

Gentleness

"Come to Me, all who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. 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. For My yoke is easy, and My burden is light." **Matthew 11:28-30**.

This month we're focusing on a specific fruit of the Spirit: *gentleness*. Here, our Lord teaches His audience to learn from Him. He is gentle and lowly in heart. Earlier, He taught, "Blessed are the meek, for they shall inherit the earth." The Greek behind meek is the same as gentle. Do you remember the context of Matthew 11? The setting may surprise you because it feels different from this passage if isolated. Jesus just rebuked others for not repenting. He says their punishment will be worse than the land of Sodom on the day of judgment. Then He thanks the Father for hiding these things from the wise and understanding while revealing them to little children.

I mention this because the context helps us understand how to approach this topic immediately. Gentleness. It would be helpful to do a classic word study. Focusing your study on passages that mention gentleness alone won't give you the complete picture. However, before you begin to apply its meaning in other passages, we need to first know how it's being used. How is it to be understood? The first two passages I mentioned used the terms meek and gentle (also translated as humble). Do you see how gentleness is connected with humility and contrasted with pride? Jesus will punish the prideful. The word we'll look at today is rooted in that term, though it's different. Yet, it is principally not that different. We will quickly look at this term and then seek to apply.

Defining:

- The quality of not being overly impressed by a sense of one's self-importance, gentleness, humility, courtesy, considerateness, meekness in the older favorable sense (BDAG).
- Gentleness of attitude and behavior, in contrast with harshness in one's dealings with others
 - 'gentleness, meekness, mildness.' (Louw-Nida)

Gentleness Passages:

- **1 Corinthians 4:21** What do you wish? Shall I come to you with a rod, or with love in a spirit of **gentleness**?
 - Arrogant members of the church did not behave as they ought. Paul was warning them.
 - We learn that gentleness doesn't mean you can't warn. The arrogant members would not experience Paul's gentleness if they didn't repent. However, Paul desired to come with a spirit of gentleness.
- **2 Corinthians 10:1** I, Paul, myself entreat you, by the **meekness** and gentleness of Christ - I who am humble when face to face with you, but bold toward you when I am away!
 - He then begs that his visit won't require him to show boldness with confidence.
 - Take note that it's translated as meekness in this passage alongside gentleness. These terms bleed into the other. Meekness is not weakness. It belongs to Christ. It requires

love and restraint. It would be easy for Paul to show boldness if he was driven by power, but his love desires gentleness.

- **Galatians 5:22-23** But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, **gentleness**, self-control; against such things there is no law.
 - This is our central passage. It describes the fruit of the Spirit. This is what God produces. Take note - there is no law against gentleness.
 - Again, we harmonize all passages. Does that mean we are never to be bold? Do we never correct or rebuke? Sometimes, even sharp rebukes are intended. Don't look for a way out of being bold.
- **Galatians 6:1** Brothers, if anyone is caught in any transgression, you who are spiritual should restore him in a spirit of **gentleness**. Keep watch on yourself, lest you too be tempted.
 - Case in point. You can be bold and precise while being gentle. When Paul spoke of gentleness vs. boldness, much of it concerned discipline. In other words, "Will I have to rebuke/discipline you? Or will this be more peaceful?"
 - Notice how we are to practice humility. People who correct harshly may think too highly of themselves. Such individuals should be aware lest they fall.
- **Ephesians 4:1-2** I therefore, a prisoner for the Lord, urge you to walk in a manner worthy of the calling to which you have been called, with all humility and **gentleness**, with patience, bearing with one another in love,
 - Paul urged the brethren to walk in a manner worthy of their calling.
 - I'm not trying to sound like a broken record, but this is the benefit of word studies. See how it's attached to humility. We'll discuss this during the application portion.
- **Colossians 3:12** Put on then, as God's chosen ones, holy and beloved, compassionate hearts, kindness, humility, **meekness**, and patience,
 - This is kin to the Ephesian letter. Here, it's translated as meekness.
- **2 Timothy 2:24-26** And the Lord's servant must not be quarrelsome but kind to everyone, able to teach, patiently enduring evil, correcting his opponents with **gentleness**. God may perhaps grant them repentance leading to a knowledge of the truth, and they may come to their senses and escape from the snare of the devil, after being captured by him to do his will.
 - This was written to an evangelist. I need to hear this. It needs to sink in with elders as well. Indeed, if the evangelist is to follow this, so should Shepherds.
 - We should desire our opponents' reconciliation with the Lord, so let's not push them away. Some people are afraid to invite their friends to services because they don't want them to be offended by anything said. Some aren't afraid of their friends hearing the truth, but rather how it's delivered. I pray I've not created the latter for any of you. I hope that you're not afraid for me to sit down with a loved one to share the gospel.
- **Titus 3:1-2** Remind them to be submissive to rulers and authorities, to be obedient, to be ready for every good work, to speak evil of no one, to avoid quarreling, to be gentle, and to show perfect **courtesy** toward all people.
 - Here, we have another evangelist, but this instruction is for those he's teaching.
 - Now, it's translated as courtesy. We just returned from vacation. The whole staff was so courteous. You can tell there was a high standard for hiring. It helps you put your finger on the gift our courtesy. It's gentle and humble. It's a person who acts as if you're

important. It's a person who treats you with respect. They've got a non-confrontational way about them.

- **James 1:21** Therefore put away all filthiness and rampant wickedness and receive with **meekness** the implanted word, which is able to save your souls.
 - Yes, receiving the word of God requires meekness. We'll get to this shortly.
- **James 3:13** Who is wise and understanding among you? By his good conduct let him show his works in the **meekness** of wisdom.
 - Wise people don't showboat their wisdom, do they? You know them for their humility.
- **1 Peter 3:14-16** But even if you should suffer for righteousness' sake, you will be blessed. Have no fear of them, nor be troubled, 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, having a good conscience, so that, when you are slandered, those who revile your good behavior in Christ may be put to shame.
 - It's troubling when others don't show concern about their behavior. We shouldn't be overcome by other's opinions or judgments. However, we should be concerned with how we conduct ourselves. If someone slanders us, let it not have any teeth. Ultimately, we're representing Christ and that should mean everything to us. We need to have a sense of responsibility and accountability.

Applying Gentleness:

- There's no "Paul the Apostle" or "Paul the Author."
 - They are one and the same. We need to use common sense. Study his life, and you'll see frustrating moments. Look at how he responded. See the mixed bag. Refrain from overanalyzing a passage he wrote and turn it into something he didn't live. We can overthink passages and come down too harshly on ourselves. We aren't robots.
- Don't let culture define gentleness.
 - We have, for example, men who have gone too far with the idea. Gentleness becomes a weakness. They are overly sympathetic and don't stand on God's word. Then you have men who overcompensate and view gentleness as a weakness.
- Our relationships demand them.
 - Marriages: so many issues could be ironed out if we humble ourselves. It comes out in our communication.
 - Parenting: we're teaching our children humility. Which is why we also should expect them to learn humility. If we're overly harsh all the time, it means we've got personal issues we've got to sort out. However, being gentle doesn't mean allowing children to get away with selfishness. Again, we're training them to be humble. So be gentle in your training, but teach them to help them.
 - Brethren: how many relationships have not blossomed or withered because of a lack of gentleness. We could go round and round about all the ways to improve, grow, learn, etc. Yet, how many issues could we have avoided if we had been humble and gentle with one another?
 - The Lost: we cannot claim to be His and lack it. Jesus declared that He was gentle and lowly in spirit. This is about representation. This is about being a help or hindrance to the lost. We've got to get our egos out of the way.

- Receiving God's word.
 - Brethren, have you ever thought that you don't listen to God because you're not meek? Are you not gentle? As James pointed out - we've got to receive it with meekness. How does that work? Well, he's talking about humility. Those who don't listen to God are prideful.