

Sept 24 – Gentleness, Meekness, Humility  
Philippians 4:5, Galatians 5:26

Complete this sentence: “God is \_\_\_\_\_.” What word or words did you think of to describe God? Mighty? All-powerful? Creator? Perhaps “loving.” Perhaps “wrathful?”

If we weren’t talking about the fruit of the Spirit and had chosen other scripture references to read, would “gentle” have been a word you used to describe God? As we’ve looked at some of the fruit of God’s Spirit, we have read Ephesians 4:24 which says we are to put on the likeness of God. We can describe God as patient, perhaps also as kind, but gentle? Do we think of God as “gentle,” or are we more likely to describe God as full of wrath, as Jonathan Edwards, a well-known preacher of the 1800s, suggested in his sermon titled “Sinners in the Hands of an Angry God?” And what about those of us who say God sent Jesus to die on the cross, to save us from God’s wrath? Paul wrote in 1 Thessalonians that we wait for Jesus, who saved us from the wrath to come (1 Thessalonians 1:10) and again, “God chose to save us through our Lord Jesus Christ, not to pour out his wrath on us.” (1 Thessalonians 5:9)

As a child, I learned of the “wrath of God.” More recently, however, I have read some writings that ask the question, “How can a God full of wrath *choose* to take on human form and then allow himself to be crucified?” Those who ask this question, answer it: God sent Jesus out of God’s great love for us – knowing that on our own we cannot return to Godliness, the way we were created to be. Well, there is much more to be wrestled with before we can merge a God full of wrath with a God offering sacrificial love, and gentleness. That will have to wait for another day.

For today, we are exploring God’s gentleness through the life of Jesus Christ and the gentleness that comes as a fruit of God’s Spirit.

1

Jesus was indeed one who showed gentleness and humility. Jesus had compassion for the hungry, the grieving, the blind, the leper. He had a “good bedside manner,” we might say. And Jesus described himself as gentle and humble. “Come to me all who are burdened. Take my yoke upon you and learn from me; for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls.” (Matthew 11:29) Jesus’ heart was for those around him who were suffering in some way. He treated them with gentleness.

And we know Jesus acted with humility.

- ◆ Philippians 2:7-8 – (Jesus) humbled himself as a servant, humbled himself and became obedient to the point of death—even death on a cross
- ◆ Matthew 21:5 – Look, your king is coming to you, humble, and mounted on a donkey
- ◆ Paul appealed to the church in Corinth, writing in his second letter to them with these words: “By the humility and gentleness of Christ, I appeal to you...” 2 Cor. 10:1

Jesus revealed the nature of God through his life on earth: gentleness

These times, the times we live in, call for patience, kindness and gentleness. These times call for those of us who identify ourselves as followers of Christ, believers in God, to allow God’s Spirit to bear fruit in us and through us.

Most days, I scroll through Facebook. Sometimes that is uplifting; sometimes it is disheartening. I’m seeing Facebook’s algorithms at work: I see fewer and fewer posts from the “other side.” But I know it’s there! And occasionally as I read comments following an article, I see the harsh language, the verbal attacks on those whose opinions differ from the opinions of the writer. And this is true not just of articles on politics but also of articles on what it means to be a Christian in 2017. Just this morning, On the Media included an interview with the CEO of GAT, a social network dedicated to free speech, even when that speech calls for killing whole groups of people, hate speech.

2

These times call for patience, kindness, gentleness—fruit of the Spirit. Living with gentleness, as we read in Philippians 4:5 “Let your gentleness be known to everyone. The Lord is near,” is even more important.

We are to live with gentleness: gentleness toward ourselves and gentleness toward others.

- ◆ One of the most valuable pieces of advice I received from a colleague was “Be gentle with yourself.” Another colleague took her advice seriously. In his conversations he often would say, “Don’t beat yourself up.” We can, and should, acknowledge our sin, we can repent—turn around, and then we can accept God’s forgiveness. Accepting God’s forgiveness means we don’t need to re-visit those sins for which we have repented and have accepted forgiveness. It also means we can accept that we are not perfect. Shortly after my very difficult summer, when I took a new job and moved back to Nebraska, a counselor encouraged me to read the book “When Perfection Isn’t Good Enough” I think she was telling me to be gentle with myself.
- ◆ Gentleness toward others –  
Proverbs 15:1 – A gentle answer deflects anger, but harsh words make tempers flare.  
Titus 3:2 ...speak evil of no one, avoid quarrelling, be gentle, and show every courtesy to everyone  
The way we speak, the words we choose, can express gentleness toward others. As Christians what should be our view of hate speech?  
The ways we act can show gentleness also, showing courtesy to everyone. Others aren’t perfect either and, this side of heaven, they, and we, will not be perfect. Rather it is required of us that we seek to understand the “other’s” situation, to “walk a mile in their shoes,” as the saying goes. I was listening to an interview with a woman who is a death penalty investigator. Her job is to learn as much as possible about the individual who has been 3

convicted and has been sentenced to death. She reported that through her work, she has learned (her words) “even monsters need someone to hear their story.” When asked why she chose this career, the woman replied she had experienced her own abuse as a child and needed to understand how an adult who was supposed to nurture and care for her could have hurt her.  
We are to be gentle with others, even those who don’t seem to deserve gentleness.

So what is gentleness; what are we talking about?

- ◆ Gentleness is a strong hand with a soft touch.
- ◆ It is a tender, compassionate approach toward others’ weaknesses and limitations.
- ◆ Philippians 4:1-2 I therefore, the prisoner in the Lord, beg you to lead a life worthy of the calling to which you have been called. <sup>2</sup>with all humility and gentleness, with patience, bearing with one another in love.

When we are gentle, that doesn’t mean we are wimps or doormats for everyone to walk on. Gentleness still allows us to stand up for what is right, what is good, what is beneficial to others. It has more to do with the way in which we stand up for our belief in God and God’s love and the ways in which we love others as ourselves.

A gentle person can still speak the truth, even when that truth is painful, but we must speak in a gentle way so the truth can be heard and received.

St. John of the Cross, a Catholic priest of the 1500s, wrote that when God’s Spirit lives in and through us, our actions (and I’ll add words) are characterized by tranquility (peacefulness—to come another Sunday), gentleness and strength. St. John says our small action is a part of the total action of God. Speaking the truth, showing gentleness becomes a part of the way God moves within us and among us here, now.

If you're still not sure about what gentleness is, let me suggest another way of looking at gentleness.

- ◆ Matthew 5:5 states "Blessed are the meek, for they will inherit the earth"

This is one of the Beatitudes: Jesus' teaching about who are those people who are blessed or happy.

Meekness is "to have power, resources, and strength yet not be influenced by them or made arrogant by the potential. The meek person doesn't have to 'claim his/her rights,' because he or she fully possesses those rights." (J. Ellsworth Kalas, study of the Beatitudes)

Imagine a well trained horse—like a Clydesdale. It is strong, large and powerful, yet responsive to the reins and its training. Gentleness and meekness are similar to that horse: strength under control

Treating others with gentleness grows out of our humility

We must be humble in order to live with gentleness.

- ◆ Kalas: not made arrogant by our power, resources, strength
- ◆ Galatians 5:26 – Let us not become conceited, competing against one another, envying one another. Or the wording from the New Century Version: "We must not be proud or make trouble with each other or be jealous of each other." After Paul listed the fruit of the Spirit, he added this caution: let us not be proud, conceited
- ◆ Jesus also taught about humility in his teaching about selecting a seat at the dinner table. (Luke 14:1-11) He had been invited to a meal at the house of a leader of the Pharisees. As he observed guests selecting places to sit, he advised that we shouldn't choose the most important place at the table. Perhaps a guest, more important than we are, will arrive and be given the place of honor. Then we will be "demoted" to a lower place at the table. Rather, Jesus advised, sit in a place of low honor; then perhaps your host will move you to a place of higher honor. The lesson is that we are to begin with humility, **5**

Jesus concluded the teaching in verse 11, "for all who exalt themselves will be humbled, and those who humble themselves will be exalted."

- ◆ Philippians 2: 3,8 Do nothing from selfish ambition or conceit, but in humility regard others as better than yourselves

William Barclay, in his commentary on gentleness, meekness, identified three aspects of humility. Gentleness, humility means we are:

- ◆ Submissive to the will of God  
For Jesus "humbled himself and became obedient to the point of death—even death on a cross
- ◆ Teachable  
Psalm 25:8-9 Good and upright is the Lord; therefore he instructs sinners in the way  
The Lord leads the humble in what is right, and teaches the humble God's way  
None of us has all the right answers. Each of us can still learn something new, each day, no matter what our age!
- ◆ Considerate  
The Greek word for gentleness essentially means a balance between excessive anger and excessive angerlessness. We are to be angry at the right time and never at the wrong time (Barclay) How's that for a challenge?!

Submissive to the will of God—not to our personal will, teachable—always ready to learn something different, and considerate—expressing the right kind of anger at the right time, letting go of the wrong kind of anger or expressing anger at the wrong time

Gentleness – tender, compassionate approach to others' weaknesses and limitations; strength under control. We can express gentleness when we live in humility. Micah 6:6-8 sums up what God expects of us. God doesn't seek our burnt or a great show of outward sacrifice. God wants our hearts. **6**

As evidence we have joined with God in God's mission on earth we are to do justice—act justly toward all, love kindness—show steadfast love of others, and walk humbly with our God.

The more I read about the attributes of the Fruit of the Spirit, the more I understand why it is “fruit” (singular) and not “fruits” (plural). These attributes—love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, gentleness, goodness, faithfulness, self-control—cannot be separated into nine distinct categories. All describe how we demonstrate God's presence within us. (Loving God with heart, soul, mind and strength) All describe how we treat others because we love God and want to be a living expression of God's love for others.

Gentleness requires patience; gentleness/meekness requires self-control, being at peace with self and with others

Kindness and goodness are interrelated, and both are expressions of love

Nine expressions, one fruit of the Spirit.

As God's chosen ones, we are to take on the likeness of God, of Jesus—God in human flesh. We are, according to Colossians 3:12, “holy and beloved,” we are to “clothe yourselves with compassion, kindness, humility, meekness, and patience” with gentleness, the nature of God.