

The Fruit of the Spirit (9): Gentleness

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[0 : 00] And then we turn back to Galatians chapter 5, where we read in verse 22 and 23, For the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness.

Gentleness. You often learn about what a word means by examining its opposites.

So according to a standard word dictionary, the opposite of gentleness is cruelty, harshness, hardness, implacability, justice, penalty, punishment, revenge, rigor, severity, sternness, vengeance.

You can also learn about what a word means by examining words which mean almost the same thing. So again, according to a standard Bible dictionary, words which are like gentleness are meekness, humility, tenderness, mildness, mercy, leniency.

People who know about such things talk about words having a semantic range, meaning that although we may not be able to exactly pin down the definition of a word, we kind of know what it means.

[1 : 47] And gentleness is such a word. As with all the other fruit of the Spirit, perhaps we might wish that gentleness had been replaced in this list by severity or sobriety or sternness.

After all, as those with the caricature of being doer Scots, being severe for us is very second nature. Likewise, as successors of the John Knox who is hackneyed by a biased media as joylessly judgmental, we don't possess, it would seem, good spiritual genetics.

For those of us who possess a wide chromosome, masculinity and gentleness do not always seem to belong together. In other words, if there is one group in the world who need a lesson in gentleness, it is Scottish Calvinist men.

Remember the semantic range of the word gentleness. Humility, meekness, tenderness, mildness, mercy, leniency.

I don't accept the caricature in its totality. Surely we've all been at the sharp end of Calvinist men who were anything but gentle with us.

[3 : 17] And perhaps for those of us who are Scottish Calvinist men, there are times when we too must confess that we have been less than gentle with others.

And yet every one of us, I'm sure, is pretty sick of opening up our newspapers and reading of the latest cruelty, violence, injustice and vengefulness in action.

Wouldn't the world be a better place if we could all just be more gentle with each other? Gentleness is the eighth fruit of the Spirit.

These expressions of the life of God is the soul of a man. These practical demonstrations of our faith in Jesus Christ. If the Holy Spirit lives in us and we are growing in the grace and knowledge of Jesus Christ, it is inevitable that not only will we become more loving and joyful, we will also become more gentle.

So much so that in theory, the gentlest among us are those who have been the Christians for the longest time. Well, I want us to examine gentleness as the fruit of the Spirit under two headings this evening.

[4 : 40] First, gentleness and Christ, where we'll explore the example and inspiration and power for our own gentleness. And then gentleness and community, where we'll examine together what the Bible says about the practical outworking of our gentleness in relationship with other people.

First of all, then, gentleness and Christ. Gentleness and Christ. As with all the other fruit of the Spirit, the ultimate example, inspiration and power is found in the Lord Jesus Christ.

Yes, as we've seen all these virtues find their ultimate source in how the three persons of the Trinity relate one to another. But in solid, visual, practical form, we see them at work in the life and ministry of our Master, who for three monumental years of his earthly journey exhibited gentleness.

And as we survey that ministry in life, we learn what true gentleness looks like. Not just the theory of it, but the practice.

The evidence begins with a prophecy made about Jesus hundreds of years before he was born. A prophecy which he fulfilled in its entirety.

[6 : 02] In Zechariah chapter 9-9, written centuries before the birth of our Lord, the prophet looked forward to the coming of the Messiah, and he proclaimed, Rejoice greatly, O daughter of Zion.

See your king comes to you, righteous and having salvation, gentle and riding on a donkey, the foal of a donkey.

The Messiah will enter Jerusalem as a righteous king to save his people. But he shall not enter on a war horse as if to win victory by force of arms.

He shall come in the gentleness of one who rides upon a donkey. He's a king, but he's gentle. His sovereignty and power harnessed to the bridle of a colt.

Many hundreds of years later, as reported in Matthew chapter 21, Jesus rides into Jerusalem in a story we call the triumphal entry. Here he is, the king of kings and lord of lords, and there he is riding in a donkey.

[7 : 19] And we read in Matthew 21, verses 4 and 5, this took place to fulfill what was spoken to the prophet.

Say to the daughter of Zion, see your king comes to you, riding on a donkey, the foal of a donkey.

Jesus, the holy king, riding into the holy city, but with such gentleness, humility, and meekness.

It was said of Jesus that a bruised reed he will not break, and a smoldering flax he will not snuff out.

Jesus, the most manly man to ever have lived, and the model for Christian masculinity.

Not harsh and severe, but gentle and humble. And then perhaps in one of the most stunning texts in the Bible, in Matthew 11, 28 through 30, Jesus invites those who, according to some translators and interpreters, have been burned out by religion.

And he says to them, 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.

[8 : 46] For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light. Jesus' approach to genuine devotion and sincere faith is diametrically opposed to the severity and the harshness and the rigor of the religious legalists of his day.

As opposed to their sternness, he is gentle and humble in heart. He is so tender with us. He invites us to come to him, not so that he may flog us half to death, but that we may find rest in him.

The kind of rest we used to find as children when we fell asleep on our mother's laps. Such a gentle shepherd Jesus is, lovingly holding us as his helpless lambs close to his heart, protecting us from danger.

Such big hands, such powerful hands, such rough hands, but so gently holding us in his grip. This gentleness word group, covering, as it does, the ideas of humility and tenderness, mercy and meekness, they provide the reason for our salvation.

That the Son of God, worshipped by the mighty angels of heaven, became incarnate of the Virgin Mary, and having lived in humility and meekness, humbles himself further to the shame of a cross.

[10 : 29] This is the gospel in a nutshell, the gentleness, the humility, and the meekness of our Lord. Our views of God can be so wrong, especially in this area of sternness and severity versus meekness and gentleness.

The Father is so gentle with his Son. The Spirit is so tender toward the Father. God is meek, riding in triumph on a donkey, holding close to his heart the downcast and the oppressed and the troubled.

Majesty and meekness, this is the Bible's presentation of Christ, our gentle shepherd, our tender King. Are there those among us who cling fiercely to this wrong view of God?

If you have a wrong view of God, it will translate into a deformed and stunted experience of his love toward you. If you think of God as harsh, then you will be harsh both with yourself and with others, setting high targets and being devastated when your demands are not met.

If you think of God as severe, then you'll be severe with yourself and with others, lacking compassion and the graciousness that genuine faith in the gospel produces.

[12 : 16] Maybe the reason you're so hard on yourself, maybe the reason you're a disappointed perfectionist, is that you have a wrong view of God. Your problem isn't psychological or behavioral,

it's theological.

Think right of God. See him through the lens of the gentleness of Jesus Christ, not as soft on sin, but sympathetic to the sinner, not as harsh, but as humble, not as severe in his law, but as sincere in his love.

Gentleness in Christ. Secondly this evening, we want to look at gentleness and Christians.

Gentleness and Christians. As with all the other fruit of the Spirit, we need to find the foundation for gentleness in the person and the work of Jesus Christ.

The Holy Spirit, who in another place is called the Spirit of Christ, works Christ-like qualities in us and expresses Christ-like qualities through us.

[13:31] One of which is gentleness. This is the gospel indicative. God is gentle and on account of his gentleness, we have been forgiven and renewed.

Were God not gentle, then gentleness would not be included in the fruit of the Spirit. As Christians, forgiven and renewed by the gospel of Christ, holding forth Jesus as both our example and depending upon the transforming power of the Holy Spirit, we too are able and commanded gospel imperative to express genuine gentleness.

As we examine the New Testament's teaching on this subject, we learn three areas in which as Christians we need to grow in our gentleness. Gentleness in community, gentleness in truth, and then gentleness in society.

Now, although the English word gentle is used many times in New Testament, I'm confining always our analysis of gentleness to the New Testament in the New Testament to the Greek word which is used here in Genesis 5.23, the Greek word *plaus*.

First of all then, gentleness and community. Gentleness in community. Well, we've said it before concerning all the fruit of the Spirit.

[15:07] They are dependent upon their existence for us living community with each other as Christians. There's no room in the New Testament for a Christian who doesn't think he doesn't need other Christians, who cuts herself off from other Christians, who refuses to engage as one person has called them lone ranger Christians.

it's in community with each other that we learn what it means to love and to rejoice and to be at peace and to be gentle.

I would never have known what it meant to be loved unless there were other Christians who loved me when I didn't deserve to be loved. I had never known what it was to be kind unless there were other Christians who, though I had provoked and disappointed them, were kind to me.

And similarly, I had never known what it was to be gentle unless there were other Christians who instead of being harshly judgmental toward me were gentle.

In Ephesians 4.2, the Apostle Paul, in describing what it means to pursue unity with other Christians, says, be completely humble and gentle.

[16:32] Be patient, bearing with one another in love. His point is that the spirit of unity is fostered and encouraged by gentleness between Christians.

Nothing breaks that bond of unity faster than Christians who are severe, harsh, and critical of one another. by the litigious, by the judgmental, by the implacable.

The fruit of the spirit always tends toward unity. And then in Colossians 3.12, the Apostle Paul, in describing what it means to live as God's elect in the world, writes, as God's chosen people, holy and dearly loved, clothe yourselves with compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness, and patience. God has made us as his new people to live in community with each other. He loves us and he tells us that if we would live in a way that pleases him, we are to be compassionate toward one another. kind, patient, gentle. The fruit of the spirit tends toward identifying us as God's beloved children.

[18:00] You see, in both these lists, Ephesians 4.3 and Colossians 3.12, as well as the fruit of the spirit here in Galatians 5.22.23, gentleness exists alongside the other virtues of Christian community.

We live in a society which longs for community. People may not be alone in our society, but boy, they sure feel alone.

Feel alone. Loneliness is at epidemic levels and everyone wants to belong to something that's bigger than themselves. people don't really care how much we know as Christians until they know how much we care as Christians.

A genuine Christian community of love, joy, and gentleness is a hugely attractive family to which they may belong and for that we strive here in Glasgow City.

But there's another aspect of gentleness and community I want to draw your attention to. In Galatians 6.1, the Apostle Paul writes, Brothers, if someone is caught in a sin, you who are spiritual should restore him gently.

[19 : 26] Don't crush him. Don't come down on him like a ton of bricks. Don't be harsh. Don't be severe. Be gentle. Suppose you have a glass jar and the lid won't come off.

You can try and twist that lid as hard as you can but it won't move. You can hit it with a hammer or use a wrench and it won't budge an inch.

But if you soak it in hot water the lid will come off very easily indeed. there may be those among us who desperately need the grace of restoration.

Perhaps they've been living in a sinful way or walking in the darkness. Perhaps they've been rebelling. Perhaps they're pursuing all the wrong kinds of relationships.

What should we do? Restore them with gentleness. heat them with the gospel of Jesus Christ.

Warm their hearts with the gentleness of Jesus towards sinners and they'll come back to him.

[20 : 41] Threaten him with a hammer. Wag your finger in their faces and you'll lose them forever.

How many of our own pre-church young people have historically been turned away from the Christian gospel by the unforgiving harsh severe attitude of older Christians toward them.

So they've done something stupid and foolish and childish but they've been hung out to dry for it.

They've been crushed for it. Made to feel like outsiders for it.

No gentleness was used in their restoration. Just the threat of ostracism and the bad fire. Faced with impossible demands and humiliation a rigidly severe attitude against them these young people walked away they've never returned.

Gentleness must exist in community and it's something for which therefore we must work and pray.

If by nature we are harsh and judgmental people or even if our manner is somewhat stern we must apply the gospel which transforms sinners into saints and change ourselves.

Gentleness and community. Second gentleness and truth. Gentleness and truth. The New Testament has firm teaching on the relationship of gentleness and truth.

[22 : 13] We don't tend to think of these two words as belonging together and so for example when we're angry with someone we will say to them now listen to me while I tell you a few whole truths.

Unfortunately we have separated two things which actually belong together truth and gentleness. we tend to think of preachers of truth as hard and severe and rather loveless some kind of scowling John Knotts caricature of a preacher wagging his finger in your face.

We don't tend to associate preachers of truth with gentleness. However listen to what James the brother of our Lord says in James 3.13 Who is wise and understanding among you he asked.

Let him show it by his good life by deeds done in the humility that comes from wisdom. So truth or wisdom belong together in that Christian life which James calls good.

In other words truth which is not gentle is not true. And gentleness which is not true is not gentle.

Perhaps we as preachers need to be more gentle in our presentation of the truth of the gospel.

[23 : 45] The first step to becoming more gentle in our presentation of the truth is ourselves to be more gentle in our reception of the truth. So for example in James 1.21 we read get rid of all moral filth and the evil that's so prevalent and humbly or gently accept the word planted in you which can save you.

You know if God was as harsh with us as we are with other people we'd all be in a sorry state. but even those words of correction he drives home into our hearts are driven home with gentle taps of his hammer.

As we recognize the grace and mercy that God has shown us in the gospel we become men and women who ourselves prize the grace and the mercy of gentleness.

perhaps the most relevant application of gentleness and truth comes in the area of correction and rebuke.

Once again here we're back to Sir Walter Scott's caricature of the reformers and covenanters as harsh severe and loveless men intent on telling everyone else how to live and mercilessly pointing the finger at all transgressors.

[25 : 08] There are times in Paul's letters when he confronts sin head on but these confrontations tend to be a very last resort. Paul first and foremost relies upon gentle correction gentle rebuke and

so for example in 2nd Timothy 2.25 describing how the Lord's servant is to behave Paul writes though oppose him he must gently instruct in the hope that God will grant them repentance leading them to a knowledge of the truth.

Paul understands that more can be accomplished by gentle instruction than by harsh rebuke. As I look back in my early years as a Christian I learned far more from older Christians who put their arm around my shoulders and lovingly corrected me than ever I did from Christians who gave me the hair dryer treatment.

Or to use Paul's language in 1 Corinthians 4.21 they came to me with love and a gentle spirit not with a whip. Think of the great preachers of yesteryear and the way they preached about hell. Some of them would bang their fists on the pulpit they'd shout so loud and go so red in the face that you thought that for all the world they'd just return from hell. These preachers made a shake and tremble thrilling some to the extent that though they were not Christians they loved nothing more than a hellfire roasting.

Think of the others those who preached on hell with eyes glazing over with tears voices cracking with emotion gentleness of speech begging his listeners to turn away from hell and toward Christ. [27 : 09] In the light of the Bible's teaching on this subject I know what kind of preaching was more faithful to the apostolic pattern. Suppose you know that a Christian friend of yours is wrong on a particular subject.

Do not be pugnacious or argumentative harshly and mercilessly beating them into submission. Put your arm around them and gently point them back to the gospel of Jesus Christ where truth and humility meet and gentleness and love reign in triumph.

And then lastly this evening gentleness and society. Gentleness and society. As we close I want us to reflect on one last aspect of how we are to express our gentleness as Christians.

Namely in our relationship to society at large. Especially a non-Christian society. One of the objections which is raised against Christianity and religion in general is that it causes wars. That it promotes violence in the pursuit of its goals. Even today in many parts of the world as you know violence or the threat of violence is used as a weapon of conversion by other religions.

[28 : 36] The answer to bad religion is not no religion it's good religion. And if there's one thing Christianity is to be it's a good religion. In 1 Peter 3 15-16 in his famous commendation of evangelism the apostle Peter writes always be prepared to give an answer for the hope that is within you to everyone.

But do this with gentleness and respect. In other words evangelism and gentleness belong together. To be gentle doesn't mean to be wobbly on doctrine or less firm on the truth.

But it does mean to present the gospel with sympathy and with sensitivity not with ferocity and with harshness. We're always to be gentle shepherds looking to save lost sheep.

Not ruthless hunters looking to kill lost sheep. But then our general demeanor in society should be that of gentleness.

In Titus 3 verses 1-2 the apostle Paul writes remind the people to be subject to rulers and authorities to be obedient to be ready to do whatever is good to slander no one to be peaceable considerate and to show true humility gentleness rather literally to all men.

[30 : 06] In other words Christians are to be known as men and women of gentleness. Genuine gentleness. Gentle women. We're not to be thought of as being prickly argumentative and pugnacious hard to govern litigious and revolutionary.

Remember Paul was writing here to Christians who had to endure the hardships of living under the reign of Emperor Nero. If it was hard for them to be gentle it should be far easier for us even if you are the kind of person who doesn't like the nationalists or the Tories.

thing is you can't have the gentleness of Jesus without having the Jesus of gentleness. The world would be a better place if we were all far gentler with one another.

I'm sure it would. Well here's the solution. Put your faith and trust in Jesus Christ the gentle one. and watch how in time the Holy Spirit changes you. and watch what