

Gently! Gently!

And he said unto him, my Lord knoweth that the children are tender, and the flocks and herds with young are with me: and if men should overdrive them one day, all the flock will die. --Genesis 33:13

JACOB could have kept pace with Esau had he been alone, but not with so many children and flocks. He did not expect Esau to travel at the slow rate which he was obliged to maintain, and therefore he desired to separate. Jacob, however, stated his reason plainly, and his brother felt the weight of it: if we must go different ways, let us cause our motive to be known, so that we may not be thought unkind. Matthew Henry says, "If friends cannot fall in with each other, they should see to it that they do not fall out" Jacob parted from his reconciled brother for the sake of his little ones, who were very dear to him.

I. LET US VIEW JACOB AS AN EXAMPLE TO US.

He displayed a tender consideration for the young and feeble; let us do the same. Let us consider:

1. How we may overdrive?

- Puzzling them with deep and controversial points of doctrine, and condemning them because they are not quite correct in their opinions. "Them that are weak in the faith receive ye, but not to doubtful disputations" (Rom. 14:1).
- Setting up a standard of experience, and frowning at them because they have not felt all the sorrows or ecstasies which we have known.
- Requiring a high degree of faith, courage, patience, and other graces which in their case can only be tender buds.
- Preaching nothing but the severer truths, or constantly urging to duty by terrible threatenings while withholding the promises and the consolatory parts of the word.
- Manifesting austerity of manner, suspicion, harshness, censoriousness of spirit, and contempt for weaker brethren.
- Fault-finding and never commending. "Fathers, provoke not your children to anger, lest they be discouraged" (Col. 3:21).
- Dwelling always upon the trials, temptations, and woes of believers, and saying little about their joys and privileges.

- In these and many other ways professed teachers show that they have need to go to school to Jacob to learn the shepherd's trade, and imitate his tender thoughtfulness.

2. *Why we should not overdrive the lambs.*

- Common humanity forbids.
- Our own experience when we were young should teach us better.
- We may again become weak, and need great forbearance.
- We love them too well to be hard with them.
- Jesus thinks so much of them that we cannot worry them.
- The Holy Spirit dwells in them, and we must be gentle towards the faintest beginning of his work.
- We should be doing Satan's work if we did overburden them.
- We should thus prove ourselves to have little wisdom and less grace. If we kill the lambs now, where shall we get our sheep from next year?
- We dare not bear the responsibility of offending these little ones, for terrible woes are pronounced on those who do them wrong.

We remember how tender Jesus is: and this brings us to our second point.

II. LET US VIEW JACOB AS A PICTURE OF OUR LORD JESUS.

See his portrait in Isaiah 40:11: "He shall feed his flock like a shepherd: he shall gather the lambs with his arm, and carry them in his bosom, and shall gently lead those that are with young."

1. The weak have a special place in his love.
2. He will not have it that any of them should die
3. Therefore he never overdrives one of them.
4. But he suits his pace to their feebleness, "I will lead on softly" (Gen. 33:14). "I have many things to say unto you, but ye cannot bear them now."

- Has he not thus been very tender to us? "Thy gentleness hath made me great" (Ps. 18:35).
- Let us not fret and worry as though he were an exactor. We are not driven by Jehu, but led by Jesus. Let us rest in his love. At the same time let us not be slower than need be.
- Towards others let us be tenderness itself, for we are to love our neighbour as ourselves.

Helpful Paragraphs

The Lord chooses under-shepherds for his flock among men subject to weakness and infirmity, that they may have a fellow-feeling for the feeble. *Lelah Merrill*, in his "East of the Jordan" describes the movement of an Arab tribe, and says, "The flocks of sheep and goats were mostly driven by small children. Sometimes there were flocks of lambs and kids driven by children not much older relatively than the lambs and kids themselves. Some of the men had in their arms two, three, four, or a whole armful of kids and lambs that were too young to walk; and among some cooking utensils there was a large saucepan, and in it was a pair of small kids that were too young for the journey."

When a candle is newly lighted and needs to be moved, it must be carried at a slow pace or it will be extinguished. A fire which is almost expiring may be revived by a gentle breath, but it will be blown out if the bellows are plied at their full force. You can drown a little plant by watering it too much, and destroy a lovely flower by exposing it to too much sun.

Nothing is so strong as gentleness: nothing so gentle as real strength.
--*Frances de Sales*

Dr. Johnson declared that want of tenderness is want of parts, and that it is a proof of stupidity as well as of depravity.

At the Stockwell Orphanage the usual rule of walking is little boys first. In this way the younger children cannot be overdriven or left behind, and moreover all the boys can see before them, whereas by the usual practice of putting the tall fellows first the view in front is shut out from all but the few who lead the way. Let the church have great care for the weaker brethren, and shape her action with a constant reference to them. A strong Christian might do a thousand things lawfully if he only thought of himself, but he will not do one of them because he wishes to act expediently, and would not grieve his brother, or cause him to stumble.

Even in our manner there should be tenderness. A truly kind act may be so performed as to cause as much grief as joy. We have heard of one who would throw a penny at a beggar and thus hurt him while relieving him. A heart full of love has a mode of its own by which its gifts are enhanced in value. There is enough misery in the world without our carelessly adding to it. Some persons are morbidly sensitive, and this is wrong on their part; but when we are aware of their failing we must be the more careful lest we cause them needless pain. A gouty man will cry out if we walk with heavy footsteps across the room. Do we censure him for this? No, we pity him, and tread softly. Let us do the same for the sensitive.