

Gentle And Lowly In Heart

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Most of the world's cultures have reserved their rewards for the people who compete successfully through strength of will and superior power. Most of the world's literature and entertainment has exalted the conquering hero who refuses to submit and who exerts his or her interests against anyone who might challenge those interests.

Often the most rewarded worldly sales people are those who have the most aggressive methods in their sales activities. The politicians who crush their opponents in the election are using the biggest lies and are the most ruthless. Frequently, the heads of large corporations are those who have robbed others blind, stolen secrets, and cheated people of their retirements. Philanthropists who have the greatest opportunity to help others use their wealth to further their diabolic agendas.

While the arrogant and abusive leader is applauded for his brashness in this world, the truly meek and gentle person is ridiculed and shamed for being weak and soft.

In stark contrast to the world's value system of human success is Jesus' portrayal of the ideal disciple and leader as meek and gentle and lowly in heart. This is more than a bold contradiction to the worldly wisdom. It provides a clear distinction between what exists in the world and existence in the Kingdom of God in the future. It involves the spiritual warfare between the arrogant and the abusive nature of the world compared to the meek and gentle nature of the Christian.

There is no denying that all Christians have human weaknesses, but we know that spiritual warfare demands spiritual weapons and God certainly promises to supply them to us. We can wage a successful campaign in the spiritual

realm only as we abandon the wisdom of the world and place total reliance on the supplier of the spiritual weaponry. That effective weaponry is the wisdom from above.

The apostle Paul had been accused of being forceful and bold at a distance, shooting his printed arrows, but subservient and weak-kneed when personally present, weakly voicing his demands. To this accusation, he replied to the Corinthians here in his letter to them.

II Corinthians 10:8-10 For even if I should boast somewhat more about our authority, which the Lord gave us for edification and not for your destruction, I shall not be ashamed—lest I seem to terrify you by letters. "For his [that is, Paul's] letters," they [that is, Paul's accusers] say, "are weighty and powerful, but his bodily presence is weak, and his speech contemptible."

Wow, what a disrespectful slam against God's minister. This charge is a repeat of what Paul used as his prelude to this chapter 10. "I, Paul, myself am pleading with you," he said to them. He was stating this regarding a vocal minority who persisted in wrongly thinking that worldly standards and motives governed his conduct and that he relied on human powers and methods in his ministry.

Paul wanted to avoid a display of boldness on his upcoming visit, yet he indicates his total readiness to exercise his authority no matter what some of the Corinthian congregation thought. If they did not refuse to listen to his slanderers and change their own attitudes, their own wrong attitudes toward God's minister, he was going to have to be bold and he was going to have to be strong in words and in action.

So he preferred to come to Corinth with love and in a spirit of gentleness, as he says. But if necessary, he was ready to come with rod in hand. What a contrast, one or the other.

Now, Paul addresses the whole church on this issue, explaining that his war, and theirs, is a spiritual war. Right at the beginning of this passage, Paul uses

two words that set the whole tone of his purpose in writing this chapter. He writes to the meekness and gentleness of Christ. Let us go to the back to the beginning of the chapter in verse 1.

II Corinthians 10:1 Now I, Paul, myself am pleading with you by the meekness and gentleness of Christ—who in presence am lowly among you, but being absent am bold towards you.

Paul's meekness here and gentleness as the true servant of God should not be confused with timidity. He was not being timid. He was not coming to them timidly, but he was coming to them with gentleness—the meekness and gentleness of Christ.

II Corinthians 10:2-5 But I beg you that when I am present I may not be bold with that confidence by which I intend to be bold against some, who think of us as if we walked according to the flesh. For though we walk in the flesh, we do not war according to the flesh. For the weapons of our warfare are not carnal but mighty in God for pulling down strongholds, casting down arguments and every high thing that exalts itself against the knowledge of God, bringing every thought into captivity to the obedience of Christ.

Paul uses the phrase, "every high thing" here in verse 5. In some translations, it is translated "every pretension," referring to any human act or attitude that forms an obstacle to the liberating knowledge of God contained in His inspired written Word. Now, in this Paul is referring to every arrogant plot and presumptuous design that temporarily frustrates God's divine plan. And we know that nothing frustrates God Himself as He carries out His plan of salvation for humanity, so the frustration is on the part of the human beings who allow themselves to be deceived or wrongly influenced by human reasoning and Satan's deceptions.

Paul, formerly zealous prosecutor of the church, recognizes that gentleness does not come naturally for many. He explicitly lists gentleness (or meekness) as a fruit of the Spirit, a virtue that is planted and flourishes where God dwells by His Spirit.

Meekness is listed in Galatians 5:23, as you well know, as the eighth fruit of the Spirit in the *King James Version*. But it is translated gentleness in most modern English translations. This is not a matter of any difference in the ancient Greek manuscripts of the New Testament. The same Greek word is found in all of them. The problem here is that the English language has changed since the days of King James and Shakespeare. The common dictionary definition of meekness as it is used today is deficient in spirit and courage. Over time, this etymology transition has moved away from the original Greek meaning. And we can see that Satan had his hand in this because it is the exact meaning of the original Greek word that is translated into meekness in the *New King James* and the *King James Version*.

“Meekness” is an elusive virtue that few people know how to define. Most definitions are vague and many people incorrectly equate it to weakness, which we know society does. Meekness is inclusive of such virtues as humble, and mild, and gentle, and modest, and unassuming, and unpretentious, tolerant, and tenderhearted. In English meek comes from an old Norse word meaning soft. And so we see that it almost captured it but not quite.

In modern English the terms meekness and mildness, which are commonly used for this Greek word, suggests weakness and cowardliness to a greater or lesser extent. But the Greek word does not express this at all. So the meekness manifested by God and given to the saints is the fruit of power. It is enduring injury with patience and without resentment. Resentment is a feeling of indignant displeasure or persistent ill will at something regarded as a wrong; an insult or an injury. The Spirit of God cannot dwell in the heart of someone who is harsh or resentful.

So meekness and gentleness are to be put on with other Christian virtues such as compassion and humility and patience, as Paul taught the faithful brethren in the church at Colossi. Even though Paul was dealing with some presumptuous people in the church in Corinth, gentleness was Paul's preferred means of dealing with them, even though they had been blackballing his name and saying negative things about him.

I Corinthians 4:21 What do you want? [Paul says] Shall I come to you with a rod, or in love and a spirit of gentleness?

We see throughout both I Corinthians and II Corinthians, he is questioning them on how they want to be dealt with. And he is saying that if you stop this disunity that is going on in your congregation, then I will come with a spirit of gentleness. Otherwise I am going to have to use a rod.

Paul had a tremendous love for the faithful in all the congregations of God, but his love was not merely blind sentimentality. He knew they sometimes needed discipline and he was prepared to use it, but he wanted to see them respond in repentance so he could show them the meekness and gentleness of Christ. And speaking of his ministry among the Thessalonians, Paul's gentleness takes on maternal imagery.

I Thessalonians 2:7 [Paul writes] But we were gentle among you [speaking of the apostles], just as a nursing mother cherishes her own children.

So this is Paul's preference in the way he would like to deal with the congregations that he was ministering to.

Now remember where his meekness and gentleness originated. We already read in the answer in II Corinthians 10:1 where it says, "Now I, Paul, myself am pleading with you by the meekness and the and gentleness of Christ." And then he goes on to talk about the weapons of the world.

On the contrary, we have the divine power to tear down evil strongholds. We are not carried away by rage and personal vindictiveness, or greed or pride, but with the gentleness of Christ, and we can triumph powerfully with that.

Meekness and gentleness appear in the Bible among the list of virtues, as I mentioned. Two corresponding themes are associated with them by Paul here: they are commanded behavior and rewards are promised to people who display these virtues.

Now, how do meekness and gentleness relate to one another? Because in that scripture that I just read, it mentioned both the meekness and the gentleness of Christ as being two separate virtues. Meekness is both internal and external in its execution in one's life and gentleness is one of the best English words to express the outward operation of meekness. II Corinthians 10:1 refers to Christ's meekness, which is transliterated in the Greek as *prauteetos* and gentleness is *epieikeia*, as transliterated from the Greek. They are listed there as separate virtues.

Meekness is the Greek word *prauteetos*. As I said, it is the quality of the person whose anger is so controlled that he is always angry at the right time and never at the wrong time. So it describes a person who is never angry at any personal wrong he may receive, but who is capable of righteous anger when he sees others wronged. So you take it on the chin, so to speak. But when somebody else is being attacked or accused, you go to their defense. That is, in a sense, the general meekness meaning.

Meekness describes the condition of the mind and heart—an internal attitude. Whereas gentleness describes mildness combined with tenderness and it refers to actions—external behavior. So on the one hand, the meekness primarily talks about or represents the internal thoughts that we have. It includes gentleness of course, but gentleness is primarily an outward thing, very much like love requires action as well.

Described negatively, meekness is the opposite of self-assertiveness and self-interest. It is the evenness of mind that is neither elated or cast down because it is not occupied with self. So it is amazing that all these virtues that God lists and all of the gifts of the Spirit, and that they all require that we rid ourselves of self-centeredness, of any selfish motivations.

The Greeks defined the word translated gentleness in the *New King James* as that which is just and even better than just. They describe it as the quality which must enter in when justice, just because of its generality, is in danger of becoming unjust. So there are times when strict justice can actually result in injustice. This is where mercy comes into play. And of course, mercy and gentleness are connected.

Now, sometimes real justice is not to insist on the letter of the law, but to let a higher quality enter into our decisions. And the man who has gentleness is the man who knows that in the last analysis, the Christian standard is not justice but love, because true justice is only based on love, but raw justice is not.

So by using this word Paul is saying that he is not out for his rights and to insist on the letter of the law, but deals with the situation in Corinth with Christlike love which transcends even the purest of human justice.

Gentleness has also been referred to as sweet reasonableness, or merely mercy. Gentleness is never a false modesty or self-deprecation or a spineless refusal to stand for anything. It is never a cowardly retreat from reality that substitutes a passive selfishness for true gentleness. It does not avoid trouble in ways that allow even greater trouble to develop. Neither is it a false humility that refuses to recognize that God has given us talents and abilities or that refuses to use them for His glory. So this enables us to have gentleness in our dealings with one another in the church. We will talk about it later, but gentleness leads to unity in the church and so it is very crucial.

Now, meekness is a virtue that we are commanded to put on and aim at. We are repeatedly exhorted to be meek and gentle, just as love without action is uselessly blind and just as faith without works is a dead faith. Also meekness without gentleness is deficient.

God demands gentleness and meekness as the spirit in which we are called to perform certain duties. It is a responsibility that every member of God's church has. And this list of duties includes restoring badly behaving Christians, correcting opponents of the truth, receiving the implanted word, and making a defense of the gospel.

Let me pose a rhetorical question. Do you know someone with a fault? Or I should say with a fault or without a fault? Do you know anyone with a fault? Should we condemn and judge or recall the mercy of God the Father in Jesus Christ has had on us?

Let us briefly look at four passages that answer these questions.

Galatians 6:1 Brethren, if a man is overtaken in any trespass, you who are spiritual restore such a one in a spirit of gentleness, considering yourself lest you also be tempted.

This is a kind, longsuffering, and forgiving spirit, not a fault-finding attitude. This is an essential qualification for restoring and recovering an offending brother.

Now turn over to II Timothy 2, verse 23. No one should attempt to caution or admonish another who cannot do it in the spirit of gentleness and meekness, and no one should attempt to reform someone without humility.

II Timothy 2:23-26 But avoid foolish and ignorant disputes, knowing that they generate strife. A servant of the Lord must not quarrel but be gentle to all, able to teach, patient, in humility correcting those who are in opposition, if God perhaps will grant them repentance, so that they may know the truth, and that they may come to their senses and escape the snare of the devil, having been taken captive by him to do his will.

So we should be calm and respectful when speaking with others. We must watch our tone while speaking the truth so that the truth, however painful it may be to them, will be well received. It takes a lot of work, a lot of tact to be able to do that. And it is something that we all can polish up on, especially me, who may have learned the most from this sermon.

James 1:19-21 So then, my beloved brethren, let every man be swift to hear, slow to speak, slow to wrath; for the wrath of man does not produce the righteousness of God. Therefore lay aside all filthiness and overflow of wickedness, and receive with meekness the implanted word, which is able to save your souls.

In sharing the good news of God's truth we are to do so with gentleness and respect. When we do this, we may win over those who hear us.

I Peter 3:15-16 But sanctify the Lord God in your hearts, and always be ready to give a defense to everyone who asks for a

reason for the hope that is in you, with meekness [other versions say gentleness there, either one is appropriate] and fear; having a good conscience, that when they defame you as evildoers, those who revile your good conduct in Christ may be ashamed.

This is the spirit in which to learn and in which discipline must be applied and faults corrected. It is also the virtue for meeting opposition to the truth and giving a proper Christian witness. So it is a core virtue that a Christian must have.

Most of us are not given the commission that the prophets (who were to cry aloud and spare not) received, warning the people in the world of impending judgment. So the best way for us to witness for Christ and to glorify God is to live God's way of life. (I do not know if there is a sermon I give where I do not mention that very thing; living God's way of life, providing a good example to others.)

Biblically, the focus of true meekness is not only in our outward behavior of gentleness nor in our relationships to other human beings. Neither is it the focus of our natural personality. Rather, *meekness is an inwardly developed tenderheartedness and the performing of it is first and primarily towards God*. It is the attitude in which we accept God's will toward us as good and therefore without dispute or resisting. Since true meekness is meekness before God, the insults and injuries that may be afflicted upon us by the world or others within the church are permitted and used by God for our chastening and our purifying. So no matter how nasty a person is to us, we should respond in gentleness. And that is one of the hardest things to do in life for those of us who have human nature, which is all of us.

It is impossible to have true unity without meekness and gentleness. Remember, meekness is enduring injury with patience and without resentment. Gentleness is a softness or mildness of manner or disposition and there is an absence of severity, self-centeredness, and pride. So we cannot be unified unless we come to the point on an individual basis where we are no longer bothered by intentional or unintentional offenses, especially from our spiritual siblings. And we get an indication of how important meekness is for our future by what Jesus said in Matthew 5:5, "Blessed are the meek, for they shall inherit the earth."

Now in Jesus' message to the disciples in Matthew 5, commonly called the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus honors meek and gentle people. "Blessed are the poor in spirit." "Blessed are the meek." "Blessed are the merciful." "Blessed are the pure in heart." "Blessed are the peacemakers."

Two biblical characters with whom we easily associate meekness are Moses and Jesus Christ. And we read in Numbers 12:3 God's command regarding Moses, in the *New King James Version*, that he was very humble. In the *King James Version*, the word meek is used, "More than all men that were on the face of the earth." And if we examine the life of Moses, we find clear as evidence that meekness is not weakness but strength under control.

Now, there is no more heroic or forceful character in the Old Testament than Moses. He is fearless in exercising leadership against unbearable stubbornness among his followers. He stands up to Pharaoh. He defends his right to lead when his authority is challenged and he is the most visible and powerful figure in the traveling nation of Israel. Yet he does all this in the strength of the Lord and he himself is not presumptuous to be self-reliant, nor does he use his position as leader for self-glorification. The major exception is when he strikes the rock instead of obeying God's command to speak to it. The inappropriateness of Moses' behavior on this occasion, compared with the general tone of his whole life, actually works to emphasize the great effort it takes to produce the qualities of meekness and gentleness that Moses had in leading some two million or more people through a wilderness.

The Bible goes out of its way to demonstrate Jesus' gentleness in the New Testament. Jesus Christ is never described as weak or fearful and He was often quite the opposite: forceful and authoritative while discerning the Pharisee's harsh, hypocritical intentions. Jesus called them brood of vipers and he also overturned the tables of the money changers at the synagogue. In Matthew 21 we will read verses 12 and 13 where it talks about those money changers and how Christ handled them.

Matthew 21:12-13 Then Jesus went into the temple of God and drove out all those who bought and sold in the temple, and overturned the tables of the money changers and the seats of those

who sold doves. And He said to them, "It is written, 'My house shall be called a house of prayer,' but you have made it a 'den of thieves.'"

There were other times when Jesus was gentle and He says so in Jesus' many statements about Himself. One of the most memorable is found in Matthew 11, especially verse 29.

Matthew 11:28-30 "Come to Me, all you 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."

So He says, "I am gentle and lowly in heart."

Gentleness is a Godlike quality and was strongly evident in the life of Jesus Christ. He gathered children around Himself and they sat on His knee and He took time to converse with them. And when the disciples sought to dismiss them as a nuisance, Jesus rebuked them.

Matthew 19:13-14 [You are very familiar with this.] Then little children were brought to Him that He might put His hands on them and pray, but the disciples rebuked them. But Jesus said, "Let the little children come to Me, and do not forbid them; for of such is the kingdom of heaven."

So Jesus often demonstrated the character traits of meekness and gentleness. There are many more examples I could give. But just let me list five more brief examples for you.

First one, in His treatment of the woman caught in adultery that the Pharisees wanted to stone. He showed a great deal of gentleness with her.

Second one, the way He treated Thomas who refused to believe that Jesus had risen from the dead until he saw Jesus with his own eyes.

Third one, the way in which He associated with the outcasts of society: the sinners, the prostitutes, and the tax collectors.

Fourth one, the way in which He healed people who were suffering.

Fifth one, His conversation with the woman at the well in Samaria. Jesus engaged her in conversation that drew her in rather than alienating her. He allowed her to admit her sin rather than condemning her from the start. And so she was receptive to what he had to say to her.

We can learn from all these examples how to properly communicate with others of varying backgrounds. Although Jesus is the truly powerful one and the truly righteous one, He was gentle for the benefit of the weak, the blind, and the blind sinners.

Now, the more memorable examples Jesus showed of meekness and gentleness was during His arrest. When He was being arrested in the garden of Gethsemane, one of His disciples, Peter, pulled out a sword and struck Malchus, the servant of the high priest, cutting off his ear. And you are also very familiar with that story as well, so I will just quickly quote it.

Luke 22:49-51 When those around Him saw what was going to happen, they said to Him, "Lord, shall we strike with a sword?" And one of them struck the servant of the high priest [that was Peter] and cut off his right ear. But Jesus answered and said, "Permit even this." And He touched his ear and healed him.

Jesus has massive strength at His disposal but He restrains His use of power because He knew He must die to bring salvation to the weak. And He put aside the strength and power of a king and in meekness and not weakness, for the benefit of the weak, demonstrated the kind of king He is. Not a tyrant but a meek and gentle king who is supremely powerful. He is the kind of king who entered Jerusalem riding on a donkey. Again, very familiar to you.

Matthew 21:1-6 Now when they drew near Jerusalem, and came to Bethphage, at the Mount of Olives, then Jesus sent two disciples, saying to them, "Go into the village opposite you, and immediately you will find a donkey tied, and a colt with her. Loose them and bring them to Me. And if anyone says anything to you, you shall say, 'The Lord has need of them'; and immediately he will send

them." All this was done that it might be fulfilled which was spoken by the prophet saying [and verse 5 is the one I want to key in on], "Tell the daughter of Zion, 'Behold, your king is coming to you, lowly [that is, humble, meek, gentle], and sitting on a donkey, a colt, the foal of a donkey.'" So the disciples went and did as Jesus commanded them.

There again, every image and everything that He did had an element of gentleness to it, as well as meekness, or meekness with gentleness, however you want to look at that. So He was a great leader and a teacher because of the many qualities of that type that He had.

But later, when Jesus knew in advance that Peter would deny Him and Judas would betray Him, He did not rise in angry protest. His gentle nature restrained Him and He commanded that we love our enemies, do good to those who hate us, and subdue our harsh nature with gentleness. So Peter himself was inspired to write about how Jesus is the supreme example of meekness and gentleness.

I Peter 2:21-24 For to this you were called [speaking to you and I], because Christ also suffered for us, leaving us an example, that you should follow His steps: "Who committed no sin, nor was deceit found in His mouth"; who, when He was reviled did not revile in return; when He suffered, He did not threaten, but committed Himself to Him who judges righteously; who Himself bore our sins in His own body on the tree, that we, having died to sins, might live for righteousness—by whose stripes you are healed.

Defiant toward the religious establishment in defending the helpless and diseased, as well as opposing evil, Jesus humbly sacrifices His own interests and from the cross He prays that His heavenly Father would forgive those who crucify Him. No wonder He characterizes Himself as being gentle and lowly in heart! With all this gentleness, He was still masculine and stable. And when confronted by those seeking to entrap or destroy Him, He stood fearless and His gentle nature was temporarily masked as He demonstrated a strength that struck fear into the hearts of those who heard Him.

It is not a mere contemplative virtue. It is maintaining peace and patience in the midst of pelting provocations. So Isaiah's prophecy summarizes Jesus example. Again, you are so very familiar with this passage, but I will just quote it.

Isaiah 53:4 Surely He has borne our griefs and carried our sorrows; . . .

Isaiah 53:7 He was oppressed and He was afflicted, yet He opened not His mouth; He was led as a lamb to the slaughter, and as a sheep before its shearers is silent, so He opened not His mouth.

Isaiah 53:9 And they made His grave with the wicked. . . . because He had done no violence, nor were then was any deceit in His mouth.

Jesus Christ, gentle and lowly in heart.

In stark contrast, the disciples of Jesus Christ, while still under the power of their own human nature, wanted to burn sinners. Would that not be our reaction? Or is that our reaction when we are newly converted? I remember my father once saying, it must have been in his first year of conversion, "I just hope God will allow me to strike down all of these obelisks all over these churches around the world." And I thought, well, that is an odd thing to want. But when you are in your first year of conversion, I guess that is the way you think; from oh, what do I do with that power? Get rid of evil.

In Mark 3 friends of James and John called those two the Sons of Thunder. The gospel of Luke shows this was an appropriate nickname for the two of them. Jesus and His disciples were traveling to Jerusalem and on the way they sought lodging in a Samaritan city. Historians tell us of the longstanding enmity between the Samaritans and the Jews. Samaritans refused to allow Jews to enter their city. Luke records that, because they feel snubbed, James and John say they would like to duplicate Elijah's miracle and bring fire down from heaven to destroy the Samaritan village. So Jesus is obviously repulsed by their attitudes.

Luke 9:55-56 But He turned and rebuked them, and said, "You do not know what manner of spirit you are of. For the Son of Man did not come to destroy men's lives, but to save them." And they went to another village.

So Jesus sets James and John straight in their attitudes and His unequivocal response comes through in His statement that "He turned and rebuked them." Jesus lets James and John know that their attitude should be one of meekness and gentleness when He reminds them of His reason for coming, "The Son of Man did not come to destroy men's lives, but to save them."

Here we see a main reason for gentleness in dealing with people—to not destroy people's lives physically, emotionally, mentally, or spiritually.

Please turn over to James 3, verse 13. This biblical account of the Sons of Thunder emphasizes that we are to be predominantly gentle Christians, just as our Savior Jesus Christ was gentle, but not weak in the faith and not lackadaisical in guarding and defending the truth. James eventually came to understand what Jesus meant by His statement, "I am gentle and lowly in heart." When James speaks of the wisdom from above, he refers to it as meek or gentle.

James 3:13 Who is wise and understanding among you? Let him show by good conduct that his works are done in the meekness of wisdom.

Regarding the phrase "meekness of wisdom" here in verse 13, *Barnes' Notes* has this comment, which I thought was very helpful.

A wise and prudent gentleness of life, not a noisy, arrogant and boastful manner. True wisdom is always meek and mild and gentle. And that is the wisdom which is needful if men would become public teachers. It is remarkable that the truly wise man is always characterized by a calm spirit, a mild and placid demeanor, and by a gentle though firm enunciation of his sentiments.

A noisy, boisterous, and stormy declaimer we never select as a safe counselor. He may accomplish much in his way by his bold eloquence of manner, but we do not put him in places where we need far reaching thought or where we expect the exercise of profound philosophical views. In an imminent degree, the ministry of the gospel should be characterized by calm, gentle, and thoughtful wisdom, a wisdom which shines in all the actions of life.

Well, that is a lot to live up for not only in the ministry, but all of us who are members of God's church have to reach for that to work for that with God's help.

James contrasts this meek and gentle wisdom from above with envious and self-seeking worldly wisdom.

James 3:14-17 But if you have bitter envy and self-seeking in your hearts, do not boast and lie against the truth. This wisdom does not descend from above, but is earthly, sensual, and demonic. For where envy and self-seeking exist, confusion and every evil thing is there. [Wow, that is a description of the world today, especially the United States, sadly.] But the wisdom that is from above is first pure, then peaceable, gentle, willing to yield, full of mercy and good fruits, without partiality and without hypocrisy.

So gentleness should be an ever-present restraint in all our troubles and actions. It comes to some men seemingly by inheritance or naturally. Of course, it does not, but it seems to in some people. To most, however, it must be developed since it is generally lacking. Our firm, masculine, human nature does not encourage these gentle qualities, so they must be actively developed.

This society has been negligent in portraying proper, gentle behavior in men except as it is portrayed as a quality of perverted homosexual men. And of course, we realize that Satan perverts everything, especially godly character

qualities. Satan redefines them in his own image and we are seeing him redefine everything that used to be considered good according to men and now it is becoming horribly deformed and perverted.

Satan has perverted gentleness in men by convincing worldly men that an outward softness with an effeminate slant is an admirable quality. But the heart of the homosexual and the effeminate are bent on self-destruction, resulting from their lifestyle. So among the rest of society, because a soft gentleness is strong and feminine in the feminine nature, many men avoid being gentle, thinking it is a mark of femininity and softness. Men who lack such qualities in the world such as strength, endurance, confidence, decisiveness, assertiveness, and self-control tend to swallow the idea of the macho man, the out of control image promoted by the media and entertainment.

In the truly Christian man, God carefully guides and disciplines him to blend gentleness with firm masculinity to produce an attractive combination in a man that is striking and admirable. This is what we men in the church need to be reaching for. His gentleness must be acquired by subduing his rough and tough human nature, as one would tame a wild colt. Our passionate feelings must be controlled.

Aubrey Andelin, in his book, *Man of Steel and Velvet*, who I have quoted many times before, illustrates gentleness this way:

Gentleness is to the steel qualities what mercy is to justice. When justice is meted out alone, it is cold, undeviating, and unsympathetic. Although justice is in reality given for the benefit of the individual without mercy, it appears intent on the suffering or even the destruction of a person as mercy softens justice. Gentleness softens the steel in man.

So gentleness is to strict qualities what mercy is to justice.

Children require gentleness constantly. A gentle voice, kindly manner, and soft expression build good relationships with children, along with firmness in upholding righteous standards. You cannot just be gentle and not uphold righteous standards in your home. Many men lack this gentleness of spirit,

much to the pain of their families. And sometimes we fathers expect more righteousness in our children, who do not have God's Holy Spirit, than we do our own selves, we who supposedly have God's Holy Spirit to help us produce spiritual fruit.

We want our children to avoid the mistakes we made. But sometimes we expect more perfection from them than they are capable of producing, and we end up frustrated and they end up discouraged. The gentle man passes by dissatisfaction in his children and sees their progress rather than their failures. A positive gentle approach in raising children becomes an encouraging and enjoyable bonding between father and child. Nevertheless, occasional anger-less corporal punishment is necessary, according to the biblical discipline for serious infractions. The wise Solomon was inspired to record divine instruction.

Proverbs 22:15 Foolishness is bound up in the heart of a child; the rod of correction will drive it far from him.

It does not just say it will drive it from him. It says "far from him," away from him. So combine this with the gentle approach in childrearing and the result is that a child's spirit is guided rather than broken.

Godly love requires a gentle nature. We cannot teach gentleness to our children unless we demonstrate it ourselves. They will not listen to our instruction if we fail to win their hearts with a gentle merciful approach. But they have to know exactly where we stand on standards with God and we have to enforce them. Yes, we can demand our obedience and we should. But our firmness must be controlled with gentleness.

In many of the passages that enjoin meekness or gentleness as a virtue, it is easy to get the impression that this virtue is displayed especially in speech, a principle made explicitly in Proverbs 15:4, "a wholesome [the ESV says gentle] tongue is a tree of life."

Marriage problems often start with harsh words; and sometimes harsh words show up very early in the marriage. If we are prone to pronounce threats, we miss the point of our calling. Humiliating, cutting comments do not reflect the values of God's Kingdom. Paul gives us advice on the character of the

new man that can greatly improve our relationships with, not only our spouses, but with all personal relationships.

Colossians 3:12-13 Therefore, as the elect of God, holy and beloved, put on tender mercies, kindness, humility, meekness, longsuffering, bearing with one another and forgiving one another; if anyone has a complaint against another, even as Christ forgave you, so you also must do.

Now, that is not a guideline. It is not a request. It is a command from God through the apostle Paul and all of the writings of Jesus Christ. It has been rightly stated that the meek and the gentle are those who give soft answers to rough questions. The power of our words can be life giving and diffuse a tense situation.

In Proverbs 15, we find a striking image of gentleness that shows its disarming power. And there is a strong connection in the Bible between gentleness and the power of words.

Proverbs 15:1 A soft [or gentle] answer turns away wrath, but a harsh word stirs up anger.

This verse can be applied to any relationship or interaction we may have with others.

Gentleness too will often disarm the most furious person where positive irrationality has not taken place. One angry word will always cause another because the temperament of one spirit always produces its own likeness in another. That is why our example with our children is so important. And that is why, when we look at our children, especially in their preteen and teen years, that sometimes we see ourselves, both embarrassingly so and every once in a while we get we get a, "Yeah, that's good."

Thus, kindness produces kindness and rage produces rage and gentleness produces gentleness. Universal experience confirms this proverb. Gentle words anticipate the gentleness of Christ. It must also characterize His people. We must work to develop a gentle character. Our caustic words and conduct must be brought under control by restraint, but we will never be

gentle in nature until there is a change that takes place in our character. Otherwise, it is just a pseudo or fake gentleness until we have a gentle character that automatically prompts us to be kindly with people.

Gentleness comes as we grow spiritually. It is developed as we grow in love and in forgiveness and to learn to recognize people's virtues rather than their faults. That is one of the hardest things we always had to do over the years in the church; is recognize people's virtues rather than their faults.

The book of Isaiah shows that Jesus Christ deals with us with the utmost tenderness and gentleness. The Servant of the Lord suffers in order to sustain others. The power of God takes the form of a servant.

Isaiah 50:4 "The Lord God has given Me the tongue of the learned, that I should know how to speak a word in season to him who is weary. He awakens Me morning by morning, He awakens My ear to hear as the learned."

The servant is well educated in the Word of God. And unlike the guilty silence of the pseudo-Christian, the servant is responsive to God's Word. Now, this scripture is in reality a prophecy of Jesus Christ, our example.

Gentleness is the spirit of humility and does not consider itself too good or too proud for humble responsibilities. Meekness is recognizing our smallness before the Almighty God. With this attitude, we will esteem our spouses better than us. We must develop humility. The key to humility is in learning to see our own mistakes and weaknesses. When this occurs, we soften our attitude towards the errors of others.

For example, we may become irritated if a child breaks a lamp or spills paint on the floor. This can spark an irritated response to the child. But when we consider that we make mistakes, probably even more serious than our children, even though we are adults with years of experience and character growth, we are humbled by that recognition.

A husband must allow the Spirit of God to lead him to place his wife above himself. When God created life upon the earth, He made human beings the pinnacle of the physical creation, fashioned in His own image. And He gave

men and women a spirit and creative minds with the ability to make choices, to develop plans, and to build their lives upon them. Men and women were created with the marvelous potential of eternal life in the Family of God. And as the loving Father, God gave us the institution of marriage, the blessing of family that we might learn to love one another as He loves us and thus be created in His character image. That is what happens in a marriage. It is a workshop for these things. After He created the first man from the dust of the ground, the Lord said,

Genesis 2:18 "It is not good that man should be alone; I will make for him a helper comparable to him."

It does not say under him. The woman was made equal to the man in the spiritual potential, the perfect complement to her husband.

We were listening to a comedian within the last 24 hours and he mentioned about the rib; and he said, "That rib that God took out of men was the rib that we used to understand women," or something like that. I do not know if we got it exact but anyway, maybe it is true.

To emphasize His purpose to Adam and Eve, our Creator did not make the woman directly from the dust, but from the actual flesh and bone of the man. And when the woman was presented to him, Adam said, "This is now bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh." I do not see any inequality there at all.

In I Peter 3:7, Peter wrote that husbands should give honor to his wife as the weaker vessel. Peter used the word "honor" and this word gives positive direction to the whole verse. Peter speaks of a structurally weaker vessel that has esteem and value. A wife could be compared to a delicate yet beautiful piece of crystal. You know, it glitters and shines. We put fine crystal on a showcase, do we not? And we give it honor.

Structurally, a husband could be compared to a stronger vessel—maybe something similar to stainless steel. Just as crystal, it will not crush, rust, or corrode. Stainless steel; I am going to give you the technicalities of it. Stainless steel is essentially a low carbon steel which contains 10% or more chromium than standard steel. And it is the addition of the chromium that gives the steel its unique stainless, corrosion-resisting properties. Besides

these benefits, it is fire and heat resistant, hygienic, impact resistant, longer lasting, and more aesthetically pleasing for a long time.

Now, every woman in this room is saying, "I wish my husband was all of those things." Just teasing. Well, the women are the crystal and we are the steel if we soften the steel with gentleness.

Nothing can hurt it, that is, stainless steel, because it is indestructible. Which material—which vessel—is more valuable, the stainless steel or the crystal? It depends on the application. They mutually excel one another according to their ordained purposes.

If husbands and wives esteemed each other better than themselves, they would automatically treat each other gently and with more respect, feelings and actions of inferiority and superiority would not exist. Gentleness is motivated by love. In Ephesians 4 Paul urges us to live a life worthy of the calling we have received and he calls on us to be completely humble and gentle.

Ephesians 4:2 With all lowliness and gentleness, with longsuffering, bearing with one another in love [another command, not a suggestion].

We are to be free from self-exultation and fully submitted to the will of God, both in our relationship with Him and in our relationship with our spouse.

The apostle Peter was inspired to write that a quiet and gentle spirit among wives is in God's sight very precious.

I Peter 3:1-4 Wives, likewise, be submissive to your own husbands, that even if some do not obey the word, they, without a word, may be won by the conduct of their wives, when they observe your chaste conduct accompanied by fear. Do not let your adornment be merely outward—arranging the hair, wearing gold, or putting on fine apparel—rather let it be the hidden person of the heart, with the incorruptible beauty of a gentle and quiet spirit, which is very precious in the sight of God.

I Peter 3:7-8 Husbands, likewise, dwell with them with understanding, giving honor to the wife, as to the weaker vessel, and as being heirs together of the grace of life, that your prayers may not be hindered. Finally, all of you be one of one mind [that is unity that Peter is calling for], having compassion for one another; love as brothers, be tenderhearted, and be courteous.

These are all elements of gentleness. Although they are strongly positive virtues, not a display of passive timidity, we can understand them more clearly if we list the behaviors that they are not. Gentleness is the opposite of loud, hardhearted, and rude.

The key to understanding this virtue is that it is not a quality of weakness, but a quality of strength. It is not cowardice, timidity, or lack of confidence. Since gentleness implies self-control, therefore it requires strength under control. We must bring our actions and emotions under control and we should bridle our tongue as one would bridle a horse and lead it to where it should go. We must train our feelings to react righteously and restrain and subdue our harshness in our nature.

The quality of gentleness stands in the Bible as a proper temperament for a servant of God. It is a tall order (and using the term tall order is an understatement) that can only be done with God's Holy Spirit empowering us to be able to do that.

Let us begin to wrap this up. Have you ever tried to tell someone something but have found it difficult either because you feared it might be offensive or because you knew that person might not understand? If so, you can understand Paul's position at the beginning of the fourth chapter of Philippians. Paul was trying to say something to the Philippians that was difficult for him to say because he was afraid that the persons involved might resent it. Paul writes to the Philippian Christians about getting along with other Christians in his letter to them. His concern was unity.

Apparently there had been trouble in Philippi. Two of the Christian women had been at odds with one another, Euodia and Syntyche. (These are Greek names.) The disagreement had grown to the point where it could hinder the unity and effectiveness of the church itself and Paul wished to warn them of

the danger and wanted to urge a more cooperative spirit among them. But these women were his friends and every time he approached the subject of unity in the letter, he seemed to come up short of a direct application to them.

At the beginning of chapter 1, he had spoken of his prayer that their love might abound more and more. And he closed the same chapter with the admonition, "Conduct yourselves in a manner worthy of the gospel of Christ. Stand firm in one spirit, contending as one man for the faith of the gospel." In chapter 2, he had urged the Philippians to be one in spirit and purpose. In chapter 3, he had written, "Join with others in following my example."

At last, he returns to the theme in chapter 4. This time he tells what it is that is disturbing him. He finally points directly to the lack of harmony within the church, but he does not elaborate on the problem, specifically; he does not even reprimand or command those involved. Instead, Paul tactfully and quietly points to the means by which the breach can be healed. In doing so, he gives us the means by which unity may be restored among us and other Christians.

Philippians 4:4-7 Rejoice in the Lord always. Again I say rejoice! Let your gentleness be known to all men. The Lord is at hand. Be anxious for nothing, but in everything by prayer and supplication, with thanksgiving, let your request be made known to God; and the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus.

So, unity referred to here is a Christian unity and this means only among those who are in God's Family. Paul says that we are to agree with each other in the Lord. In other words, we are to have the mind of Christ. It is the same thing that Paul had in mind earlier when he wrote in Philippians 2:5, your attitude should be the same as that of Christ Jesus. He is not speaking of the doctrines that Christ taught, although they are important. He is speaking of the attitude that Jesus had in relationship to others. The mind of Christ is gentle and lowly in heart. Jesus emptied Himself to die for the salvation and well being of others. It is evident that in this context, Paul's plea to agree with each other is a plea for the attitude of humility and the action of self-sacrifice among us. And he says, "Let your gentleness be known to all men."

That is our command. Be gentle to all men and to each other, and for the sake of the unity of the church.