

Sermon: Gentleness

Text: I Peter 3:15-16

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Galatians 5:22-23 (NIV) ²²But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, ²³gentleness and self-control. Against such things there is no law.

I Peter 3:15-16 (NIV) ¹⁵But in your hearts set apart Christ as Lord. Always be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks you to give the reason for the hope that you have. But do this with gentleness and respect, ¹⁶keeping a clear conscience, so that those who speak maliciously against your good behavior in Christ may be ashamed of their slander.

Introduction: Some may view certain aspects of the fruit of the Spirit (**Galatians 5:22-23**) as signs of weakness. Nothing could be more wrong. “Gentleness” is a strength. It is a great asset - not a weakness. It is certainly a personal quality that God values.

I. What is Gentleness?

A. It is something God values.

I Peter 3:3-4 (NIV) ³Your beauty should not come from outward adornment, such as braided hair and the wearing of gold jewelry and fine clothes. ⁴Instead, it should be that of your inner self, the unfading beauty of a gentle and quiet spirit, which is of great worth in God’s sight.

You might remember earlier in chapter 3 of I Peter that it is Abraham’s wife, Sarah, who has a gentle spirit, and this is a quality God highly values. Personal character is always worth more than material wealth.

And we know full well that God is not impressed with exterior things, but the heart of his creation. It ties into worship and an attitude of reverence and awe.

Illus. Scott Tissue - “Tough, but oh so gentle

The Greek word (πραυτης) sometimes translated meekness or humble and indicates power under control.

Gentleness is also like being a friend.

Illus. I remember a mission trip to the Yucatan. Being a friend and being gentle was like what we did by holding pieces of trees up for the workers for shade. No job is too small or too big for a friend.

B. Jesus provides us an example.

Two of three times the word “gentle” is used in the NT, it is talking about Jesus: **Matthew 11:29 (NIV)** 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.

Matthew 21:5 (NIV) ⁵“Say to the Daughter of Zion, ‘See, your king comes to you, gentle and riding on a donkey, on a colt, the foal of a donkey.’ “

The other time the word “gentle” is used it is talking about the character requirements for a kingdom person or follower of Jesus as our Lord preaches the sermon on the mount.

Matthew 5:5 (NIV) ⁵ Blessed are the meek (gentle), for they will inherit the earth.

Following Christ draws out our gentleness, for we need and want to be like him. And if we are like Jesus, we cease to push people out of the way for our purposes. The ego is a terrible thing - there is this “fighting-to-be-first syndrome” that Jesus condemns.

Illus. In the Yucatan, on the work site, others would eat, drink first. In life without the Spirit of God the self must prevail. I have to get what I want - and at your expense if necessary. In Christ, the reverse is true.

Gentleness is not a virtue everyone admires. George Bush, father of our current president, in fact, felt it necessary when campaigning for the presidency, to prove to his countrymen that he was tough. The journalists had raised the issue of “the wimp factor,” worried the soft-spoken candidate might not be man enough for the job. The wild-west ethic rides on. Gentleness is not high on the list of attributes American males aspire to display.

Given American social mores, men especially come to the Scriptures unprepared for these injunctions to be gentle. Yet it is apparent that being gentle is exactly what God expects of anyone who follows Him.

C. Gentleness points to the end of time.

Philippians 4:5 says “Let your gentleness be evident to all. The Lord is near.” (this could also mean relationally close)

So gentleness needs to be demonstrated certainly, and there should be some urgency in its demonstration.

II. How Is Gentleness Productive?

A. Gentleness helps not to discourage others.

We have all seen the rough, unloving, you are going to go to hell approach used on people. That rarely gets the good news about Jesus a hearing.

If you read carefully the NT, it was generally that Jesus was upset with the religious people of the day and especially the leaders. Part of the reason Jesus was upset was that they had created a burdensome system of law (rules and regulations). Jesus was trying to teach grace not only with his words, but his actions (John 5:1-15).

B. Gentleness may attract people to the Church.

I have seen people convinced to do and say many things by the power of personality including get involved with all kinds of religious groups. But it is the gentle individual that is the best spokesperson for a loving God. It is that person that will be able to witness effectively.

If we lead this kind of life - i.e., displaying gentleness, opportunities will come our way to share Jesus.

Illus. Trying to get out of the airport, I was given a hand gesture to get to the back of the line of cars when I made a mistake. I reached over to roll down the passenger-side window (you can do that in a Plymouth Colt without even moving) to let him know how much I appreciated his courtesy - but Teresa said: “Maybe you better not.”

I went around and some Asian family had made the same mistake so I cut them off. NO, I let them in. It was contagious. I looked in my rear view mirror and someone else got let in. Gentleness can be contagious AND WE SURE COULD USE SOME GENTLENESS in our culture.

It is always amusing to see what goes on when people are trying to get on a plane (I understand the hurry to get off). That plane is not going to leave without them, and if I have an assigned seat next to the rear bathrooms, I am in no hurry.

III. How Can I Be More Gentle?

A. Focus on others' needs ahead of yourself.

LET CHRIST BE LORD.

Illus. The Spirit's gentleness is hard to bring to maturity in the individualistic soil of our culture. Alexis DeToqueville made this discovery early in the nineteenth century. The keen-eyed Frenchman visited America to study our penal system, but while he was at it - observed and commented on American life and customs in general. After returning to France he wrote his travel memoirs in a book which Americans have carefully studied ever since. In it he warns against the threat to social stability called "individualism." **HE WAS RIGHT.** This toxic doctrine justifies my putting selfish interests first, ahead of community (the Bible calls that community the Church or the Body of Christ), nation, family, friends - anybody. If everyone subscribes to this most popular of "isms," the nation loses coherence and descends rapidly into anarchy.

The antidote for this poison is Jesus. We need to let Jesus be Lord and serve His interests. For where there is worshiping, obeying, submitting to the same Lord, there is harmony.

Churches usually have problems not over theology, but ego and power. What most churches could use and certainly what is needed in the world is a big dose of gentleness straight from God.

Illus. You remember the Chernobyl incident....3.5 million people are going to die as a result. A series of bad decisions by people covering up their mistakes caused the meltdown. They didn't really want millions of people to die or be maimed; they weren't "bad" people, we would say. They were just looking out for themselves. If others got hurt because of their selfishness, too bad, but they had to look out for themselves, didn't they?

If you stock the world with people looking out primarily for themselves—you cover the earth with darkness. The Church must be different, and be the **LIGHT**.

“A good offense is the best defense.” In matters of conscience, someone with something to hide characteristically charges someone else with wrong-doing. A bad conscience makes a good critic. When someone tells you, for example, “I don’t go to church; there are too many hypocrites there,” you haven’t learned a thing about the church but you have learned that the critic is well acquainted with hypocrisy. We all find our sins in others, and we don’t deal with them gently as a rule.

B. Gentleness is an active quality not passive.

We are just beginning this week a study of the OT book of Exodus. And who is the primary human character in the book? It is Moses, isn’t it? No one should ever confuse gentleness with weakness or passivity.

Moses led the nation of Israel out of Egypt and did many miraculous acts in that Exodus. He stood up to the most powerful leader of his time. And listen to what it says about this powerfully active leader:

Numbers 12:3 (NIV) ³(Now Moses was a very humble (it could be translated “gentle”) man, more humble than anyone else on the face of the earth.)

You can be a great leader, but there is a quality that must be there for God to use you. You must be gentle.

Conclusion: No one needs protection from a Spirit-led Christian. It is the self-serving individual who is both dangerous and lost. One of the interesting word backgrounds for gentleness is the idea of friendship. Everybody needs a friend. We have a friend in Jesus the song says that He is there to carry us through.

Certainly loving God is commendable, but it also must be coupled with our love of others.

Listen to Paul as he speaks for God to the churches in Asia:

Ephesians 4:2-3 (NIV) ²Be completely humble and gentle; be patient, bearing with one another in love. ³Make every effort to keep the unity of the Spirit through the bond of peace.

Christianity cannot be passive, but is completely practical for those who love God.

(Some of the non-personal illustrations were taken from Leroy Lawson’s book: *God’s Way to a More Perfect You, Living by the Fruit of the Spirit.*)