

Word Study of “HESED”

Introduction:

1. In our recent studies of God as a covenant keeper you have heard me refer to the Hebrew word “hesed.”
2. In this study I would like to go back and look at the term as it is used in the O.T.
3. We will examine some of the passages where parallelism is used to help define what the word actually means.
4. Our interest is not only to see how the word is used of God and His relationships to us, but also to understand our obligation to manifest “hesed” to those with whom we are in relationship.

Discussion:

- I. There is a very close association between being faithful to one’s commitments and the word “hesed.”
 - A. Deut. 7:8-9.
 1. Verse 8 indicates that God kept the oath He had made to the fathers and so brought them out of the house of slavery.
 2. Verse 9 speaks of God’s faithfulness and His covenant keeping in association with His “lovingkindness” (hesed, and throughout the NASB text where “lovingkindness” is the translation).
 3. Note the focus is on God’s faithfulness in His relationship to men.
 - B. Psa. 89:28.
 1. Seems to express the same idea.
 2. This time it is of God’s faithfulness to David and his descendants (20-29).
 3. Note in verses 30-37 that God keeps His covenant forever. Lovingkindness (hesed) is contrasted with dealing falsely. God will not deal falsely, but in faithfulness even when the sons of David forsake God’s law.
 - C. Psa. 40:11.
 1. In this text God’s compassion is paralleled with His lovingkindness (hesed) and His truth.
 2. It is this that preserves David.
 3. It is not David’s sinlessness (v. 12).
 4. It is the Lord who delivers. It is the Lord who helps (v. 13).
 - D. Psa. 26:3.
 1. This passage calls attention to God’s lovingkindness (hesed), but it does something additional.
 2. It speaks of David’s response to God’s lovingkindness. David walks in God’s truth (v. 3).
 3. He calls on God to vindicate him because he has trusted in the Lord’s hesed.
 4. But it is a trust not merely proclaimed but acted upon (4-12). (This is also evidenced in Deut. 7:9: “to those who love Him and keep His commandments.”)

- a. David distinguishes himself from “sinners” (v. 9).
 - b. It is not that he has not sinned himself. David never made such a claim. Instead he confessed he had sinned.
 - c. But he stood on a level place because of God’s lovingkindness (hesed).
- E. There are three prayers recorded in the O.T. that call attention to God’s covenanted promises and His “lovingkindness” (hesed). Note how God is addressed in each of these prayers.
- 1. 1 Kings 8:22-26. Solomon’s prayer of dedication of the temple.
 - a. The address (v. 23).
 - b. Promises to David.
 - c. What You have spoken and fulfilled.
 - d. Confession.
 - 2. Dan. 9:1-19. Daniel is praying for God to fulfill His promise for a return from Babylonian captivity.
 - 3. Neh. 1:5. Nehemiah is praying for God to grant him success in his appeal to return to Jerusalem after the captivity to rebuild what had been destroyed. His appeal is to God’s covenant and His lovingkindness (hesed).
 - 4. Hundreds of years separated these prayers but each of them acknowledges God’s faithful commitment based on His lovingkindness (hesed).
- F. God follows through on His promises. He fulfills His commitments based on His lovingkindness (hesed). If a commitment is made and not done there is a lack of hesed.
- 1. God keeps His promises and thus shows hesed to those who walk before Him.
 - 2. Sometimes it is translated “loyalty” or “love.”
 - 3. It involves God dealing with men on the basis of who He is and not on the basis of what they deserve.
- G. The Greek speaking Jews translated “hesed” with the word “eleos.”
- 1. In the English this word is translated –“mercy”, “steadfast love,” and “lovingkindness.”
 - 2. The idea is that God follows through on His commitments so that I do not suffer because of my unfaithfulness to Him. Thus the word “mercy” is a fitting translation.

II. The term is used in men’s relationships with one another, implying a moral obligation to treat each other kindly.

- A. Abraham, when he went into a dangerous land where men killed to take an attractive wife, asked Sarah to show him hesed and allow him to pass her off as his sister to save his life (Gen. 20:13).
- B. Joseph interpreted the dream of the baker and asked him to remember him with hesed when he was returned to favor with the king (Gen. 40:14).
- C. Israel was rebuked for not showing Gideon’s family hesed for all the good he had done for Israel (Judges 8:35).
- D. Rahab manifested hesed to the spies and asked that they treat her father’s household with hesed (Josh. 8:35). Note the “pledge of truth” here.
- E. Abner said he had shown hesed to the “house of Saul” (2 Sam. 3:8).
- F. Solomon was to be kind (hesed) to the house of Barzillai, who had aided David after a defeat by Absalom (1 Kings 2:7).

- G. Friends showed hesed to friends (2 Sam. 10:2; 16:17).
- H. Joash unwittingly killed the son of his friend (Jehoida). This was considered a breach of hesed (2 Chron. 24:22).
- I. Boaz complimented Ruth for showing hesed to Naomi and to him (Ruth 3:10). He identified her as a “woman of excellence” (v. 11).
- J. Boaz manifested hesed by taking Ruth as wife (Ruth 2:20).

III. Men should model their relationships to one another after God’s relationship with them. This means that we should demonstrate hesed to each other. We are under moral obligation in all relationships: friends, family, marriage, work, partner, roommate/housemate to show hesed. That is, to treat the other person(s) better than they deserve to be treated.

- A. This is expressed in many ways in Scripture.
 - 1. Rom. 12:1-21.
 - 2. Eph. 5:31-32.
 - 3. Gal. 5:16-24.
 - 4. “Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you” (Matt. 5:44).
- B. The idea is that you seek what is good for others (Phil. 2:3ff). You may object: “They don’t deserve it.” No matter! You be kind.
- C. The concept revolutionizes churches, friendships, family relationships, marriages, work relationships, even relationships with people who share the same room or house. People tend to want to bite and devour one another. Instead, do what is good for the other! It is not about what you can get at someone else’s expense, nor about how much you can keep for yourself (James 4:1ff). It is about what you can give (2 Cor. 8-9).

Conclusion:

- 1. How effective are you in manifest hesed?
- 2. What if God was only as effective as you?
- 3. Does what He has done for you touch your heart? He gave you His Son! How will you respond to His hesed?
- 4. Will you serve like He has served?