

## **GENTLENESS Gal 5:19-23**

Our passage from Galatians this morning is a familiar one, particularly the last part that speaks about the fruit of the Spirit. In v19, the passage lists characteristics that are not of the Spirit, such as “fornication, impurity, licentiousness, idolatry, sorcery, enmities, strife, jealousy, anger, quarrels, dissensions, factions, envy, drunkenness, carousing and the like” and then in v22 we read:

“By contrast, the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, generosity, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control.”

Incidentally, these are actually aspects of a single fruit - not separate fruits, where we can say, I don't like that one, so I'll leave it in the bowl. Think of a mandarin with many segments, rather than a bowl of different fruits. All of these characteristics are aspects of the single fruit of love. We can't really say to ourselves, “Well I've got 7 out of the 9 down, so I'm doing ok. If we are lacking in one aspect, we are lacking in all of them. It is the one fruit!

So, as I pondered again on the fruit of the spirit, I found myself focusing on 'gentleness'. This aspect of the fruit of the spirit, is, I think, underrated, and therefore perhaps not so much on our radar. So I'd like to look at it this morning.

You may remember an old hymn called, “Gentle Jesus, meek & mild.” We don't sing it any more. Why, is that, I wonder? I think to our contemporary mind, this hymn portrays a picture of Jesus that we somehow find distasteful. It's similar to those portrayals of Jesus that we may have found in our Sunday School books in decades gone by. I'm sure you've seen them.

To our modern thinking, a Jesus like this seems somehow spineless and weak - a nerd, a wuss! Does this affect what we think of gentleness as a fruit of the spirit, I wonder? Do we perhaps see gentleness as slightly distasteful, because we see it as a sign of weakness, particularly in males? Obviously it's quite alright for mothers to be gentle - that's their job. You wouldn't get very far with a new-born baby or a heartbroken child if you weren't able to be gentle! But what about gentleness in your

average Aussie guy? What about the footy players, the truckies, the tough country farmers, the aggressive career oriented men - and career women for that matter - or the soldiers from years gone by? I suspect gentleness can easily be seen as weakness.

If we are uncomfortable with the concept of gentleness, either as a description of Jesus, or as an ideal for ourselves - it is because our modern understanding of gentleness is incorrect.

In this passage in Galatians, the word translated as “gentleness” is the Greek word **PRAOTES**, which also incorporates the idea of meekness and humility, particularly in our dealings with others.

Let’s look at these 3 aspects of gentleness, which I hope will inspire us to cultivate this aspect of the fruit of the spirit in our lives.

### **1) First aspect of GENTLENESS IS STRENGTH UNDER CONTROL**

Nowhere in the scriptures, does the word PRAOTES, or gentleness, carry with it the idea of weakness, or spinelessness, or lack of spirit! Rather, in biblical times the word carried with it the idea of strength being tamed, like a wild horse that has been brought under control.

Have any of you seen the movie, “The Black Stallion”? It has some amazing footage of the power and strength of a wild black stallion that was ultimately tamed by the love and persistence of a young boy. We can tame a wild animal like this, and it becomes obedient to a bit and bridle! It becomes PRAUS in the Greek - or gentle, meek, mild - but it does not lose its strength or become weak in any way.

We all know the apostle Peter was impetuous and hot tempered - yet through the power of the Holy Spirit, this side of his nature was *tamed* - brought under control, and his fire and energy were then able to be used for the glory of God.

In the physical realm - think of a raging bushfire. Unchecked fire is so destructive, yet tamed, it can cook our food and heat our homes.

So we need to understand that gentleness is not weakness. It's not spinelessness or passivity. It is power, spirit, and strength - ***under control.***

## ***2) Second aspect of GENTLENESS IS MEEKNESS***

How do we understand meekness? One definition is that meekness is being at peace with our power, so that we do not use it arrogantly or hurtfully.

We see this meekness, this quiet, controlled strength in Jesus. In the Garden, when he was arrested, Jesus chided Peter, telling him put away his sword. He reminded Peter that at any time, he could call in legions of angels - and yet he controlled his power and divinity to obey His Father in heaven.

Throughout his trial, torture and crucifixion, Jesus endured emotional and physical agony, and yet, as we're told in Isaiah, "He was oppressed and afflicted, yet He did not open His mouth: like a lamb that is led to the slaughter, like a sheep that is silent before its shearers, so He did not open His mouth" (Isaiah 53:7) At any time, Jesus could have overcome his persecutors, yet he chose not to. He *meekly* submitted to the pain and indignity of the cross - for us.

Often, meekness is formed in the crucible of hostility. We may find at work, or the bowling club, or places we rub shoulders with unbelievers, that we become the target of jibes and sneers and indifference - because of our faith. Meekness develops as we submit to the Holy Spirit, and continue to love and serve and pray for these people, despite the way they may treat us. We need to remember that Jesus promised us that the "meek will inherit the earth"!

## ***3) Third aspect of GENTLENESS IS HUMILITY.***

Humility seems an easier concept for us to grasp, somehow. Perhaps because it is the opposite of pride, which we are so familiar with!

Humility is not being puffed up with self importance. Humility is not seeking to be highly regarded. It is not having a need to have a voice of authority. It is not needing to have your own way. Humility is not

reacting defensively when our feelings are ruffled.

On the other hand, we shouldn't belittle ourselves either, which is equally offensive to God who made us. We need to look at ourselves with "sober judgement".

Romans 12:3 tells us, "For by the grace given me I say to every one of you: Do not think of yourself more highly than you ought, but rather think of yourself with sober judgement, in accordance with the measure of faith God has given you."

So, pride comes when we please ourselves at the expense of others - humility comes when we look at God.

So strength under control, meekness and humility are all aspects of this word PRAOTES - this part of the fruit of the spirit. We need to remember, that gentleness is *not* weakness, but is in fact our human nature under control. And not under self-control, but under God's control.

**Well - that's the theory. What about in practice? What does it mean to exhibit gentleness in our daily lives? How can we cultivate this aspect of the fruit of the spirit?**

Gentleness applies to every aspect of our dealings with other people. It should be with gentleness that we speak to our partner or family at the breakfast table. It should be with gentleness that we respond to someone when they hurt our feelings, or irritate us. It should be with gentleness that we relate to someone when there is disagreement between us.

Gentleness is what helps us reach those who don't know the Lord. Gentleness is what helps us have unity in the church. Although it's not something we talk about often, it's central to the way God works in and through us.

As I've said, we're accustomed to thinking of strength being the opposite of gentleness, softness and tenderness. Yet this is not always true.

During World War 1 British fighter pilots made an amazing discovery, that thick layers of silk stopped low velocity shrapnel better than steel. So they wound the silk around their heads and then wore leather horse riding helmets on top of the silk. Scientists still aren't sure just what it is that gives silk its strength, but it's true, that in certain situations soft, gentle, tender silk can prove far stronger protection than cold, hard steel.

Jesus showed us the same holds true for human character: that gentleness, a heart that's soft toward others, and tenderness are in fact qualities of great strength!

When it comes to comes to **cultivating** the fruit of the spirit, or being refined in any area by God, it helps to remember:

1) We need to be **willing** to be refined and changed. We need to say to God - and mean it - ***Search me, oh God, and see if there is any wicked way in me.***

2) **We need time with God and with his people.** We make it very difficult for God to search us and communicate with us, if we have our back to him, so to speak. We need time alone with him, with his Word in front of us, and perhaps a pen and paper in our hand. We also need time in the company of his people, where we have a context in which we can "love one another". We can't become the people God wants us to be in isolation.

3) We need **repent**, if necessary, of wrong behaviour, and then surrender ourselves willingly to God's will for us.

4) We need to **exercise faith**. It is only by "abiding (resting, trusting, dwelling) in Christ, that we will develop the fruit of the Spirit. We provide the willingness, God provides the fruit through the transforming power of the Holy Spirit.

As Paul reminds us in Phil 4:5 **"Let your gentleness be evident to all."**