

## The Strength of Gentleness

Galatians 5:22; Joel 2:13

September 28, 2014

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No doubt most of us have had the experience of lighting a candle and having it go out because we did not put our hand around it and walk slowly to the place where the candle was to be placed. Taking strident and forceful steps, while not gently protecting the candle, will inevitably lead to the extinguishing of the light of the candle.

The Christian life is similar to that candle. How often is the light of our candle (the light of the gospel and the light of our Christian testimony) snuffed out before others by taking a very harsh and forceful approach to others, when the light would have shone ever so brightly if we had simply taken a gentle and kind approach in our testimony for Christ before others? This is not in any way to suggest that we should ever compromise the truth of the gospel or the truth of God's commandments in standing for Christ. But, dear ones, just as we are to speak the truth in *agape* love (Ephesians 4:15), so are we to speak the truth in kindness because *agape* love ("charity") is kind or gentle (1 Corinthians 13:4). "A soft answer turneth away wrath, but grievous words stirreth up anger" (Proverbs 15:1).

Remember what characterized the heart and conduct of Christ toward others: "A bruised reed shall he not break, and smoking flax shall he not quench, till he send forth judgment unto victory" (Matthew 12:20). This verse clearly teaches that what characterized Christ was not harshness, severity, or rudeness (though with those who were obstinate and rebellious in their sin/error, the Lord certainly was very direct with His righteous judgment), but what characterized the demeanor and actions of Christ was a gentleness and kindness toward the undeserving, toward sinners and toward His stumbling and weak disciples.

How would those within our own family characterize us in regard to the fruit of the Spirit that we shall be considering this Lord's Day: namely, gentleness? Men are we gentlemen? Women are you gentlewomen? Children are you gentlechildren? We may be faithful in defending and holding fast to the truth of Christ. We may be exemplary in walking the narrow path of truth and righteousness before the Lord and the world. But are we also imitating Christ by not breaking the bruised reed and by not quenching the smoking flax in our homes, at work, in our neighborhood, and in the church? Dear ones, we are not yet finished bearing fruit in our lives in bearing love, joy, peace, and longsuffering. By God's grace, we must continue to press on in bearing another fruit in our life: the fruit of gentleness (just as this fruit characterized the life of Christ).

The main points of the sermon this Lord's Day are: (1) The Meaning of Gentleness ("But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, longsuffering, gentleness" Galatians 5:22); (2) The Origin of Gentleness ("For he is gracious and merciful, slow to anger, and of great kindness, and repenteth him of the evil" Joel 2:13).

### **I. The Meaning of Gentleness ("But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, longsuffering, gentleness" Galatians 5:22).**

#### **A. What is gentleness?**

1. The Greek word for "gentleness" (*chrestotes*) is translated in the Authorized Version (KJV) as "gentleness" (Galatians 5:22), but also as "kindness" (Titus 3:4; Colossians 3:12).
2. Gentleness/Kindness is like the rest of the fruit of the Spirit, a supernatural grace which is implanted in the lives of all Christians at their regeneration (it is the DNA of Jesus Christ—it reveals our

family likeness to the Lord). It is an attribute of God (Titus 3:4; Luke 6:35). The fruit of gentleness/kindness is not an ordinary temperament with which we are born, but is rather an extraordinary fruit with which we are reborn in Christ and which as Christians we manifest in our lives to varying degrees (ever growing into conformity to the gentleness/kindness of Christ). Thus, none of us (as children of the living God) have a legitimate excuse not to be bearing the fruit of gentleness in our lives whether we think it is so contrary to our natural temperament, or whether we think it is so contrary to the way that we were raised, or whether we think it is so contrary to the way the world treats us at work or at school or my husband/wife or parents/children/siblings treat me at home. It is often in those most trying circumstances that the fruit of gentleness is grown. Dear ones, when we make room for excuses in our minds as to why we are not living for Christ and producing fruit for Christ, we have lost the battle to the enemy. God's grace is greater than all our sin (Romans 5:20).

3. The fruit of gentleness follows the fruit of longsuffering (in Galatians 5:22), for we (as Christians) are not only to passively restrain ourselves from anger when trials and afflictions come our way or to patiently wait upon the Lord to deliver us from trials and afflictions, but we are to actively shine forth in our hearts and actions a Christ-like gentleness and kindness toward others (even in the midst of heartaches, disappointments, afflictions, delays, and unrealized dreams). Note that more than once gentleness/kindness is used in a list that follows longsuffering (Romans 2:4; 1 Corinthians 13:4; 2 Corinthians 6:6).

4. The fruit of gentleness/kindness is an attribute of *agape* love (1 Corinthians 13:4). Therefore, just as *agape* love is humble and not proud, so is gentleness/kindness (it is directed to the need of others rather than thinking how good this will make me look). Just as *agape* love is bestowed not upon the deserving, but upon the undeserving, so is gentleness/kindness (it does not keep a record of wrongs received or of kindness shown). Just as *agape* love is self-sacrificial, so is gentleness/kindness (it is giving, even when giving is sacrificial).

5. The fruit of gentleness/kindness is a mild and tender heart (softened by the knowledge of God's infinite loving kindness in Christ Jesus shown to such an undeserving and chief of sinners as me).

a. Gentleness/Kindness is courteous (not rude or self-serving). The fruit of gentleness is shown forth in a gentleman who cares for and defends women (beginning at home with your own wife/mother/sisters). Young ladies, the way a young man treats his mother or sister is likely a good indication as to how he will treat you. The strongest of men should be gentle giants for Jesus Christ. The picture of a behemoth of a man tenderly caressing a little child in his powerful arms is the picture of gentleness. His power is not used to crush the weak, the vulnerable, the helpless, or the needy, but that strength is rather used to show the gentleness, kindness, and tenderness of Jesus Christ.

b. Gentleness/Kindness will (like *agape* love) speak the truth of Christ and even die for it, but it will seek to speak the truth in a way that will draw others to it by the gentleness/kindness in which it is presented to the weak, to the downtrodden, to the disheartened, and to the needy (like the good animal trainer who realizes that shouting and beating the animal is not likely to get the desired results of obedience, but rather winning the trust of the animal by loving it, caring for it, showing gentleness/kindness, and rewarding it). So it is dear ones how the Lord treats us His children, and how we ought to treat our own children as well. Yes, there are times when a greater severity is warranted in our speech to others (as is the case in God's severe discipline of us, His children), but that severity when necessary will only be effective when it is used against the prevailing background of gentleness/kindness.

B. What gentleness is not?

1. **Gentleness/Kindness is not weakness.** It is a strength of character, not a weakness of character. Strength of character can be no better described for us than by the character of God who is gentle/kind (Titus 3:4; Luke 6:35) and by the character of Christ who is gentle/kind

(1 Peter 2:3—“gracious” is the same Greek word for gentle/kind). Gentleness/Kindness is not powerless, but rather harnesses its strength at times when it would be so easy to crush by words or deeds the one who offends you, so that the strength of character and the fruit of gentleness/kindness is used to help and to serve others.

2. **Gentleness/Kindness is not effeminate.** The world would like to portray this godly fruit of gentleness/kindness as being for women (and males that display gentleness/kindness are sissies). To the contrary, gentleness/kindness is a godly attribute of the most manly of men—David, who slew Goliath, slew a lion and a bear, never lost a battle in war, who was a man after God’s own heart, was a man of gentleness/kindness (2 Samuel 9:1,7). Gentleness in a man of God is manliness.

3. **Gentleness/Kindness is not compromising.** Bearing the fruit of gentleness/kindness in our Christian life does not mean we must throw away the gospel of Jesus Christ or the moral law of God. Gentleness/Kindness like agape love (from which it flows) does not rejoice in iniquity, but rejoices in the truth (1 Corinthians 13:6). In fact, the gentleness/kindness of God, of Christ, and of the faithful martyrs and witnesses of Christ is demonstrated in our presentation of the truth of Jesus Christ—in our tenderness, in our longsuffering, in our patience, and even at times in our tears. In fact, compromise is not kindness, but is a lack of kindness, it is to endanger others (for they need to know the truth, and they need to see you standing for the truth—that is true manifestation of kindness to others).

4. **The goal of gentleness/kindness is not seeking to win a popularity contest, or seeking to win the approval of others, or seeking to be liked by others.** It is seeking to show forth the gentleness/kindness of God to undeserving sinners and to brothers and sisters in Christ in order to glorify the Lord and to show forth His character that has been worked within us. The goal of gentleness/kindness is not to be liked, but is to be Christ-like.

## II. **The Origin of Gentleness (“For he is gracious and merciful, slow to anger, and of great kindness, and repenteth him of the evil” Joel 2:13).**

A. The origin and source of the grace and fruit of gentleness or kindness is the Lord God Himself. The Hebrew word that is often translated as “loving kindness” or “kindness” in the Old Testament Scriptures is the word, *chesed*. This is the word used in Joel 2:13 when speaking of the “great kindness” of the Lord (and note, not merely “kindness” but “great kindness”). Let us learn from the context of Joel 2:13 how great is the kindness of our God.

B. In Judah at the time in which the prophet Joel gave his prophecy (which was approximately 800 b.c.), there was gross backsliding from the gospel and commandments of the Lord. As a result, God’s judgment was threatened against the house of Judah (Joel 2:1-2). Urgent needs call forth urgent measures. Thus, we see those urgent measures declared by the Lord through His prophet in Joel 2:12-13.

1. **First, there is an immediate urgency to turn unto the Lord** (“Therefore also **NOW**, saith the LORD”).

a. There is no valid reason and no legitimate excuse to delay or postpone turning to the Lord, our God declares. Procrastination is not an option. These matters of your backsliding are of the utmost importance. This is a matter of life and death.

b. Today (not tomorrow) is the day of salvation or sanctification (as the case may be). Dear ones, if there is no urgency in our lives when it comes to sin, we have been blinded and the world has deluded us.

2. **Second, there is a gracious invitation to turn unto the Lord in the desperate hour** (“Turn ye even to me”).

a. The Lord here pleads with His people to turn from their own sinful and rebellious ways and to come unto Him that His righteous judgment might be turned from them.

b. Dear ones, we further aggravate our sins, when we not only turn from God's good and holy commandments, but when we also ignore and neglect His gracious invitations to come unto that throne of grace where the grace of Christ is more abundant than any and all of our sins. It's like slapping His hand that is extended to us in His mercy. Man seeks to rationalize this sin of not turning to Christ in various ways.

(1) "I'm not such a great sinner—look at the many good and commendable things I have done."

(2) "At least I am not like so and so in the Church—that person really needs to turn from his/her sins."

(3) "I will turn to the Lord in time—I want to enjoy more of the pleasures of this life before doing so."

(4) "There are so many demands on my life right now—I just don't have the time. God will be as merciful to me tomorrow as He is today."

c. Beloved, there is not one good reason why we should not turn to the Lord in faith and repentance today. In fact, every excuse we might offer is actually a reason why we should hear Christ's invitation and come to Him with all of our sins, with all of our burdens, and with all of our problems.

3. **Third, there is the manner in which God's people are to turn unto Him** ("with all your heart").

a. As we turn in faith to the Lord, we are called to do so with all our heart (and not half of our heart). In our turning to Christ there is the necessity to do so out of a sense of our own desperate need for Christ. This is not a turning to Christ that considers the grace of Christ to be so cheap that we simply look for ways to continue in sin that grace might abound. This is whole-hearted turning to Christ that hates and despises the sin that has engulfed you, and wants with all your heart to not only be free from the guilt of sin, but also to be free from the power of sin in your life.

b. This is such a whole-hearted turning to Christ from our sin that it will involve more than a mere profession/confession. It is a turning that leads to certain evidences in our lives.

(1) **Fasting.** Biblical fasting is a means of grace, wherein we abstain from nourishment temporarily and look in faith to Christ and His righteousness, confessing our own utter helplessness to deliver ourselves, and God's infinite mercy and power to save and to rescue us from every sin, burden, and need. Some besetting sins in our lives call for a turning to the Lord that is evidenced in fasting.

(2) **Weeping.** Dear ones, there is no virtue in tears in and of itself. Some people can cry at the drop of a hat. Others rarely shed a tear. However, if we have ever known the brokenness of heart and weeping over having lost a child, a mother or father, a brother or sister, or a close friend, how much more should we be broken over losing communion and fellowship with our gracious Savior due to our sin, due to our unbelief, due to our hard hearts, or due to our icy love for the Lord.

(3) **Mourning and rending our hearts before God.** When we consider the devastating effects of sin in the lives of men which lead to idolatry, death, abortion, war, divorce, rape, violence, adultery, theft, we cannot treat sin lightly. We cannot rejoice in sin, but must mourn over sin and its effects in the lives of people and most importantly, the offence sin is to our holy and gracious God. Jesus said in the second beatitude: "Blessed are they that mourn, for they shall be comforted" (Matthew 5:4). A rejoicing saint in Christ is one who knows what it is to mourn over his own sin and the sins of others. Mourning over sin is not the end, but the means to the end of rejoicing in the God of our salvation who is full of love, mercy, and grace to undeserving sinners like you and me.

C. But what confidence or what ground would the House of Judah have (or what ground do you have) that the invitation of the Lord to come to Him whole-heartedly would avail to their salvation or sanctification? The firm and incontrovertible ground of God's promise to save and to deliver from sin's guilt and sin's power is founded upon the unchangeable character of God ("For he is gracious and merciful, slow to anger, and of GREAT KINDNESS, and repenteth him of the evil" Joel 2:13).

1. What will you find if you turn to the Lord today in faith and repentance? An avenging God who is consumed with anger toward you? A God who delights to afflict and punish you? No! No! No! To the contrary, you will find a God of "great kindness". You will find a God who delights to show His "great kindness" to undeserving sinners and even to the chief of sinners (1 Timothy 1:15). God's character and nature is one of "great kindness" and is manifested in offering His only begotten Son for sinners who come in faith to Jesus Christ.

2. Remember, dear ones, that neither the enormity of your sin nor the gravity of your sin disqualifies you from turning to Christ. To the contrary, it actually qualifies you to come to Christ and to receive of His great kindness, for the Lord Jesus has not come to heal those who consider themselves to be spiritually healthy and not in need of a doctor, but rather He has come to heal those who confess just how spiritually sick they really are with the cancer of sin that has eaten away at their very life and soul.

3. The only question then is, Will you turn to such a merciful Savior who delights to show such great kindness? Dear one, you have nothing to lose except your guilt, condemnation, bondage, fears, pride, shame, discouragement, and hopelessness. You have everything to gain including Christ and His righteousness, forgiveness, renewed strength, the growing fruit of gentleness/kindness in your life, and hope of everlasting life. Let not your pride, your unbelief, your enjoyment of sin, or your "control" of your own life keep you from enjoying now and for all eternity the great kindness of the Lord in setting you free. Turn in faith to Christ now, for He is a Savior of great kindness. Amen.

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