

Gentleness - Love's Humility
Galatians 5:22-25; Matthew 11:28-30

STORY: A young man watched as an elderly couple sat down to lunch at McDonald's. He noticed that they had ordered just one meal, and an extra drink cup. As he watched, the old gentleman carefully divided the hamburger in half, then counted out the fries, one for him, one for her, until each half.

Then the old man poured half of the soft drink into the extra cup and set that in front of his wife. The old man then began to eat, but his wife just sat watching him.

The young man felt sorry for them and asked, "I'm sorry to intrude, but would you allow me to purchase another meal for your wife so that you don't have to split your food?"

The old gentleman said, "Oh, no, thank you. We've been married a long time, and everything has always been shared."

The young man said, "Wow! That's amazing." He then turned to the wife and asked, "Aren't you going to eat your share?"

The wife replied, "Not yet...It's his turn to use the teeth."

Speaking of teeth...I heard about a preacher...

INTRO: The world judges Christianity more by the actions of Christians than it does the preaching of Christians. The authenticity of the Gospel of Christ has more to do with our behavior than just articulating our beliefs. We cannot afford to profess Christ and **not** be anything like Him!

Would you accept:

A counselor -- who doesn't get along with people!

A teacher -- who doesn't like children!

A banker -- who doesn't know how to handle money!

An Athlete -- who doesn't like to exercise!

A mountain climber -- who doesn't like heights!

STORY: A woman was being tailgated by a stressed-out man on a busy boulevard. Suddenly, the light turned yellow, just in front of her. She did the right thing, stopping at the crosswalk, even though she could have beaten the red light by accelerating through the intersection.

The tailgating man hit the roof and the horn, screaming in frustration as he missed the chance to get through the intersection on her bumper. As he was still in mid-rant, he heard a tap on the window and looked to see the face of a police officer. The officer ordered him to exit the car with his hands up. He was searched, handcuffed, and placed in the back seat of the patrol car.

After almost thirty minutes of interaction on his radio and in car computer, the officer let the man out and released him. He said, 'I'm very sorry for this mistake. I pulled up behind your car while you were blowing your horn, flipping off the lady in front of you; because I noticed the 'Choose Life' license plate holder, the 'What Would Jesus Do?' bumper sticker, and the chrome-plated Fish emblem on the trunk. So, I assumed you had stolen the car.'

The World will not accept a Christian that is NOT Christ-like!

The late Rev. Samuel Shoemaker, shortly before his death, published an article in a respected Protestant publication, entitled, "Can Our Kind of Church Change Our Kind of World?"

I ask you, "Can today's kind of Christian, change today's kind of world?"

Transition: Most people are aware of all that is happening in the world. The divisiveness, discord, hate, and violence that we see and hear about daily. We live in a 24-hour news cycle. Politically people choose to be Republican, Democrat, or Independent...right leaning or left leaning, conservative or liberal. You get the point, and most people get their point of view fed and fueled by Fox news or CNN, MSNBC or ESPN, whatever.

The point is that no matter what you get fed from the news, it will stoke and stir up discord, hate...a me vs. them mentality. We are Christians and we need to be fed and fueled by the Good News of God's word so that our actions reflect Christ, because **We cannot afford to profess Christ and not be anything like Him!**

Christianity is NOT for the weak! Being a Christian does NOT mean being soft spoken, weak, or easily intimidated. Jesus said TRUE Christians would be known BY THEIR FRUIT.

Jesus even clarifies that not everyone who does miracles in His name will necessarily be his servants ... fruit is what determines relationship, not ministry. It is unsettling that Jesus would say, ***"Many will say to me on that day, 'Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in your name, and in your name drive out demons and perform many miracles?' Then I will tell them plainly, 'I never knew you. Away from me, you evildoers!'"***

The fruit of the Spirit is the result of a deep connection to Christ, evident in the very character of the life of the one connected.

Turn with me to Galatians 5:22-25; ***22But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, forbearance, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, 23gentleness and self-control. Against such things there is no law. 24Those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires. 25Since we live by the Spirit, let us keep in step with the Spirit.'*** (NIV) **Let's Pray**

This is not the beginning of a new sermon series, but a one-off message I feel is timely. Today's message is: **"Gentleness - Love's Humility."**

Once Christ ascended to heaven, He promised His disciples that He would send another just like Him to be with them, in fact, IN them. This was the Spirit of God. With the coming of the Spirit, we now have our source of fruitfulness.

The fruit of the Spirit IS LOVE! This in the original Greek is singular, not plural. The list that follows are not "other" fruits ... they are "qualities of LOVE."

The Corinthian church focused on "charismata" (gifts), but Paul made it clear that "charismata" without character is nothing more than "sounding brass and tinkling cymbals."

Paul's emphasis in the middle of his discussion on the gifts (1 Cor. chapters 12 and 14) he writes a whole chapter on LOVE ... the fruit of the Spirit (chapt. 13). The Corinthian church was misdirected on spirituality and how they judged it.

ANYONE can be used in the gifts, even baby Christians ... but fruitfulness is the result of maturing processes.

The gifts are a function of faith and availability.

The fruit of the Spirit is a function of spiritual maturity.

John mentions in his first epistle that no one can say they are connected to God if they fail to LOVE, that is because LOVE IS the fruit of the Spirit of God.

Joy Is Love's Strength!
Peace Is Love's Security
Patience Is Love's Stability
Kindness Is Love's Conduct
Goodness Is Love's Character
Faithfulness Is Love's Commitment
Gentleness Is Love's Humility
Self-Control Is Love's Victory

Gentleness is not something we typically seek after. Being called gentle might seem like an insult, especially to men. But we are to be gentlemen.

Illustration: Movie – Groundhog Day (conversation between Phil & Rita)

Phil: What are you looking for? Who is your perfect guy?

Rita: First of all, he's too humble to know he's perfect. He's intelligent, supportive, funny. He's romantic and courageous. He's got a good body, but doesn't look in the mirror every two minutes. He's kind, sensitive and gentle. He's not afraid to cry in front of me.

Phil says, this is a man we're talking about, right?

Rita: He likes animals and children, and he'll change poopy diapers. And he plays an instrument, and he loves his mother.

Do you remember watching Superman TV shows or Superman movies. Remember who Superman was in his everyday life? He was Clark Kent, the mild-mannered reporter. Even Clark Kent was meek and mild.

Most of us think that we understand what gentleness is all about. The dictionary defines it as being considerate, mild and soft. When we think of meek, we often think of weak, but the biblical definition is much richer.

The Greek language, in which the New Testament was originally written, was extremely precise and expressive. When the Greeks developed a word, they not only gave it a careful definition, but they also almost always illustrated it.

Their definition of gentleness was **“power under control,”** and they described it with a picture of a very powerful horse that had been tamed. Gentleness is like a wild animal with its power in check.

I surfed some web sites and discovered a curious phrase. When describing horses that have been tamed, one site referred to them as **“gentled.”** Even today, to break in a horse is to “gentle” him. The horse is still powerful but is now under the control of the trainer. **When God “gentles” us, we become powerful under His control.**

Jonathan Edwards suggests that gentleness **“may well be called the Christian spirit. All who are truly godly and are real disciples of Christ have a gentle spirit in them.”**

Story: John Wooden’s UCLA basketball teams won ten NCAA national championships in twelve years, including seven in a row. In his book entitled **Wooden**, he begins with this story:

My dad, Joshua Wooden, was a strong man in one sense, but a gentle man. While he could lift heavy things men half his age couldn't lift, he would also read poetry to us each night after a day working in the fields raising corn, hay, wheat, tomatoes, and watermelons. We had a team of mules named Jack and Kate on our farm. Kate would often get stubborn and lie down on me when I was plowing. I couldn't get her up no matter how roughly I treated her. Dad would see my predicament and walk across the field until he was close enough to say, 'Kate.' Then she would get up and start working again. He never touched her in anger. John Wooden said, “It took me a long time to understand that even a stubborn mule responds to gentleness.”

"Gentleness" is a word that is more commonly translated "meekness." it is the same word that is used in Matthew, chapter five, where Jesus said, "***blessed are the meek, for they shall inherit the earth.***" The two words are related.

Gentleness is an active trait-how we should initiate action toward others.

Meekness is a passive trait-how we respond when others mistreat us.

It's too bad that the meek have not already inherited the earth, because the un-meek are making a real mess of it.

What Jesus said concerning the meek is totally opposite of what the world says. The world says blessed are those with money, with might, with muscles, and missiles. But Jesus said, "blessed are those with meekness or gentleness."

Biblical gentleness is "strength under control."

Story: There was the story of a woman who carried her newborn baby onto a bus and the driver said, "That's the ugliest baby I have ever seen!" The lady slammed her money into the box and stomped back to a seat near the rear of the bus. The man next to her noticed she was upset and asked her what was wrong. She said, "The bus driver was very rude to me." The man replied, "That's outrageous. He should not be insulting passengers like that."

By this time the lady was even more furious, and said, "That's right. I think I'll go up there and give him a piece of my mind." The man answered, "That's a good idea. And, while you're up there, I'll hold your monkey for you!"

Mark Twain once said, "**Kindness is a language, which the deaf can hear, and the blind can read!**"

One might allow ability, education, or scholarship to walk into the hall of human suffering alone, and nothing happens. However, let gentleness walk into that same arena and a crowd gathers. **Gentleness has its own aroma. It has its own unspoken language. It's 'grace in action.'**

No one can produce true spiritual fruit without being connected to Christ! We must be **"IN" Christ** to develop good fruit. Human effort will not do it!

It must flow from Christ through us, much as a vine channels its fruit producing materials through the mother plant before it shows up as fruit on the vine.

Jesus also emphasizes that we must **REMAIN in Him** to bring fruit to its full development. It is not enough to have a single experience with Christ; it must be an ongoing relationship. When our life flows directly from Christ our fruit and our passions reflect His heart and life, not our own.

Healthy fruitfulness happens with a consistent connection.

Let me give you just a few examples of powerful men whom God used to demonstrate gentleness and meekness.

Moses was facing opposition from his brother, Aaron, and his sister, Miriam, who were mad at Moses' wife, and becoming jealous over the recognition that Moses received from the people. Number 12:3 makes this comment: ***"Now Moses was a very humble man, more humble than anyone else on the face of the earth."*** (NIV)

As **David** was fleeing from Jerusalem after his son, Absalom's, takeover, a man who had been a supporter of the previous king, Saul, came out and threw rocks and cursed David as he passed by. His companions were outraged and wanted to kill the man. But David demonstrated meekness when he said to Abishai and all his officials, ***"My son, my own flesh and blood, is trying to kill me. How much more, then, this Benjamite! Leave him alone; let him curse, for the Lord has told him to. 12It may be that the Lord will look upon my misery and restore to me his covenant blessing instead of his curse today."*** 2 Sam. 16:11-12 (NIV)

God told **Jeremiah** to warn the nation of God's displeasure and the consequences of their continued disobedience. Which only enraged the crowd and caused some to want to kill Jeremiah. His response was not to try and defend himself. He said, 'As for me, I am in your hands; do with me whatever you think is good and right.' (Jer. 26:14)

Stephen was one of the early leaders selected to serve the growing church in Jerusalem. He was described as a man "full of faith and the Holy Spirit." He boldly spoke out for Jesus and was falsely accused of blasphemy. They brought him

before the Sanhedrin, the religious high court, where he delivered a bold message of repentance. He was sentenced to be stoned to death. As he was being stoned, the Bible says, ***"Then he fell on his knees and cried out, 'Lord, do not hold this sin against them.' When he had said this, he fell asleep."*** (Acts 7:60) And he was killed without a hint of self-defense.

Paul was in prison when he wrote his protégé Timothy. He was on trial and was later executed. This man, who had penned much of the New Testament and influenced the lives of thousands of people in his own generation, writes of his legal proceedings, "At my first defense, no one came to my support, but everyone deserted me. May it not be held against them." 2 Tim. 4:16

Every one of these men could have responded with a power play. Every one of them could have reacted in anger and vindication and we'd feel they were fully justified. But God used their meekness to demonstrate a characteristic of Himself that he longs to become reality in each of us.

In a prophetic passage about Jesus, Isaiah 40:11 says, ***"He tends his flock like a shepherd: He gathers the lambs in his arms and carries them close to his heart; he gently leads those that have young."***

In another prophecy, Isaiah wrote, ***'He was oppressed and afflicted, yet he did not open his mouth; he was led like a lamb to the slaughter, and as a sheep before her shearers is silent, so he did not open his mouth (53:7).***

The single most powerful individual who ever lived, was a man of meekness. The man who could call down ten legions of angels; the man who could turn water into wine; the man who could simply say a word and an angry mob would fall on their faces; a man who could feed thousands with a few loaves and a few fish was a giant of gentleness.

Jesus was meek, but he was anything but weak. In weakness he was a man of strength; in hypocrisy he was a man of integrity; in sorrow he was a man of comfort; in despair he was a man of hope; in death he was a man of life.

He was not afraid to stand up against anyone, whether it was the religious establishment, the civil establishment, or the business establishment. He went

into the temple on a certain day with a whip and chased the moneychangers out of the temple when no one else would.

Jesus was not weak. Jesus was not a coward. Jesus was not afraid to stand up for what is right; But he did it in a spirit of gentleness and meekness.

Not only did Jesus provide an example with his actions, but he taught us in Matt. 11:28-30 " ***"Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest. 29Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. 30For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light."***

In describing himself, Jesus was describing his call to those who would follow him. And at the heart of this message is the call to be gentle and humble.

To be gentle we need to:

1. Be Understanding – Not DEMANDING

Philippians 2:4 says: ***"Do nothing from selfishness or empty conceit, but with humility of mind regard one another as more important than yourselves; do not merely look out for your own personal interests, but also for the interests of others."***

How do you respond to the people around you? Are you rude and demanding? Look beyond your own needs and agenda and notice that other people have needs too.

Gal.6:1-2 says, "Brethren, if a man is overtaken in any trespass, you who are spiritual restore such a one in a spirit of gentleness, considering yourself lest you also be tempted. Bear one another's burdens, and so fulfill the law of Christ."

Now this is not referring to an unbeliever who lives in unbroken sin. This is a believer who has been broken by sin. The bible says we are to restore these in a spirit of gentleness. The word "restored" is a surgeon's term that referred to the setting of a broken bone or a dislocated joint. When a doctor sets a broken bone, he does it gently, tenderly, and softly.

Do you know what our first response ought to be to a backslidden believer or a broken brother? The first thing we ought to say to ourselves is "except for the grace of God, that would be me." that's why Paul goes on to say "consider yourself lest you also be tempted." we don't need to be shooting our own soldiers and killing our own wounded. We need to help those who are hurting, and especially those who have fallen into the pit of sin, and do all that we can in a spirit of gentleness to help pull them out.

2. Be Accepting – Not REJECTING

When a person accepts Jesus as their Lord and Savior – do you know what happens? They become part of our family. They become part of our fellowship. They become part of the body of Christ. The truth is – none of us are perfect so we need to get along. We need to accept one another. Nothing feels worse then being rejected – and nothing feels better than being accepted.

Romans 15:7 says: “Accept one another, just as Christ also accepted us to the glory of God.” Rom 15:7 (NASB)

3. Be Tender – Without SURRENDER

One of the tests of spiritual maturity is how you handle people who disagree with you. Some people have a need to devastate everyone who disagrees with them. If you challenge them or offer a comparison, complaint, or criticism, they respond with a full-blown personal attack. Then what do you do? You have three alternatives: you can retreat, you can attack, or you can respond in gentleness.

Attacking is usually a telltale sign that you feel insecure and threatened by someone’s disapproval. And anger is a warning light that tells you that you are about to lose something – your cool, your testimony or reputation.

Responding in gentleness – is the approach God wants you to take to opposition. This kind of response requires a fine balance between maintaining your right to an opinion while equally respecting another’s opinion. It requires being tender without surrendering your convictions.

In The Message Translation in Romans 14:1 says: “Welcome with open arms fellow believers who don’t see things the way you do. And don’t jump all over them every time they do or say something you don’t agree with—even when it seems that they are strong on opinions but weak in the faith department.”

Proverbs 15:1 says: ***“A gentle answer turns away wrath, but a harsh word stirs up anger.”***

James 3:16-17 says: ***“For where jealousy and selfish ambition exist, there is disorder and every evil thing. But the wisdom from above is first pure, then peaceable, gentle, reasonable, full of mercy and good fruits, unwavering, without hypocrisy.”***

Gentleness is the ability to disagree agreeably. You can walk hand in hand with someone without seeing eye to eye. You can agree to disagree agreeably.

So far, we have discussed three aspects of gentleness: be understanding – not demanding; be accepting – not rejecting; and be tender – without surrender.

4. Be Teachable – Not UNREACHABLE

James 1:19 says: “So then, my brethren beloved, let every man be swift to hear, slow to speak, slow to anger.” Jas 1:19 (YLT)

If you are quick to listen and slow to answer back – you are going to be slow to lose your temper. If you want to be a gentle person, use your ears more than your mouth and be willing to accept correction.

The wisest people I know are the people who have a “teach me” attitude and are willing to learn from others. You can learn from anyone. ***Finally,***

5. Be Proactive – Not REACTIVE

The apostle Peter recalled how Jesus acted at his trial before Pilate.

“While being reviled, He did not revile in return; while suffering, He uttered no threats, but kept entrusting Himself to Him who judges righteously.” 1 Peter 2:23 (NASB)

The psychological dynamics of that confrontation are fascinating. Pilate was threatened by the simple fact that Jesus wouldn't speak up and defend himself. It made Pilate nervous. Rather than react to Pilate, Jesus assumed control of the situation by choosing to remain silent. He didn't need to react to Pilate's insults because he knew exactly who he was – the Son of God.

Gentleness is the ability to handle hurt without retaliating. It is the ability to absorb the blow without striking back. You may say, "That's not easy to do." You're right – it is almost impossible. **To respond that way is not natural – it is supernatural – it is the fruit of the Spirit.**

When someone stabs you in the back – when someone hurts you – Do you pull out your big guns and react? When you do, you admit that someone else is controlling your emotions. You acknowledge that you have given that person the power to determine your feelings.

Remember this: no one can take that control from you; but you give it away the moment you start reacting. Learn to be proactive, not reactive.

God's Word tells us: ***"Never pay back evil for evil to anyone."*** Rom 12:17

Later in the same chapter it says: ***"Do not be overcome by evil but overcome evil with good."*** Rom 12:21 (NASB)

To retaliate is to react. To forgive is to be proactive. It is saying, "I choose the way I respond."

Gentleness is strength under control – choosing God's way to respond to people.

Proverbs 16:32 says, ***"He who is slow to anger is better than the mighty, And he who rules his spirit [is better than] he who captures a city."*** (NASB)

Keep in mind that this quality I am talking about, meekness or gentleness, is a fruit of the spirit. You see, it is not natural to be meek.

Did you know that the very opposite of meekness is 'demanding your rights.' And what has the rights movement fostered? A spirit of anything except the spirit of meekness.

When Jesus preached about meekness, he didn't win a lot of friends or influence a lot of people. When he preached to the Pharisees they wanted a miraculous kingdom. When he preached to the Sadducees they wanted a materialistic kingdom. When he preached to the Essenes they wanted a monastic kingdom. When he preached to the zealotes they wanted a military kingdom. But Jesus was preaching a meek kingdom.

Be understanding – not demanding; be accepting – not rejecting; be tender – without surrender; be Teachable – Not UNREACHABLE; be proactive, not reactive.

Gentleness/Meekness is simply letting God control every area of your life. Meekness is giving God your wallet and saying, "Lord, how much do you want me to give?" it is giving God your time and saying, "Lord, how do you want me to spend it?" it is giving God your life and saying, "Lord, how do you want to use me?"

CONCLUSION:

I want to close this morning with an adaptation from the introduction to Brennan Manning's book, "The Ragamuffin Gospel."

The gospel of gentleness is for the bedraggled, the beat-up, and burnt-out.

It is for the sorely burdened, the wobbly and weak-kneed who know they don't have it all together.

It is for the inconsistent, unsteady disciples; for poor, weak, sinful men and women.

It is for earthen vessels who shuffle along with feet of clay.

It is for bruised reeds and smoldering wicks, bent and broken people who believe their lives are a grave disappointment to God.

It is for me and it is for you and everyone else who knows they do not have it all together.

Jesus came for the sake of those who fail. He came as a friend to the friendless. A mender of broken hearts. A comforter for those who mourn. A hero of the helpless. A bearer of burdens for the heavily laden. And a gentle Savior who will not break you or snuff you out. And we reflect Him when we allow the fruit of the spirit of gentleness to rule our lives.