

**1st Thessalonians 2: 7 and 8; “Like a Nursing Mother”, A Mother’s Day Sermon
Delivered by Pastor Paul Rendall on May 10th, 2020,
for the Afternoon Worship.**

I think that it is fitting on this Mother's Day that we would take a look at the subject of Paul's acting as a mother to these young believers in Thessalonica. Although it is always right to recognize and maintain the different and respective roles and responsibilities of mothers and fathers; Paul is telling us here that there were certain qualities of a mother which he adopted in his ministry to the young believers at Thessalonica. He is saying that there are certain qualities of mothers which spiritual fathers and indeed all believers need to learn themselves, so that Christ will be better demonstrated in their lives.

So this afternoon we want to ask the question – What are these desirable qualities which nursing mothers can teach all Christians, in their attempts to teach and help each other to better demonstrate Christ? As we look carefully at the text we can see that there are three qualities of the nursing mother which we can all learn from, which will help us to better demonstrate Christ to people around us. 1st of all – Gentleness; 2nd – Cherishing, and 3rd – The desire to impart life-giving and life-sustaining truths. So let's think about these good qualities together.

1st – The Quality of Gentleness. (verse 7)

“But we were gentle among you, just as a nursing mother cherishes her own children.” Who is more gentle than a nursing mother? We should remember here that the Apostle Paul was dealing with new and young believers who were suffering persecution from their fellow-countrymen. He needed very much to be gentle with them. He wasn't dealing with those who were in danger of believing false doctrine or apostatizing from the faith. There are other places in the New Testament where Paul had to deal very firmly and sharply, giving strong reproofs and rebukes to churches or individuals within those church. Listen to Galatians Chapter 1, verse 6 and following: “I marvel that you are turning away so soon from Him who called you in the grace of Christ, to a different gospel, which is not another; but there are some who trouble you and want to pervert the gospel of Christ.” “But even if we, or an angel from heaven, preach any other gospel to you than what we have preached to you, let him be accursed.”

You can see that there are times when gentleness would be the wrong approach. It is wrong to tolerate false doctrine in relation to the gospel. Those are times when warning, rebuking, and reproving are very necessary. Another example is found in the book of Titus, Chapter 1, verse 9 and following when Paul is speaking on the qualifications for an elder. He says that he must be one, “who holds fast the faithful word that he has been taught, that he may be able, by sound doctrine, both to exhort and to convict those who contradict.” In the NAS it says, he should be a man who is “holding fast the faithful word which is in accordance with the teaching, that he may be able both to exhort in sound doctrine and to refute those who contradict”.

He goes on in verse 10 to say – “For there are many insubordinate, both idle talkers and deceivers, especially those of the circumcision, whose mouths must be stopped, who subvert whole households, teaching things which they ought not, for the sake of dishonest gain.” “One of them, a prophet of their own, said, ‘Cretans are always liars, evil beasts, lazy gluttons.’” “This testimony is true.” “Therefore rebuke them sharply, that they may be sound in the faith.” There was no time for gentleness here. But is it not interesting that in Galatians chapter 6 verse 1 that Paul says – “Brethren, if a man is overtaken in a trespass, you who are spiritual restore such a one in a spirit of gentleness, considering yourself lest you also be tempted.”

Paul is not thinking of bad habits of insensitive people here. He is thinking of a person who has been overtaken in a fault. There has been a definite sin, a particular sin committed, and that sin needed to be addressed lest the brother be self-deceived and continue in it. This is a

case where gentleness is needed. The gentleness of a mother. Those of you who have had good and gentle mothers; how often when you were young, if you did something wrong, that your mother gently reprimanded you for your fault? She gently told you the truth about yourself and your need to do what was right. She was nursing you along in the faith. And you understand that fathers, or fathers in the faith, need to do the same thing as well. Let's look at a radical example of this. Turn with me over to Numbers Chapter 11. The children of Israel were tired of being in the Wilderness. They were tired of eating manna. They had some very intense cravings that they yielded to, it says here in verse 4. They remembered the fish, the cucumbers, the melons, the leeks, the onions, and the garlic. They wanted to taste meat again.

It was a good thing that Moses was a praying man in regard to the children of Israel that he was called to lead. Because when the people complained, it says in verse 1, "it displeased the Lord". I wonder if we have sufficiently considered just how much our own complaining is displeasing to the Lord? It says, again in verse 1 – "For the Lord heard it, and His anger was aroused." "So the fire of the Lord burned among them, and consumed some in the outskirts of the camp." "Then the people cried out to Moses, and when Moses prayed to the Lord, the fire was quenched." This, I say, is often what a parent is called upon to bear and to do; to be as a mother in their ministering Christ, in gentleness, to the people in their family. This is what they are called to bear in relation to the people that they are close to, and those whom they serve. They must trust in the Lord to help them.

If they would act righteously and lovingly, they must pray and seek the Lord for mercy to address their loved one who is sinning in a gentle way. This applies to mothers, to fathers, and to all who minister in the name of the Lord. But sometimes we get frustrated with trying to be gentle and patient, don't we? Look at Numbers 11, verse 10. "Then Moses heard the people weeping throughout their families, everyone at the door of the tent; and the anger of the Lord was greatly aroused; Moses also was displeased." "So Moses said to the Lord, 'Why have You afflicted Your servant?' "And why have I not found favor in Your sight, that You have laid the burden of all these people on me?" "Did I conceive all these people?" "Did I beget them, that You should say to me, 'Carry them in your bosom, as a guardian carries a nursing child, to the land which you swore to their fathers?'"

We can answer that question of Moses' can't we? No, Moses, you did not beget them, but you surely do know what is the right behavior of a nursing mother. It is gentleness. It is care to deal gently with those who need to be reprimanded. It is one of the primary qualities of a good leader. Not harshness and severity, but gentleness. 2nd Timothy 2 : 22 – "And a servant of the Lord must not quarrel, but be kind (gentle) to all, able to teach, patient when wronged, in humility (or with gentleness) 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 held captive by him to do his will."

This is why God has made nursing mothers to be gentle. He knows that a young child is going to have many needs and many complaints. Some of the complaints are going to be for the wrong reason. In many things patience will be needed, to teach and correct the child, so that they will grow up to glorify God. And gentleness is the way to see this accomplished to the glory of God. Gentleness is a quality which each of us ought to thank God for, when we see it in mothers. It ought not to be despised. But gentleness is a quality which we ought to thank God for in relation to strong men and leaders in church and society as well, for there is great need for it, in order that he, together with the church, might accomplish many things that are good.

In 2nd Corinthians 10: 1, Paul explains the reasons why this gentleness is needed. It is because it is Christ-like to be gentle. "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." "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.” You can see here, can’t you, of what great importance, Paul attached to the quality of gentleness? He knew that it flows from humility, that wonderful lowliness of mind, which does not consider others as less important than ourselves. It is not opposed to boldness, which Paul also considered to be of great value in speaking the truth. But the Christian, he is saying should couple both together in his spiritual warfare to see truth and goodness established in the hearts of men.

Mothers know this very well and we should be thankful for it. How often have we as fathers had something to say to our children, and we have not said it gently? We have said it roughly, or harshly, and we have spoiled the truth in our delivery of it. We may have proved our point, but we were not walking in the Spirit. The fruit of the Spirit is gentleness it says in Galatians 5: 23. Gentleness is something that only God himself can really teach us, but when He has taught them He will also mightily use those men and women who He has taught.

2nd Samuel 22: 36 says – “You have also given me the shield of Your salvation; Your gentleness has made me great.” “You enlarged my path under me; so my feet did not slip.” Oh, how God-like, how Christ-like is the quality of gentleness. It is the shield of our salvation, that God will deal gently with us, because of Jesus Christ. Can we not, then, should we not then, also deal gently with others; especially our children, that they might grow up to be great and godly men and women?

Now, 2nd - The next quality of a nursing mother which we can all learn from, which will better help us to demonstrate Christ, is the quality of cherishing our children.

Cherishing our children flows out of, and is a part of our realizing how great the love of Christ is toward us. To cherish, the Dictionary says, is – “To hold or treat as dear; to care for tenderly; to nurture or foster; also, to entertain in the mind.” The believers here in Thessalonica were entertained in the mind of God. They were loved enough by God and Christ that Christ died for them in order that they might be cherished forever. A person cherishes those whom he truly loves. One of the reasons that we honor mothers on this special day is because they cherish our children. A loving mother holds them in her mind and in their heart. She holds them as babes, and she keeps them warm. She nurtures and cherishes them by giving them milk and food. She gives them the comfort, and encouragement of her breast and holds them in her arms often when they are infants. She holds them in her mind and heart as they grown older.

And if we are a Christian father, we know that they cherish our children because they cherish us as their husbands, if they know the Lord. They cherish the marriage relationship which God has brought us both into. This is only right. “For (it says in Ephesians 5: 29) no one ever hated his own flesh, but nourishes and cherishes it, just as the Lord does the Church.” But what about cherishing other believers in the faith? There is no marriage relationship there. Well, we cherish them in a spiritual way. We do this as something which flows out of our love to the Lord Jesus. Being married to Him spiritually, we want to be loyal to Him, and to honor Him by loving and cherishing His spiritual children. We may or may not have begotten them by the gospel, but we can cherish them with the kind of love that will think of their welfare and the good that we can do for young believers.

And really, this kind of cherishing applies to all believers. The word in the Greek here is *Thalpo*, which Robertson says is an old word which means, “to keep warm, to cherish with tender love, to foster”. We have a good example of it in 1st Kings 1: 1. “Now King David was old, advanced in years; and they put covers on him, but he could not get warm.” I like the way that the King James version puts it – “but he gat no heat”. In fact let me give you the rest of these verses in the King James. “Wherefore his servants said unto him, ‘Let there be sought for my lord the king a young virgin: and let her stand before the king, and let her cherish him, and let her lie in thy bosom, that my lord the king may get heat.’” “So they sought for a fair damsel throughout all the coasts of Israel, and found Abishag a Shunammite, and brought her to the

king.” “And the damsel was very fair, and cherished the king and ministered to him: but the king knew her not.”

So, there was no marriage consummated in a sexual relationship here. What we have here is a cherishing relationship. In the margin of my King James Bible it says that the Hebrew means, “Let her be a cherisher unto him”. This is what Paul would be to the young believers at Thessalonica. This is what you and I who would learn the spiritual significance of motherhood should pray that we would come to, in our relationships with younger believers, or any needy believer for that matter. Christ’s little ones need cherishing. They need the warmth of the devotion and the love that you have for Jesus Christ, to come to them, when they cannot get heat; when their relationship with Christ, their spiritual “body temperature” is cold.

No doubt David wanted to be warm, but he couldn’t generate it in himself. That is why they looked out for someone who could care for him and keep him warm. Let me ask – Are you this way spiritually with believers whose love and faith have grown cold, or have cooled? Take a look around you at the believers in this church and ask yourself – What can I do for them, to encourage and comfort them; to warm their faith into a fire?

3rd – It is the quality of the nursing mother to want to impart life giving and sustaining truths. (verse 8)

“So, affectionately longing for you, we were well pleased to impart to you not only the gospel of God, but also our own lives, because you had become dear to us.” The gospel of Jesus Christ is a gospel bringing life. Just as a nursing mother wants to impart to her child her own life-giving mother’s milk, so you and I should want to impart the life-giving truths of the gospel to people around us; and especially young believers. Discipling young believers is imparting to them not only “everything which Christ has commanded them”, but it is also our imparting to them, in the way that we teach them, our very lives. We give advice and counsel out of our own experience. We tell them of the way that God’s Word has helped us and nourished us, and made us strong and helped us to grow.

This is true discipleship, when our life overflows into the lives of others in accordance with the Word of God. When we who are older in the faith are around new born spiritual babes, it is our job to act as a mother introducing the spiritual breast to the babe, saying – “C’mon, take this”. “Take in the good Word of God.” “This is what will give you nourishment and growth.” Receive it from me as a “mother” in the faith. This is why Peter says in 1st Peter 2: 1 and 2 – “Therefore, laying aside all malice, all deceit, hypocrisy, envy, and all evil speaking, as new-born babes, desire the pure milk of the Word, that you may grow thereby, if indeed you have tasted that the Lord is gracious.”

Do you, as a more mature believer have this desire to want to impart life-giving and sustaining truths to younger believers? This is good if you do. If you do not, it would be good if you would pray and ask the Lord to show you someone whom you can personally minister to. Surely in a church of this size, you will be able to think of someone. I hope that each of us deeply appreciates the mother who raised us by feeding and caring and nourishing us bodily so that we grew up to walk and guided us when we were very prone to doing the wrong thing. She directed us into the right paths if she was a faithful mother. Now it is your job to be acting the part of a spiritual mother. Be not ashamed of it. Paul was not. He was not only well-pleased to impart the gospel of God, but also his own life because these believers had become dear to him. How about you? Are you becoming a “mother” in this holy sense? I trust that by God’s grace you will.