

Sermon: Gentleness

Text: I Peter 3:15-16 ESV

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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.

Galatians 5:22-23 ESV ²² But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, ²³ gentleness, self-control; against such things there is no law.

I Peter 3:15-16 ESV ¹⁵ but in your hearts honor Christ the Lord as holy, always being prepared to make a defense to anyone who asks you for a reason for the hope that is in you; yet do it with gentleness and respect, ¹⁶ having a good conscience, so that, when you are slandered, those who revile your good behavior in Christ may be put to shame.

I. What is Gentleness?

A. It is something God values.

I Peter 3:3-4 ESV ³ Do not let your adorning be external—the braiding of hair and the putting on of gold jewelry, or the clothing you wear— ⁴ but let your adorning be the hidden person of the heart with the imperishable beauty of a gentle and quiet spirit, which in God's sight is very precious.

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 is (πραυτης) sometimes also translated meekness or humble, and indicates power under control.

Gentleness is also like being a friend.

Illus. I remember a mission trip to Yucatan, Mexico. Being a friend and being gentle was like what we did by holding pieces of trees up for the workers for shade. They were shaded while we were not, but they were doing the heavy work with rebar and concrete. 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 ESV** ²⁹ Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls.

Matthew 21:5 ESV ⁵ “Say to the daughter of Zion, ‘Behold, your king is coming to you, humble (**gentle, NIV; Greek, πραυς, meek**), and mounted on a donkey, on a colt, the foal of a beast of burden.’”

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 ESV** ⁵ “Blessed are the meek (gentle), for they shall inherit the earth.

Following Christ draws out 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 and drink first. In life without the Spirit of God the human self will 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 Herbert Walker Bush, our 41st U.S. president, father of George W. Bush, our 43rd 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 still lives on. Gentleness is not high on the list of attributes American males and females aspire to display.

Given American social mores, we 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 ESV ⁵ Let your reasonableness [gentleness] be known to everyone. The Lord is at hand; (Probably means “near in time,” but this could also mean relationally close)

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

Even though there is different word used in this verse in **Philippians**, it is still translated reasonableness[gentleness]. The word (το επιεικες) here is “reasonableness in judging. The word signifies a humble, patient steadfastness, which is able to submit to injustice, disgrace, and maltreatment without hatred and malice, trusting in God in spite of all of it.” - *Linguistic Key to the Greek New Testament*, Rienecker, p. 560

Insert picture here-----

A note to John Sarno - I've mentioned Mihail (Misha) Britsin before in a post. He is the pastor of a church in Melitopol. There just aren't enough words or the right words to say how I feel, and I'm sure most of the world feels at this time. Mihail was a student of mine back in 2003 during my first in-country class which was in Kherson, Ukraine. We have kept in touch for all these years through emails and then Facebook. Every so often he would update me on how he was implementing some of the things he learned in my worship class. He was so proud of what was being done there. I am so proud of what he is doing there now. Never wavering from his faith in, and his trust of God to be faithful through all of what he lives through each day and of what he writes. These are his words from his most recent post, translated from Russian that a friend posted. I believe these words should speak — shout — to our souls, especially the last paragraph:

"...More people were killed yesterday... More hate and pain in the world... Daughter monitors events in Kharkov - there her friends are under a bomb... A pastor from Mariupol wrote that one of his adopted daughters was killed. She had a baby boy left... A woman was shot directly in a humanitarian convoy on the way out of Mariupol. And they promised to miss... An Orthodox priest was kidnapped in Berdyansk... Sergey Perebeynos went out to the street with photos of the dead under gunfire of his wife and daughters - the displaced people from Donetsk found shelter in Irpenm, but the war caught up with them there, they were again ready to flee from it. And they failed...

"I can't imagine what God must feel when he sees humanity sinking into hatred. What does God experience, who created man in His image and likeness, when he sees how wickedness and ignorance like acid devouring God's image in God's creation?

"And I try to resist the hate. Trying to find some antidote to anger and anger that surrounds the soul when you learn about the new deaths, new violence, monstrous injustice. When you learn a new lie. And that means new victims of this lie..."

Thank you for your leadership in the world, in the kingdom, and in my life, Mihail Britsin. These are twenty year-old lessons that are timeless. Oh, how we need God's gentleness!

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 fair hearing.

If you read the NT carefully, we see generally that Jesus was usually more 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 much-too-strict system of law (rules and regulations). Jesus was trying to teach grace not only with his words, but his actions ([mention 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 once, 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 the person know how much I appreciated his courtesy - but Teresa said: “Maybe you better not.” She was right, of course.

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 catch on, too; AND WE SURE COULD USE SOME GENTLENESS in our world.

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 to board.

III. How Can I Be More Gentle?

A. Focus on others’ needs ahead of my own.

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 and money. 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 original Chernobyl incident.....at least 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 would 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 have studied the OT book of Exodus together. 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 performed 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 ESV](#) ³ Now the man Moses was very meek, more than all people who were on the face of the earth. (“very meek” could be translated “gentle”)

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

Illus. There are two stories about George Washington that have impressed me as illustrations of at least one aspect of biblical gentleness. The stories may be apocryphal (like the cherry tree being cut down), but they picture him as not only a gentleman, but also a gentle man. On one occasion, he was fox hunting with a group of friends. One of the fields through which they were passing was bordered by a stone wall. As his horse jumped the wall it knocked off a stone. Washington immediately stopped, got down from his horse, and replaced the stone. One of his friends said, “You are too big a man to bother with that.” Washington replied gently, “No I am just the right size.”

Another story tells of a corporal at Valley Forge who was directing three men as they tried to lift a log in place. It was too heavy, but the corporal commanded again and again, “All right, men, one, two, three, lift!” A man in an overcoat came by and said to the corporal, “Why don’t you help them?” The corporal pulled himself up to full height and replied, “Sir, I am a corporal.” Without a word the man stepped over and with his help the log went easily in place. The man was George Washington.

Gentleness includes true humility that does not consider itself too good or too proud to take on humble tasks.

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. The old song says we have a friend in Jesus; the song says “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 4:1-3 ESV](#) ¹ I therefore, a prisoner for the Lord, urge you to walk in a manner worthy of the calling to which you have been called, ² with all humility and gentleness, with patience, bearing with one another in love, ³ eager to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace.

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