I’ve always believed that a busy church was a growing church. However, as important as ministry programs and projects are, the real measure of a congregation’s growth is based on how the members treat each other in the church, not just how busy they are in ministry.

This principle reminds me of a true story about our family that centered around a "little cup." The cup in question was a porcelain cup with Snow White hand painted on it, and purchased as a souvenir from Disneyland when my wife was a little girl.

Now the problem with this cup was that over the years it became cracked - right at the handle. You could hardly see the crack but you could "hear" it when you set it down - it would go "thunk."

This might not be a problem for you and your household, but you see, the Mazzalongs were the world champion glass and dish breakers. My wife and I had four children in the space of five years and these four wild children of ours broke a lot of dishes, glasses, windows - anything breakable. But somehow, the little cracked cup survived.

Now the reason it survived (despite its crack and our poor track record with dishes) was that everyone knew that it was mom's special cup, a precious souvenir from her childhood. One bump and it was finished. We handled it with care.

You see, we were all conscious of its fragility and so whenever we used it, it was with this silent understanding. For example, when washing it we would always be careful to turn the damaged handle inward in the dishwasher to protect its weak spot.
The result of all of this was that we ended up using this little cup more than any other dish in the entire house. It became precious to us in its flawed state because it was the only piece of dishware that required love in order to be handled. Hard to believe, but that little cup made us better people!

THE CRACKED CUP AND THE CHURCH

I think that there is a parallel here between our family's attitude toward that little porcelain cup and the attitude we should have towards each other in the church. I believe that the church is like a cupboard where the Lord keeps cracked and damaged dishes.

- He is able to use these for His service because He is careful.
- He uses them but never forgets their weaknesses.

The result is that He uses fragile things to do great service because He uses them in love. In speaking of the Lord's tenderness in the use of delicate things, Isaiah says,

A bruised reed He will not break, and a dimly burning wick
He will not extinguish.
- Isaiah 42:3

I might add - and a cracked cup, He will not break.

Now, I don't know who may be reading this Mini Book, but if you are a Christian and belong to some church, I'm willing to guess that even in your congregation there are a lot of "cracked cups," even some "crack pots!!"

The cracks may not all be in the same spot for each of us, but everybody has a tender spot and, if hit too hard on that spot, will fall apart into many pieces (just like that broken cup). I don't think we're always conscious of this fact and that's why there is, at times, a lot of broken glass lying around the church.

I sincerely believe that no one ever deliberately wants to hurt anyone, and certainly no one wants anyone to stomp on their own sore spot,
but it happens (not only in the church, but at work, in families, between friends, etc.).

For this reason the Apostle Paul gives us three very simple rules for handling "cracked cups" in such a way that we don't inflict further damage. These rules will help us avoid damaging others who are sensitive and already suffering from broken and weak parts.

**HOW TO HANDLE A "CRACKED CUP"

These rules are found in chapter 4 of the Ephesian letter. This passage is set in the middle of a long section dealing with the problem of getting along with others in the church.

Apparently, the Ephesian Christians had been very zealous for the Word of God, to obey it and teach it properly. They wanted to do the 'right' thing. In their enthusiasm about guarding against false doctrine and teachers, they were becoming suspicious and mean spirited with one another. In this context Paul writes to them giving instructions about how to better love each other and avoid hurting those who were already damaged.

He gives them three rules in handling the "cracked cups" of this world, and in the church.

32 Be kind and compassionate to one another, forgiving each other, just as in Christ God forgave you. 1 Follow God's example, therefore, as dearly loved children 2 and walk in the way of love, just as Christ loved us and gave himself up for us as a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God.

- Ephesians 4:31-5:2

**Rule #1 - Be Kind (4:32a)

The English word "kind" in the Greek means literally "to do good." This includes saying, thinking, and doing good things for others. Spiritual maturity is measured by kindness, not just church attendance, or
orthodoxy, or business. Kindness is a quality of character that is so Christ-like.

It's easy to spot kind people:

- Kind people are sensitive, not just smart.
- They are givers, not accumulators.
- They strive to be appealing rather than just be attractive.
- And kindness strengthens other people as well.

The best way to make the church grow is through kindness. People respond to kindness, and will work and sacrifice for one who is kind. Next to the gospel itself, kindness is the most effective evangelistic tool.

Paul's unspoken point is that if we cannot expect Christians to be kind to each other, who can we expect to be kind? And so, if we wish to avoid damaging each other we must consciously practice kindness towards each other; openly, generously and without prejudice.

**Rule #2 - Be Tenderhearted (vs. 32b)**

To be tenderhearted doesn't mean that a person is soft or a wimp. Tenderheartedness is that quality of character where one is so moved by another's condition that he not only feels sympathy but will take some kind of action; today we call it empathy.

Tenderheartedness is present when we:

- Feel sorry for the crack in the other, not feel superior because we have no crack in that spot in our own character.
- We want to help heal the damaged spot in the other, rather than criticize and condemn the other because of their weakness.
- We are willing to handle with care the delicate condition of our brethren, not just discard them because of their defects. ("Can't help people with cracks like that.")

We have to have compassion with the damaged Christian because that's the only kind of person in the church: damaged Christians! There ought to be a sign that says 'Damaged people are welcome here!' The reason some people have difficulty being tenderhearted is because their own damage or weak spot is in their eyes.

- They are blind and cannot see themselves.
• They can't see their own cracks.

Even for these people we have to be tenderhearted. Jesus was most kind to the most blind Pharisee of all: Saul of Tarsus. It was no coincidence that he was blinded when he saw Jesus, and regained his sight when he recognized how blind he had been.

Rule #3 - Forgive Each Other (vs. 32c)

There is forgiveness at two levels:

A. Forgiveness at direct offenses against us. Some say "forgive and forget." Some say "I'll forgive but I'll never forget." Forgiving is not about forgetting. Some things done to us we will never forget.

God doesn't ask us to forget; He asks us to "let go."

Forgiveness is the letting go, the giving up of our legitimate right to collect on a debt. Forgiving an offense or a debt is considering it paid, not forgetting that it was once owed. People offend us, bump into our weak areas and we deserve to receive an apology or have a right to be compensated. Forgiveness is that action where you cancel the debt someone owes you. You do this, you control this, you offer this as the solution to the problem whether they can pay or not.

B. Forgiveness also means a spirit of tolerance and patience. We must also forgive the weaknesses we see in others that don't directly offend us or affect us, but get on our nerves! They don't steal from us or insult us but the way they are offends our sense of how we think they should be. They don't live up to our scorecard (not the Bible) but our opinion of how people should be, and that bugs us.

Spiritual damage control requires us:

• To forgive others who crash into our weak spots.
• To exercise patience with those who we believe have no right to be in the cupboard in the first place because they're too damaged, too cracked to be of any use.

We need to remember that God has handled us so tenderly, so carefully, that we are still in one piece; and the greatest miracle of all is that He continues to use us despite our delicate condition.
God has overlooked all of our cracks in Christ Jesus.

We need to extend that same kind of mercy towards others when they offend us or bug us. We need to ask ourselves the following question: "Is this where I will cut off the grace of God for another?" Remember, when you turn off the flow of grace for another, you turn it off for yourself as well.

**Summary**

Paul concludes with another key idea in chapter 5:1-2. The love of the saints for one another is like a fragrant aroma to God; as was the sacrifice of Jesus.

The love of God in Christ, this is the glue that repairs the cracks and provides a renewed life of service. This is the way God puts us back together after we're all cracked and broken: with His love.

And we, in the church, are the channels for this love and the agents that He uses in repairing all the cracked and broken lives that come to Him through faith in Jesus Christ. Without this kind of love, we cannot grow in a way that is pleasing to God.

So, if you're a cracked cup: unused, unloved, unnoticed, unclean; I encourage you to offer your broken dishes to God today by coming to Jesus in repentance and baptism. Let Him love you, let Him repair your damage with His love, let Him cover your weakness with the blood of His cross.

For the rest of the cups in the cupboard I read a poem by brother Leonard Stevenson who summarized well the thoughts in this lesson with the following poem:

"The Cracked Cup"
Ephesians 2 10

Please handle with care, for I have a "crack."
And that isn't all in which I lack.
My handle is weak, so please take care;
Yes, sometimes life is so hard to bear!

And it appears to me as I look about,
Everyone has "cracks"; not all are stout.
And if not cracked, then broken, or bent;
Or scratched, bruised, torn and rent.

And since this is true, let’s all be kind;
Tender hearted, forgiving, gentle - not blind,
To the cracks, flaws and bruises each have got;
And heed the lessons our Savior taught.

Let's bind up the cracks of one another;
And especially those of our "sister" and "brother."
So exercise tolerance, and patience too;
But especially LOVE, for this is the "glue!"

https://bibletalk.tv/the-cracked-cup