

The Meekness And Gentleness Of Christ

A Gentle Spirit Is Very Precious to God

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Harshness comes in many forms. Listen to this dialogue between a sharp-tongued boss and a dissatisfied employee seeking a raise:

"I know perfectly well that you are not being paid what you are worth!"

"So?" asked the employee, his hope returning.

"But I cannot allow you to starve to death, can I?"

In the world, sometimes those with the greatest opportunity to help, offer only harsh and biting words.

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. Most of the world's cultures have reserved their rewards for people who compete successfully through strength of will and superior power. In contrast, the meek and gentle person is ridiculed for being weak and soft, and of no real value in society.

Often, the most rewarded sales people are those with the most aggressive methods. The politicians most often voted into office are usually the biggest liars, and the most ruthless of men and women. Today, frequently, the heads of large corporations are those who have robbed others blind, stolen secrets, and cheated people of their retirement funds.

In such a context, Jesus portrays the ideal disciple as someone who is meek and gentle. The promised reward that such a person will inherit the earth is a bold contradiction of worldly wisdom.

There is a clear distinction between existence in the world, and worldly conduct and methods. There is no denying that all Christians have human weaknesses, but we know that spiritual warfare demands spiritual weapons.

We can wage a successful campaign in the spiritual realm only as worldly weapons are

abandoned. Total reliance must be placed on the spiritual weaponry, which is divinely effective for demolishing seemingly impregnable evil strongholds and defending the ongoing attacks.

In this society today, as in the society of the first century, these evil strongholds that crumble before the weapons of the spirit are such things as intellectualism and traditions of men. Paul calls these "the wisdom of this world."

Around 55-56 A.D., Paul had been accused of being forceful and bold shooting his printed arrows at a distance, but subservient and weak-kneed when personally present, weakly voicing his demands. To this accusation he replied:

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 letters," they say, "are weighty and powerful, but his bodily presence is weak, and his speech contemptible."

This charge is a repeat of what Paul used as his prelude to chapter 10, "I, Paul, myself am pleading with you." He took that gentle approach. He was stating this regarding a vocal minority who persisted in thinking that worldly standards and motives governed all his conduct and that he relied on human powers and methods in his ministry. They basically placed him on a physical level using physical tactics.

Paul wanted to avoid a display of boldness on his upcoming visit. Yet, he indicates his total readiness to exercise his authority if they would not refuse to listen to his slanderers and change their own attitudes toward God's minister. Paul preferred to come to Corinth "with love, in a spirit of gentleness" but, if necessary, he was ready to come, rod in hand. So, it was left up to the congregation, in one sense, how he would approach them, whether it would be gentle or stern.

Paul addresses the whole church on this issue. He explains 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 of the "the *meekness* and *gentleness* of Christ."

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 toward you.

So, Paul's meekness and gentleness as a servant of Christ should not be confused with timidity. He was not a timid person. He actually had quite a bit of authority and forcefulness in his mannerism, but he also had that side of gentleness that he needed in instructing members of the church.

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.

In this, Paul is referring to every arrogant plot or presumptuous design that temporarily frustrates God's divine plan. We know nothing frustrates God Himself as He carries out His plan of salvation for humanity. The frustration is on the part of human beings who allow themselves to be deceived, or influenced, by human reasoning and Satan's wiles.

Paul, who was formerly a zealous persecutor 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 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 Greek word *prautes* is found in all of the translations.

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 has moved away from the original Greek meaning.

Meekness is an elusive virtue, in that few people know how to define it. Most definitions are vague on its meaning and many people incorrectly equate it to weakness.

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Meekness is inclusive of such virtues as: humble, mild, gentle, modest, unassuming, unpretentious, tolerant, tender hearted. We get a feel of its general meaning. In English, "meek" comes from the Old Norse word *mjuke*, meaning soft. You see there where the English of meekness has come to mean soft or weak.

In modern English the terms meekness and mildness, which are commonly used for this Greek word, suggest weakness and cowardliness to a greater or lesser extent. But, the Greek word *prautes* does not express this.

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.

Meekness and gentleness are to be "put on" with other Christian virtues such as compassion, lowliness, and patience as Paul taught the saints and faithful brethren of the church in Colossae.

Even though there were arrogant people in the church at Corinth, gentleness was Paul's preferred means of dealing with them.

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

Paul had a tremendous love for the faithful in all the congregations of God, but his love was not mere 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 in his approach. That was always his preferred approach.

In speaking of his ministry among the Thessalonians, Paul's gentleness takes on a maternal image.

I Thessalonians 2:7 But we were gentle among you, just as a nursing mother cherishes her own children.

You see there an indication of how the ministry should deal with the members of the

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church. Just as a mother who cherishes her own children does.

Remember where Paul's, and our, meekness and gentleness originated. We already read the answer in II Corinthians.

II Corinthians 10:1 "Now I, Paul, myself am pleading with you by the meekness [Greek *prauteetos*] and gentleness [Greek *epieikeias*] of Christ."

Then he goes on to talk about the weapons of the world. On the contrary, we have divine power to tear down evil strongholds. We are not carried away by rage, personal vindictiveness, greed, or pride. But, with the gentleness of Christ we can triumph powerfully. Gentleness is one of the spiritual weapons that we use against those sins of the world that are so harsh.

Meekness and gentleness appear in the Bible among lists of virtues, and two corresponding themes are associated with them. God commands us to behave that way and rewards are promised to people who display these virtues of meekness and gentleness.

How do meekness and gentleness relate to one another? Meekness is both internal and external in its execution in one's life. Gentleness is one of the best English words to express the outward operation of meekness.

II Corinthians 10:1 refers to Christ's meekness (*prauteetos*) and gentleness (*epieikeia*). They are indicated as separate virtues that Christ has and that we should desire. Meekness describes a condition of the mind and heart—an internal attitude—whereas gentleness describes mildness combined with tenderness. It refers to actions, that is, external behavior. They go hand in hand, they work together.

Described negatively, meekness is the opposite of self-assertiveness and self-interest; it is evenness of mind that is neither elated nor cast down, simply because it is not occupied with self at all.

Gentleness is never a false modesty, a self-depreciation, or a spineless refusal to stand for anything. It is never a cowardly retreat from reality that substitutes a passive selfishness for true gentleness and avoids 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.

Meekness is a virtue that Christians are commanded to put on and aim for, and we are repeatedly exhorted to be meek and gentle.

Meekness and gentleness are commanded as the spirit in which we are called to perform certain duties as Christians. The list of such duties includes restoring badly behaving Christians, correcting opponents of the truth, receiving the implanted word, and making a defense of the gospel. These are all ways that gentleness or meekness are used.

Let me pose a rhetorical question. Do you know someone with a fault? That is an easy question to answer as we can all think of people with faults. Should we condemn and judge, or recall the mercy God the Father and Jesus Christ have had on us? Let us briefly look at four passages that answer these questions. These are self explanatory and will give you a good overall answer to this.

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.

II Timothy 2:23-26 But avoid foolish and ignorant disputes, knowing that they generate strife. And 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.

These are all verses that tell us how we should deal with others having to do with such things as restoring a badly behaving Christian, correcting opponents of the truth, and receiving the implanted word.

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 this next scripture we will see making a defense for the gospel is another reason or time when we use meekness or gentleness.

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 you a reason for the hope that is in you, with meekness and fear; having a good conscience, that when they defame you as evildoers, those who revile your good conduct in Christ may be ashamed.

So we see the nature or the attitude which we take such accusations and defaming.

Gentleness 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. I do not know how many times during the last forty years or so that I have come across men who decided that they were going to ram the truth down someone's throat rather than giving it to them in a meek and gentle way. Right off the bat they have alienated the person to listening to anything further. I think that is a very common mistake that zealots, so to speak, make.

We should not try to cram God's truth down the throats of people in the world. The best way for us to witness Christ and to glorify God is to **live** God's way of life, providing a good example to others.

Biblically, the focus of true meekness and gentleness is not only in our outward behavior, nor in our relationships to other human beings, neither is it the focus of our natural personality. Rather it is an inwardly developed tender-heartedness; 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 disputing or resisting. That is the true focus of meekness and gentleness.

Since true meekness is meekness before God, the insults and injuries that may be inflicted on us by the world, or others within the church, are permitted and used by God for our chastening and purifying.

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 of manner and disposition. There is an absence of harshness, fierceness, or violence in it.

We cannot be unified unless we come to the point, on an individual basis, where we are no longer bothered by the intentional or unintentional offenses from others—especially our spiritual brothers and sisters.

We see an indication of how important meekness is for our future in Matthew 5:5 where Jesus Christ says: "Blessed are the meek, for they shall inherit the earth."

The two biblical characters, with whom we most readily associate meekness, are Moses and Jesus.

We read in Numbers 12:3 regarding Moses that he "was very humble, [meek] more than all men that were on the face of the earth." If we examine the life of Moses, we find good evidence that meekness is not weakness, but strength under control.

There is no more heroic and forceful character in the Old Testament than Moses. He is fearless in exercising leadership against unbearable intransigence among his followers. He stands up to Pharaoh. He defends his right to lead when his authority is challenged. He is the most visible and powerful figure in the traveling nation of Israel.

Yet, he does all this in the strength of God, and he himself makes no presumption to be self-reliant, nor does he use his position as leader for self-aggrandizement. The major exception is when he strikes the rock instead of obeying God's command to speak to it, accompanied by a self-importance about being the one to bring forth the water. He said, "Hear now, you rebels! Must we bring water for you out of this rock?" Where was his credit to God? So, even Moses made mistakes.

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 quality of meekness and gentleness even in a person with God's Holy Spirit.

"Gentleness" describes the person who is so much in control of himself that he is always angry at the right time and never angry at the wrong time, just like Moses, who God praised for being the meekest among his contemporaries.

Though one of the greatest leaders in human history, he thought of himself as a servant in relation to God, so he quietly submitted to God's will. He refused to elevate his own importance over that of God, using his authority in humility. In doing that, having a humble attitude, he was able to have a gentle approach.

Protestants teach their children a prayer, "Gentle Jesus, meek and mild." But, in the New Testament, Jesus is never described as weak, or mild, as the prayer indicates. That word meek, that they use in that prayer, really in their minds means weak. Jesus was sometimes quite the opposite, both forceful and authoritative.

While discerning the Pharisees' harsh, hypocritical intentions Jesus called them "brood of vipers." He also overturned the tables of the money changers at the synagogue.

Matthew 21:12-14 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.' Then the blind and the lame came to Him in the temple, and He healed them.

So, between verse 13 and verse 14 we see the two strong sides of Jesus' personality and character. On the one side, He was very forceful, steadfast, and authoritative. But then right away, He becomes gentle.

Matthew 21:15-17 But when the chief priests and scribes saw the wonderful things that He did, and the children crying out in the temple and saying, "Hosanna to the Son of David!" they were indignant and said to Him, "Do You hear what these are saying?" And Jesus said to them, "Yes. Have you never read, 'Out of the mouth of babes and nursing infants You have perfected praise'?" Then He left them and went out of the city to Bethany, and He lodged there.

So, we see there a contrast between Christ's gentle approach, but with authority, and the Pharisees' harsh, condemning approach.

A weak and mild Jesus is not biblical. But gentle Jesus is! Jesus Himself says so. In Jesus' many statements about Himself, one of the most memorable is found in Matthew 11:

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."

Gentleness is a God-like quality and was strongly evident in the life of Jesus Christ. He gathered children about Him—they sat on His knee and He took time to converse with them. When the disciples sought to dismiss them as a nuisance, Jesus rebuked them.

Matthew 19:13-14 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."

Jesus often demonstrated the character traits of meekness and gentleness. Here are another five brief examples:

1. It is seen in his treatment of the woman caught in adultery that the Pharisees wanted to stone.
2. The way he treated Thomas, who refused to believe that Jesus had risen from the dead until he saw Jesus with his own eyes.
3. The way in which he associated with the outcasts of society, the sinners, the prostitutes, and the tax collectors.
4. The way in which he healed people who were suffering.
5. 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. The conversation was a gentle conversation that went very well. No doubt that lady remembered that, and who knows, maybe she was converted.

We can learn from all of 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 and the blind sinners.

A memorable example of Jesus' show 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.

Matthew 26:52-53 But Jesus said to him, "Put your sword in its place, for all who take the sword will perish by the sword. "Or do you think that I cannot now pray to My Father, and He will provide Me with more than twelve legions of angels?"

You can hear his firmness, but yet that gentleness in what He told Peter.

Jesus had massive strength at His disposal, but He restrained His use of power because He knew that He must die to bring salvation to the weak. He put aside the strength and power of a king and in meekness, not weakness, for the benefit of the weak demonstrates the kind of King He is—not a domineering tyrant, but a meek and gentle King, although supremely powerful.

He is the King of kings who entered Jerusalem, riding on a donkey.

Matthew 21:1-11 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: "Tell the daughter of Zion, 'Behold, your King is coming to you, Lowly, and sitting on a donkey, A colt, the foal of a donkey.'" So the disciples went and did as Jesus commanded them. They brought the donkey and the colt, laid their clothes on them, and set Him on them. And a very great multitude spread their clothes on the road; others cut down branches from the trees and spread them on the road. Then the multitudes who went before and those who followed cried out, saying: "Hosanna to the Son of David! 'Blessed is He who comes in the name of the Lord!' Hosanna in the highest!" And when He had come into Jerusalem, all the city was moved, saying, "Who is this?" So the multitudes said, "This is Jesus, the prophet from Nazareth of Galilee."

Here, we see the image of the truly meek and gentle leader, teacher, and King. It is interesting because, early on, the disciples thought that He was going to come into Jerusalem with a rod of iron and conquer the city and take over the area so that He could set up His kingship.

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. He commanded that we love our enemies, do good to those who hate us, and subdue our harsh nature with gentleness.

Peter himself was inspired to write about how Jesus is the supreme example of meekness and gentleness.

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I Peter 2:21-24 For to this you were called, 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 were healed.

Defiant toward the religious establishment in defending the helpless and diseased, as well as opposing evil, Jesus is self-effacing in regard to His own interests. 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 masculine and firm. 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. Isaiah's prophecy summarizes Jesus' example well.

Isaiah 53:4 Surely He has born 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 was any deceit in His mouth."

Jesus Christ, gentle and lowly of heart! It is interesting how often the mouth is mentioned there and how He had control of His tongue. Without control of our tongue we cannot have gentleness.

In stark contrast, the disciples of Jesus Christ wanted to burn sinners. They mistakenly thought ferocity was the ideal behavior for a servant of God. Then God intervened, through Jesus, to show them that they were wrong.

In Mark 3, James and John were called the "the Sons of Thunder," a name given to them by Christ. 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 long-standing enmity between the Samaritans and the Jews. Samaritans refused to allow Jews to enter their city.

Luke 9 records that because they feel snubbed, James and John say they would like to duplicate Elijah's miracle of 'bringing fire down from heaven' to destroy the Samaritan village. 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.

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. 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—not to destroy people's lives or humiliate them.

This biblical account of the "Sons of Thunder" emphasizes that we are to be predominately gentle Christians, just as our Savior, Jesus Christ, was gentle. But, with the right balance of that firmness and that steadfastness in the truth.

As human beings, it is so hard for us to get the right balance. 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" in verse 13, Barnes' Notes has this comment:

A wise and prudent gentleness of life; not in a noisy, arrogant, and boastful manner. True wisdom is always meek, mild, gentle; and that is the wisdom

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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 eminent degree, the ministry of the gospel should be characterized by a calm, gentle, and thoughtful wisdom—a wisdom which shines in all the actions of the life.

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 are there. 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.

Gentleness should be an ever-present restraint in all our thoughts and actions. It comes to some men seemingly by inheritance. To most, however, it must be developed, since it is generally lacking. Our firm, masculine nature does not encourage these gentle qualities.

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

Satan has perverted gentleness in men by convincing some men that an outward softness with an effeminate slant is an admirable quality. But, the heart of the homosexual is bent on self-destruction resulting from his lifestyle. Statistics show that homosexual men have a very short life span compared with, in the modern vernacular, "straight men."

The mind of the homosexual is twisted with lusts for power and control over others, pedophilia, and disloyalty. The promotion of perverted "Man-Boy Love" associations and

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websites shows the aggressiveness and militancy of this twisted movement. Crime, child abuse, and multiple sex partners are strikingly high among this group. The homosexual's lifestyle is one of self-gratification and there is nothing gentle about it.

Among the rest of society, because gentleness is strong in the feminine nature, many men avoid being gentle, thinking it a mark of femininity and softness. Men who lack such qualities as strength, endurance, confidence, decisiveness, assertiveness, and self-control tend to swallow the macho, out-of-control image promoted by the media. They fashion their lives to be like that and they imitate their heroes of the big screen.

In the Christian man, God carefully blends gentleness with firm masculinity to produce an attractive combination in a man that is striking and admirable.

His gentleness must be acquired by subduing his masculine human nature as one would tame a wild colt. Our passionate feelings must be controlled and our harsh temperament restrained. So, we get back to it being a matter of self control.

Aubrey Andelin, in his book *Man of Steel and Velvet*, 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 the person. As mercy softens justice, gentleness softens the steel in man.

I thought he put that very well.

Women especially need the combination of the gentleness of velvet and the firmness of steel. Children also require gentleness constantly. A gentle voice, kindly manner, and soft expression build good relationships with children, along with firmness in upholding righteous standards. All gentleness will make nothing but an extortionist because your child will exhort what he wants out of you, and out of society later.

Many men lack this gentleness of spirit, much to the pain of their families. Sometimes, we fathers expect more righteousness in our children than we do of ourselves. They do not have God's Holy Spirit—as we do—helping us to produce the spiritual fruit such of gentleness.

We want our children to avoid the mistakes that we made, but sometimes we expect

more perfection from them than they are capable of producing. 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 our children becomes an encouraging and enjoyable bonding, between father and child, and mother and child.

Nevertheless, occasional "anger-less" corporal punishment is necessary according the biblical instruction for serious infractions. The wisest man who ever lived was inspired to record this divine instruction in Proverbs 22:15: "Foolishness is bound up in the heart of a child; but the rod of correction will drive it far from him."

That is scriptural, and anyone who disagrees with what God has inspired there can take it up with God. But, remember there has to be that gentle side in carrying out correction. 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, so we cannot hope to teach it 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 disposition. Yes, we can demand their 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 that "a wholesome [or as the ESV says, gentle] tongue is a tree of life."

Marriage problems often start with harsh words. Sometimes harsh words show up very early in the marriage. Here is a light-hearted example credited to Bill Holbrook, a syndicated writer:

"Let us get one thing straight," the newlywed said to her husband. "I am not cleaning up after you. I am a career woman. That means I pay other people to do housework. Got it?"

"How much?"

"Eight dollars an hour. Take it or leave it."

Paul gives us advice on the character of the new man that can greatly improve our

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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.

It has been said, that the meek are those who give soft answers to rough questions.

In Proverbs 15, we find two striking images of gentleness that show its disarming power.

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

If we are prone to pronounce threats we miss the point of our calling. Humiliating, harsh comments do not reflect the values of the Bible. As the prophet Isaiah wrote:

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.

This scripture is, in reality, a prophecy of Jesus Christ, our example. The book of Isaiah shows us that Jesus Christ will deal with us with the utmost tenderness and gentleness.

Isaiah 40:11 He will feed His flock like a shepherd; He will gather the lambs with His arm, and carry them in His bosom, and gently lead those who are with young.

Gentleness is the spirit of humility and does not consider itself too good, or too exalted, for humble tasks. Meekness is recognizing our smallness before Almighty God. With this attitude, we will esteem our spouses better than ourselves.

What is your attitude toward your wife or husband? Do you feel better than her or him? Even more telling, what do your actions show? An attitude of pride and superiority must be changed if a marriage is to thrive. Marriages sometimes survive under these

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conditions. They would not thrive, that is improve and get better as the years go by.

A husband must allow the Spirit of God to lead him to place his wife above himself. She is not inferior to him. God created both man and woman in His image.

When God created life upon the earth, He made human beings the pinnacle of the physical creation, fashioned in His own image. This is sometimes included in the marriage ceremony.

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 a loving Father, God gave us the institution of marriage and the blessing of family that we might learn to love one another as He loves us, and thus be created in His character image.

After He had created the first man from the dust of the ground, the Lord God said, "It is not good that man should be alone; I will make him a helper comparable to him." (Genesis 2:18)

The woman was made equal to the man in spiritual potential, the perfect compliment to her husband.

To emphasize His purpose to Adam and Eve, the Creator did not make the woman directly from the dust, but from the very flesh and bone of the man. When the woman was presented to him, Adam said, "This is now bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh." So, how do we treat our own bones and flesh? Do we treat it harshly? Well some do, those who smoke and take drugs. But, the right way to treat our own bodies is with gentleness and we certainly should treat our spouses with gentleness.

In I Peter 3:7, Peter wrote that husbands should give honor to his wife, as to the weaker vessel. Peter used the word "honor." 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. We put fine crystal in a showcase. We give it honor.

Structurally, a husband could be compared to a strong vessel—maybe something similar to stainless steel. Just as crystal, it will not rust or corrode.

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When I worked in the Facilities Management Department of a manufacturer with multiple plants for Noxzema, Cover Girl makeup, and Lestoil detergent, stainless steel was the metal of choice. In fact, it was absolutely necessary. The FDA required the cleanliness standards to be equal to that of food manufacturers because makeup and toiletries were produced there. I saw how much, and how well, stainless steel holds up. You can think of it as beautiful after a while, once you have worked in a manufacturing plant for any number of years.

Stainless steel is technically a low carbon steel which contains 10% or more chromium than standard steel. It is the addition of this 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. I have long since left the analogy to the man, I am just giving you some qualities of the stainless steel. Although, with some wives and their nagging, I suppose a man could feel that he was fire and heat resistant, hygienic, impact resistant, longer lasting, and more aesthetically pleasing for a long time.

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

If husbands and wives esteem 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 in that type of marriage. Gentleness requires the existence of love.

In Ephesians 4, Paul urges us to live a life worthy of the calling we have received, 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."

We are to be free from self-exaltation 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."

1 Peter 3:3-4 Do not let your adornment be merely outward adorning of

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arranging the hair, of wearing gold, or of putting on fine apparel; rather let it be the hidden person of the heart, with the incorruptible ornament of a gentle and quiet spirit, which is very precious in the sight of God.

I Peter 3:7-8 Likewise you husbands, 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 of one mind, having compassion for one another; love as brothers, be tenderhearted, be courteous.

These are all elements of meekness and gentleness. They are strongly positive virtues, and not a display of passive timidity. We can understand them more clearly if we list the behaviors they are not. "Meekness and gentleness" are the opposite of harshness, vengefulness, self-aggrandizement, and lack of self-control.

The key to understanding these virtues is that they are not qualities of weakness, but rather of strength. They are not cowardice, timidity, or a lack of confidence. Meekness and gentleness imply self-control, therefore, they require strength under control.

The qualities of meekness and gentleness stand in the Bible as the proper temperament for a servant of God.

King David was an impressive example of strength and gentleness. As a young shepherd boy, he slew both a lion and a bear. With only a sling and a pebble from a brook, he killed the feared Goliath. He led armies and governed a kingdom. And yet he had a gentle nature. He loved music and wrote poetry. He spoke of fruit in its season, of mouths of babes and nursing infants, of roses and lambs, of green pastures and still waters. David was a man after God's own heart. He was steadfast and gentle, but he had to develop his gentleness over time because he was a very war-like man throughout much of his life.

What can we do to subdue a harsh nature and develop gentleness? Aubrey Andelin, in his book *Man of Steel and Velvet*, suggests three things. I thought this was very good advice:

1. We must work to have restraint and self-control. We have to bring our actions and emotions under control. We should bridle our tongues as one would bridle a horse and lead it where it should go. We have to train our feelings to react righteously, and restrain and subdue any harshness in our temperaments.

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2. We must work to develop a gentle character. Our harsh conduct can be brought under control by restraint, but we will never be gentle in nature until there is a change that takes place within our character—until we have a gentle character that automatically prompts us to deal kindly with people. Gentleness comes as we grow spiritually. As we develop love and forgiveness and learn to concentrate on people's virtues rather than their faults, we develop gentleness.
3. We must develop humility. The key to humility is in learning to see our own mistakes and weakness. When this occurs, we soften our attitude toward the errors of others. For example, we may become irritated if a child breaks a lamp or spills paint on the floor. This can cause a harsh attitude to well up towards the child. But, when we consider that we make mistakes probably more serious, despite the fact that we are adults with years of experience, we are humbled and it becomes easier to face the mistakes that others make with a gentle attitude.

In Jesus' message to His 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." All of those have elements of gentleness in them.

A gentle and quiet spirit is very precious in the sight of God.