

Gentleness

Galatians 5:22-23 HCSB But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faith, (23) gentleness, self-control. Against such things there is no law.

Do you know any VDPs, "Very Draining People?" They're the kind who say things that set you on edge, and you're convinced that they enjoy doing it? They come into your home and say, "Where did you find that wall-paper?" And it's obvious that they're not asking because they want to go out and buy some for themselves.

They're the kind who come right out and ask, "Ooh, how much weight have you gained, dear?" Or they say, "Boy, you sure look tired today." Deep down inside, we know that we don't need comments like that.

They're all around us! And why are they like that? I've heard their excuses. "It's not my fault. That's just the way I am. It's in my genes. I inherited it from my mother or my father. That's the way they were, too."

You see, we live in a "blame game" society where what we do and how we act are never our own fault. Our temperament, our personality, how we deal with people are always somebody else's fault.

At times I just want to shake people like that and ask them, "What about God? What about the Holy Spirit? Why don't you let Him into your life, to change your attitudes and actions, your life and your personality?" Some people need a personality transplant.

Now I hope that you have not interpreted these sermons to be a kind of "try harder" seminar. I'm not saying to you, "Just try harder to be patient, or try harder to be more loving, or try harder to be more gentle."

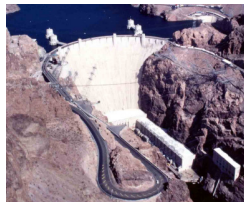
What I'm hoping for is that you will allow the Holy Spirit to do His work in you, changing and making you into the kind of person God wants you to be. And when that happens, the fruit of the Spirit will be evident in your life.

I. DEFINITION OF GENTLENESS

This morning we're going to consider the fruit of "gentleness." And once again, we need to define it. What is "gentleness?"

The Greek language in which the N.T. was originally written, was a precise and expressive language. When the Greeks developed a word, they not only gave it a careful definition, but they almost always illustrated it.

Their definition of gentleness was "power under control," and they illustrated it with the picture of a horse that had been tamed. Gentleness to them was a powerful animal with its power completely under control.



¹Water that's under control would be water rushing through a dam turning turbines, generating electricity to light a city.

¹ <http://www.korto.com/images/Hoover%20Dam.jpg>



²Water out of control would be a flood destroying everything in its path.



³A disease out of control can devastate the body and kill its victim.



⁴But a disease under control can produce vaccines and save thousands of lives.

So when you think about gentleness, think about power under control, anger under control, our emotions under God's control.

II. JESUS IS OUR EXAMPLE OF GENTLENESS

Now let's look at some demonstrations of gentleness in the Bible. Once again, Jesus is our perfect example.

So let's consider 3 events in His life that demonstrate the gentleness of Jesus. But as we do, I want you to keep in mind this question: "If we had people like these people in our church, how would we treat them?"

Samaritan woman at the well. With that in mind, in the 4th chapter of the Gospel of John, we see His gentleness in the familiar story about the woman at the well.

² <http://www.wrh.noaa.gov/tfx/hydro/FAW/ManyGlacierSmall.png>

³ <http://www.randomhouse.com/features/preston/cobraevent/art/smallpox1.jpg>

⁴ http://msnbcmedia4.msn.com/j/msnbc/Components/Photos/061120/061120_vaccine_vmed_12p.widec.jpg

Vs. 7 says. "When a Samaritan woman came to draw water, Jesus said to her, 'Will you give me a drink?'" And in parentheses it says, "His disciples had gone into town to buy food." If the disciples had been there, this would have been a very complicated situation.

Vs. 9 says, "The Samaritan woman said to Him, 'You are a Jew and I am a Samaritan woman. How can you ask me for a drink?'" Then it says in parentheses, "For Jews do not associate with Samaritans."

Now again, remember the culture. In that day a man didn't talk publicly to a woman, and a Jew certainly didn't talk to a Samaritan. So if Jesus were a normal Jewish man, He would never have spoken to her. But Jesus is deliberately trying to break down the barriers between them.

Well, you know the rest of the story - how she taunts Jesus and speaks very unkindly to Him. Yet Jesus responds with patience and kindness and love. Then it turns out that she has been married 5 times, and is now living with a man who is not her husband. She's guilty, there's no question about that.

But Jesus sees in her more than just a woman who has been married 5 times and is now living with someone who is not her husband. He sees a thirsty, needy person. And He offers her living water that will quench her thirst, not just for a moment, but forever.

Woman caught in adultery. There is a similar story found in the 8th chapter of the Gospel of John. It is the story of the woman who was caught in the act of adultery. She was guilty, and Jesus could have judged her harshly. She deserved condemnation. She deserved punishment. She deserved judgment.

But Jesus treats her gently. He writes in the sand, and shames her accusers into slinking away. Then He says to her, "Neither do I condemn thee. Go your way and sin no more."

Zacchaeus. There's another story in Luke 19. It is the story of Zacchaeus, the wee little man who gets all his self-esteem from taking money from other people. He's rich and dishonest. But Jesus looks at him and says, "Zacchaeus, come down. I am coming to your house today."

Soon we see a changed Zacchaeus, and we hear Jesus saying, "Today, salvation has come to this house."

How would you deal with people like that in our church - dishonest business men, immoral women, a woman who has lived with several men, hoping that each one would be the right relationship? How would you deal with them? Would you judge them harshly? Would you tell them that they're not welcome here?

Let me suggest that is exactly what the word "gentleness" is all about, dealing with people who have been broken and twisted and mangled in life.

Now why didn't Jesus condemn them? Because His motivation is very different. He did not come just to judge. But rather, He came to restore. He came to save.

We have always known John 3:16 as one of the most important verses in the Bible. However, the following verses are equally pertinent.

- **John 3:16-18 HCSB** "For God loved the world in this way: He gave His One and Only Son, so that everyone who believes in Him will not perish but have eternal life. (17) For God did not send His Son into the world that He might judge the world, but that the world might be saved through Him. (18) Anyone who believes in Him is not judged, but anyone who does not believe is already judged, because he has not believed in the name of the One and Only Son of God.

III. HOW GENTLENESS IS TO BE USED

Now finally, I want you to see how gentleness is to be used. Galatians 6:1 says,

- **Galatians 6:1 HCSB** Brothers, if someone is caught in any wrongdoing, you who are spiritual should restore such a person with a gentle spirit, watching out for yourselves so you won't be tempted also.

Then he says, "You who are spiritual" in other words, those of you who are filled with the Holy Spirit, "restore him gently." That's the way gentleness is to be used. It is to be used to restore.

We live in a war zone. Do you feel it? Do you sense that you're surrounded by exploding lives and personalities and relationships? Do you hear the cries of suffering? Do you see the mangled lives and relationships - all because they made wrong choices?

Maybe it is a business man who made a wrong choice in business, and his integrity is now suspect, and he's about to lose his job.

Maybe it is someone who has made wrong moral decisions. Now he finds himself infected with a sexually transmitted disease, and his marriage has been destroyed.

Maybe it is a woman who decided to abort her child, and now she must deal with the guilt.

Maybe it is a young man who made wrong sexual choices, and is now caught in the trap of homosexuality.

Maybe it is a teenager who made wrong choices about drugs or alcohol.

God is saying, "When you see people who are caught in sin - like the woman at the well, like the woman caught in the act of adultery, like Zacchaeus" - He says, "When you see people like that... Church, be gentle! Be careful. Their lives are so fragile. They could be easily broken. But they can also be restored. So treat them with gentleness. Pick them up and hold them gently. Show them the way to repentance, and the way back to me, because they are mine. I created them, and I want them back. More than anything else, I want them back."

Listen to these words of prophecy about Jesus found in Isaiah 40:11,

- **Isaiah 40:11 HCSB** He protects His flock like a shepherd; He gathers the lambs in His arms and carries *them* in the fold of His *garment*. He gently leads those that are nursing.



⁵A picture that will probably always be fixed in our minds from the Oklahoma City tragedy is the picture of the fireman holding the body of that baby. We'll never be able to forget it, will we? What's touching about that picture is the obvious gentleness with which that big, burly fireman is holding that little baby. You can see in his face, "I must handle this child gently. He's so fragile. But if I hold him gently, maybe he can be saved."



⁵ <http://photosthatchangedtheworld.com/wp-content/uploads/2008/07/baylee-almon.jpg>

⁶One of the most familiar nursery rhymes is "Humpty Dumpty sat on a wall. Humpty Dumpty had a great fall. And all the king's horses and all the king's men, couldn't put Humpty Dumpty together again."

Charles Swindoll says that little nursery rhyme was originally written about people, broken people, people who fell off the wall, and people who found their lives smashed. And all the king's horses and all the king's men could not put them back together again. But God can. And He is trying to teach us as a church the lessons of gentleness, that we need to be gentle with one another, too.

Violet Slaughter's father died in 1969. Before he died he gave her an antique pitcher and wash basin that before the turn of the century used to be found in guest bedrooms. The pitcher would be full of water and the guest would pour water into the basin to wash off at night before going to bed.

It was Violet's most prized possession because it came from her parents' home. And it became even more precious to her after her father died. She kept it on display in a very special spot in her home.

One day guests came to visit, and they brought with them an unruly dog that jumped around a lot. In doing so it wrapped its leash around the little table on which this pitcher and basin were displayed, causing the pitcher and basin to fall and break.

It was a tragedy to Violet. Her husband says, "I watched as she took the dust pan and picked up every piece of that broken basin and pitcher. She kept all the pieces. And every evening, she would bring out the ceramic glue and glue pieces back together again."

That's what God says we need to do as a church. So we have two goals. **First** of all, to realize how gentle God has been with us, how many times He could have condemned us, how many times He could have punished us. But gently, time and again, He reaches out and takes us in His arms and holds us close to His heart. He gently leads us.

Secondly, I want you to realize how important it is that we become gentle caregivers, and begin to exhibit the fruit of the Spirit in our lives.

It's a harsh and cold world out there. And somehow humanity needs to see that Jesus makes a difference. He brings our tempers and our temperaments and our personalities under control.

CONCLUSION

Are you a gentle person this morning? Have you treated others with gentleness? God created them. God loves them. And more than anything, God wants to restore them, and He wants to use you with your gift of gentleness to bring them back to Him.

This morning, if you're here and you need the gentleness of Christ in your life, we invite you to come. We extend His invitation to you. We encourage you to make a decision for Jesus this morning. Will you come as we stand and as we sing?

⁶ http://visibility911.com/blog/wp-content/uploads/2008/02/humpty_dumpty.jpg