

The Fruit of the Spirit: Gentleness

8/9

Galatians 5:16-26; Matthew 11:28-30

07 24 2011 Sam Jones Memorial UMC

Scripture:

The Wind and the Sun

The Greek author, **Aesop**, told a fable about the North Wind and the Sun. While they were arguing over who was stronger, a traveler walked past. The Wind and Sun agreed to a contest: whoever could make the man take off his coat would be the winner.

So the Sun hid behind a cloud. The Wind blew and blew; but the harder the Wind blew, the more the traveler huddled in his coat. Out of breath, the Wind finally gave up.

Then the Sun came out from behind the cloud and shone with all his might. The warmth quickly persuaded the man to take off his coat and enjoy the fine day.

The moral of the story is: **gentleness is always better than force.**

The Gentleness of God

Today we are continuing our summer worship series entitled *The Fruit of the Spirit*. Galatians 5:22-23 lists nine characteristics of the Christian disciple. Throughout *The Fruit of the Spirit* series, we have seen these qualities are first and foremost **attributes of God**. The eighth attribute is **gentleness**.

Jesus said to his followers: *“Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, **for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy and my burden is light.**”* (Matthew 11:28-30)

When Paul wrote to the church in Corinth *“by the meekness and **gentleness of Christ.**”* (2 Corinthians 10:1)

The Scriptures describe God as a **shepherd** caring for his sheep. The familiar words of Psalms 23 begin with the affirmation of faith: *“The Lord is my shepherd.”* Jesus told his friends, *“I am the good shepherd; I know my sheep and my sheep know me—just as the Father knows me and I know the Father—and I lay down my life for the sheep.”* (see John 10:1-21)

Jesus is our example and template. Like children imitating a parent, we are called to emulate our heavenly Father’s gentleness. As God is gentle with us, we are called to be gentle with others. Walking by the Spirit and abiding in God’s presence cultivates a spirit of gentleness in our lives.

Gentleness: Power Under Control

But let’s face it—gentleness is not a valued quality in our culture. The Greek word for gentleness can also be translated as **meekness**. “Meekness” rhymes with “weakness,” and this sums up our society’s feelings on the subject. In reality, however, gentleness and meekness are the opposite of weakness.

Gentleness is **power under control**. In the Greek language, the term *praotes* describes the harnessed power of a tamed animal.

If you have ever attended the Cartersville Christmas parade, then you have seen the **Clydesdale horses** pulling the Anheuser-Busch wagon. The massive draft horses weight over 2,000 pounds—that’s one TON of animal or ten times the size of an average man. However, these massive horses docilely wear a bridle and harness, responding to the driver’s gentle touch.

- **Power**

Gentleness combines **power and control**, and both elements are equally important. Meekness is not weakness; instead, gentleness is strength. Jesus promised his disciples the power of the Holy Spirit. In the New Testament, the Greek word for **power** is *dunamis*. The root gives us English words like dynamo, dynamic, and dynamite.

We serve the Lord God Almighty, the creator of the heavens and the earth. Heaven’s power is our birthright as God’s adopted children. Romans 8 reminds us that we are more than conquerors in the name of Jesus Christ our Lord—nothing in this world or the world to come can overcome us. Jesus said even the gates of Hell would not stand against the church’s march.

Too often Christians lead weak, powerless, defeated lives. Our language is filled with statements like “I can’t,” “He’ll never change,” “She’s hopeless,” and “It’s always been that way.” Christ calls us to claim the power that is beyond our own.

At times, we are like people living at the bottom of a hydroelectric dam who have no electricity! However, an old gospel song reminds us: “*There is power, power, wonder-working power, in the blood of the Lamb.*” In our contemporary service, we sing *That’s What We Came Here For*:

*We come into Your presence with singing,
Come into your presence with praise,
Enter your gates with thankful hearts,
We are going to celebrate.
All of heavens waiting, pow'r is on its way . . .
So we shout hallelujah,
Lifting to ya a mighty roar of praise!*

- **Control**

Gentleness is power . . . under **control**. This second element is critical. Power under control is constructive. Power without control is destructive. Power under control is a Clydesdale pulling a wagon. Power without control is a bull in a china shop. Power under control is a dam producing electricity. Power without control is a flood. Power under control is nuclear produced power. Power without control is a nuclear meltdown.

Christians still experience great passion, indignation, and even anger, but the Spirit empowers us to creatively control these powerful emotions. We learn how to act according to the Spirit’s guidance rather than react according to our human nature.

The Greek philosopher, Aristotle, defined gentleness as: “*The mean (average) between excessive anger and excessive angerlessness, the quality of a man who is always angry at the right time and never angry at the wrong time.*” (Galatians, Barclay, p. 52)

- **Power Under Control**

Gentleness is strength under control. As God’s people, we act from a position of strength. If fear is absent, then there is no need to be defensive. We can afford to be gentle because of the Spirit’s strength and power.

In previous sermons, I have introduced our housedog named **Sam**. Sam is a Yorkshire Terrier—also known as a Yorkshire Terrorist! The breed is well known for its rowdy, rambunctious nature. Sam is a 200 pound dog in a 10 pound body. When he looks in a mirror, he sees a Doberman Pinscher!

There is a large Golden Retriever in our neighborhood named Scarlett who is Sam’s opposite in every way. The 100 pound canine is the embodiment of gentleness.

One day the two dogs met on the road. Sam went into his hyper mode, barking, growling, prancing, and pawing. Scarlett simply looked at him with amusement. I’m not even sure she knew that Sam was a dog! She patiently and tolerantly put up with Sam’s antics until he calmed down. Then they became friends.

Scarlett’s strength allowed her to be gentle. Sam was no threat to her well being. She could afford to overlook his behavior and treat him kindly. Because we have God’s power, we too can afford to be gentle with others around us.

Gentleness with Others

James 3:17 says: “*The wisdom from above is first pure, then peaceable, **gentle**, willing to yield, full of mercy and good fruits, without a trace of partiality or hypocrisy And a harvest of righteousness is sown in peace for those who make peace.*” Titus 3:2 reminds God’s people of the simple discipline “**to be gentle.**”

This memorable television commercial shows how NOT to go about doing this:

Clip	Geico Ad with Drill Sergeant	http://youtu.be/XfmVBmDKLZI
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Human beings are like bananas—we bruise easily. People ought to wear bright tags that declare: *FRAGILE—Handle with Care*. Oftentimes we hurt others without even realizing it. Sometimes this seems especially true within the church.

<p>Gil Watson, pastor of Northside United Methodist Church, tells about an incident at a country church he served early in his ministry. One of the matriarchs of the church did not attend church for several Sundays. So Gil made a pastoral visit. He discovered that the woman was quite distraught and planned to never attend church again.</p>

<p>After a great deal of crying and sighing, the woman finally confided in him the reason for her hurt feelings. She said, “Preacher, at the last covered dish dinner, no one ate a bite of my pound cake!”</p>

Christian gentleness treats others like they are fragile. We wrap our relationships with spiritual **bubble wrap**. I LOVE bubble wrap. Whenever we receive a package at church with the air filled bubbles, it's like Christmas morning. I can spend minutes happily popping the packaging. There's even a bubble wrap app for I-Phones! If I had this app, then I would never get any work done!

Gentleness recognizes the vulnerability of the human ego. People are fragile; and we can be hurt easily. Sometimes we hurt others inadvertently.

For example, I have an admittedly bizarre **sense of humor**—I get tickled at things other folk just don't find funny. And then I have a compulsive need to share my insights with others. I once read that a sense of humor a sign of intelligence; so I figure folk who don't find me funny just aren't smart!

I have realized over the years, however, that my jokes and comments can unintentionally hurt other people's feelings. I've been working on curbing this impulse in my life.

I share this personal example to ask the question: what is it YOU habitually say or do that might be less than gentle with others around you? We all have abrasive characteristics that can rub others the wrong way. What does the Holy Spirit need to change in your life?

I would encourage you to commit Proverbs 15:1 to memory: *"A gentle answer turns away wrath, but a harsh word stirs up anger."*

Here's your homework assignment. Answer the following question: What would gentleness "look" like with our spouse, children, parents, siblings, coworkers, fellow students, neighbors, etc. Envision a life of gentleness; and then allow the Holy Spirit to work within your life to make the vision a reality.

Gentle Men

I would like to especially say a word to the **men** today. Let's face it, being described as gentle and meek hardly sounds like a compliment to manly men like us. One macho man rephrased the Beatitudes to say, *"The meek will inherit the earth—if it's all right with the rest of you!"*

However, remember that meekness is not weakness—it is actually a sign of strength. Remember that gentleness is strength under control. I single out the men for this part because we tend to be pretty rough with one another's feelings. Men typically show their affection by cutting each other down. Ladies, you don't have to understand it—just know this is the case!

In this clip from **Grease**, we see two young men struggling to express their friendship for one another.

DVD	GREASE	Begin: 1:26:56	"Hey, Danny . . ."
		End: 1:27:40	"Pick you up at 3, all right?"

My best friend in the ministry is named **Glenn**. Last year I invited him to speak at *Business by the Book*. During my introduction, I used a few humorous cut-downs to describe him; and then he returned the favor during the program.

After the program, I had a woman approach me and ask, “Are the two of you really friends? If someone talked about me that way, then I would be in tears.”

The comment stopped me short—I was simply doing what men do. Later I shared the conversation with Glenn, and it has transformed our friendship. We have become less rough and more caring for one another. And I must confess, even saying this makes me feel a little girly! Isn’t it a shame that our society thinks of gentleness as a primarily feminine characteristic. In reality, truly strong men are also gentle men.

Christian author, Max Lucado wrote: *“Nothing is won by force. I choose to be gentle. If I raise my voice, may it be only in praise. If I clench my fist, may it only be in prayer. If I make a demand, may it be only of myself.”*

Gentleness with Ourselves

God’s gentleness with us enables our gentleness with others. In turn, we need to learn to be gentle with **ourselves**. This is a word that each of us need to hear on occasion. After all, we can be our own worst critics.

We all have these recorded tapes that play repeatedly in our heads. Some of the messages were recorded by others, and some of the messages were recorded by us. Some of the messages are positive, and some of the messages are negative. Some of the messages are constructive, and some of the messages are destructive. Unfortunately, the negative, destructive messages are the ones we often hear.

What tapes play in your head? Messages like: “You’re too young, old, short, tall, fat, thin, slow, dumb, selfish, ugly, hateful, useless, untalented, worthless” These words sink their claws deep into our psyche and tear us apart.

If you have younger children at home, then consider instituting a “*No Knock*” rule. This simply means you don’t knock yourself down. Maybe all of God’s children need a “*No Knock*” rule in their lives.

Lighten up by letting God’s light shine in your life. Be gentle with yourself—you are fragile. Don’t tear yourself down. Instead, hear the Holy Spirit proclaim that you are a valued, worthwhile, precious child of God. Since the beginning of time, there has never been someone just like you and me.

Our heavenly Father loves us beyond all imagination. The height, width, and depth of divine grace are immeasurable. In fact, God loves us so much that he gave his only Son for our salvation. We are precious in the sight of the Lord.

Conclusion

In Aesop’s Fable of the North Wind and the Sun, the moral of the story is simple: gentleness is always better than force. Meekness is not weakness. Instead, gentleness is strength under control. When we act gently towards others, we reveal the Holy Spirit’s presence in our lives.