

# Developing the Fruit of Gentleness

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That we might develop this virtue, it is required that we understand the concept, “gentleness”.

The best way to gain such an understanding is to examine the passages in which this word is used. A lexicon (a dictionary of New Testament Greek words) tells us that “gentleness” means “mild, pleasant; the opposite of harsh, hard, sharp, and bitter.” This same Greek word is also translated “kindness” and “goodness”.

This word is used as an attribute of God. The “goodness” of God leads to repentance (Romans 2:4). While the severity of God is manifested on those who are cut off, it is the “goodness” of God which is manifested on those who are saved (Romans 11:22). God’s “kindness” to those dead in trespasses and sins is the evidence of the riches of His grace (Ephesians 2:7). This same idea is expressed in Titus 3:3,4.

Also, this word describes an attribute of the people of God. As the recipients of God’s kindness, they are made able, by the work of the Holy Spirit within them, to be kind and gentle (Galatians 5:22). They are urged by Paul to put on “kindness” (Colossians 3:12). We, who have tasted the gentleness and kindness of God are admonished to be “gentle” to all men (Titus 3:2; Philippians 4:5 - the word “moderation” means “gentleness”). This “kindness” is to be especially in evidence in a minister of the Gospel (II Corinthians 6:6 and II Timothy 2:24).

Now we face the question, How is one gentle? How can we show gentleness?

Mr. Doezema and Mrs. Lubbers have used various phrases to describe this attribute. I cannot improve on them. Examine carefully the following expressions, which I have taken from their articles. I believe that you will find an excellent presentation of “gentleness”. “Eminently approachable”; “humble in demeanor”; “kind in speech”; “tender compassion for sinners”; “concern for a sinner’s repentance and restoration to the favor of God”; “to deal sensitively, gently with the poor, lost sheep”; “genuine concern for the spiritual well-being of the lost sheep”; “sensitive to their immediate need”; “gentle and considerate, seeking to understand the pressures and insecurities they face and making allowances accordingly”; “adding nothing by his own manner likely to offend”; “present the truth or administer the rebuke in such a way as to recommend the truth and sweeten the rebuke”; “giving a crust of bread and a cup of cold water in Christ’s name”; “clothing the naked, visiting the sick, and entertaining strangers”; “loving your enemies”; “tenderness and great compassion”; “do good to those that spitefully use you”; “soothing his hatred and spreading compassion and gentleness in its place”.

Quite a list, is it not? These expressions catch the true flavor of “gentleness”.

Some have erroneously thought that gentleness is contrary to honesty; that it is a weakness.

It is sad, but true, that some have and others presently use gentleness as an excuse for cutting off the sharp edges of the truth, for making the Word of God more palatable for man. This is a most serious crime against God and against His Word (Rev. 22:19).

But we must be careful that we do not throw the baby away with the dirty wash water, for gentleness is not opposed to truth. Much to the contrary, gentleness and kindness are placed side by side with teaching the truth in those passages which ascribe this attribute to office bearers (II Corinthians 6:6, 7; II Timothy 2:24, 25). The whole counsel of God is to be declared, and that declaration of the Truth is to be with gentleness.

Thus we are made to see that rather than being opposed to the truth, gentleness describes the manner in which the truth is to be presented. Gentleness is not contrary to honesty and candor: it

is its faithful companion.

This fruit of the Spirit we must put on (Colossians 3:12).

How can we put on gentleness? How can we develop this virtue?

1. Begin by coming boldly unto the throne of grace, asking that God, by His Spirit, grant you the grace of gentleness.

2. Next, consider how much we are the objects of God's kindness. Ephesians 2:4-7 and Titus 3:3-6 describe that kindness upon the back-drop of a description of our unworthiness: "foolish, disobedient, deceived, serving divers lusts and pleasures, living in malice and envy, hateful and hating one another".

3. Contemplate how Titus 3:2-6 shows the intimate relationship between our being gentle and our consciousness of how we have received God's kindness and love.

4. Next, meditate on the fact that our gentleness is especially necessary when we face those who curse and hate us. We are to be gentle to our enemies, for we must be like our Father in heaven and not like the publicans who are only gentle to those who are gentle to them (Matt. 5:43-48). If we are ill-treated, then we have opportunity to show that we are disciples of Christ, who, "when He was reviled, reviled not again; when he suffered, He threatened not" (I Peter 2:23). We may "not render evil for evil, or railing for railing; but contrariwise blessing; knowing that we are thereunto called" (I Peter 3:9).

5. Finally, do not forget that we are commanded by the sovereign God to be gentle. Therefore, we have no excuse before Him for not putting on this virtue. Also, this command of God is that we must be gentle to ALL. God has not put any saint before someone so terrible that we are excused from obedience to this command. And God has given to no saint such a personality that he or she is excused from obedience to this admonition. Even in the extreme case of one excommunicated from the Church of Christ, the "Form of Excommunication" (long used in Reformed Churches) admonishes us, that, while accounting such a one as an heathen and keeping no company with him, we are to admonish him in the manner of a brother.

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We must be gentle.

Every child of God must pray for the blessing of God, which enables him or her to put on this fruit of the Spirit. It must be put on when we deal with someone who is exasperating and frustrating to us. We must be gentle when we deal with a brother or sister in the Lord, of whom we are inclined to think that they are less than we.

This gentleness must be evident especially in office bearers. Gentleness must characterize the presentation of the Truth to unbelievers. It must be present when we seek the reformation of those who have gone astray. Gentleness must be greatly in evidence in the consistory room, on house visitation, and discipline calls. Gentleness must be present in the deliberative assemblies of consistory, classis, and synod.

Controversy is not reason to set aside gentleness. Much to the contrary, this is precisely the time it must be present, according to II Timothy 2:24, 25: "The servant of the Lord must not strive, but be gentle unto all men, apt to teach, patient, in meekness instructing those that oppose themselves; if God peradventure will give them repentance to the acknowledging of the truth." In a letter on the subject of controversy, John Newton (an 18th century Calvinist preacher and hymn-writer from England; wrote the following:

"Of all people who engage in controversy, we, who are called Calvinists, are most expressly bound by our own principles to the exercise of gentleness and moderation. If, indeed, they who differ from us have a power of changing themselves, if they can open their own eyes, and soften

their own hearts, then we might with less inconsistency be offended at their obstinacy; but if we believe the very contrary to this, our part is, not to strive, but in meekness to instruct those who oppose, 'if peradventure God will give them repentance to the acknowledging of the truth.' If you write with a desire of being an instrument of correcting mistakes, you will of course be cautious of laying stumbling-blocks in the way of the blind, or of using any expressions that may exasperate their passions, confirm them in their prejudices, and thereby make their conviction, humanly speaking, more impracticable.

"If our zeal is embittered by expressions of anger, invective, or scorn, we may think we are doing service to the cause of truth, when in reality we shall only bring it into discredit. The weapons of our warfare, and which alone are powerful to break down the strongholds of error, are not carnal, but spiritual; arguments fairly drawn from Scripture and experience, and enforced by such a mild address as may persuade our readers, that whether we can convince them or not, we wish well to their souls, and contend only for the truth's sake. . .

"There is a principle of self, which disposes us to despise those who differ from us; and we are often under its influence, when we think we are only showing a becoming zeal in the cause of God. I readily believe, that the leading points of Arminianism spring from, and are nourished by, the pride of the human heart; but I should be glad if the reverse was always true; and that to embrace what are called the Calvinistic doctrines was an infallible token of a humble mind." "I am afraid there are Calvinists, who, while they account it a proof of their humility, that they are willing in words to abase the creature, and to give all the glory of salvation to the Lord, yet know not what manner of spirit they are of. Whatever it be that makes us trust in ourselves that we are comparatively wise or good, so as to treat those with contempt who do not subscribe to our doctrines, or follow our party, is a proof of a self-righteous spirit."

"What will it profit a man if he gains his cause, and silences his adversary, if at the same time he loses that humble tender frame of spirit in which the Lord delights, and to which the promise of His presence is made?" "If we act in a wrong spirit, we shall bring little glory to God, do little good to our fellow-creatures, and procure neither honor nor comfort to ourselves." "Go forth, therefore, in the name and strength of the Lord of Hosts, speaking the truth in love; and may He give you a witness in many hearts, that you are taught by God, and favored with the unction of the Holy Spirit." Be gentle to all!

Are you zealous for the church with great enthusiasm, while neglecting the evils which creep into your home, your friendships, your social life, and worst of all neglecting to fight your own personal spiritual battles? Then you are living a lie.

To "war the warfare of the Lord" and to "Keep the watch of the house of the Lord" is to battle in every sphere, in every manner, in all relationships; every moment, always and everywhere standing against Satan, always and everywhere and in everything on the side of God.

Many will be ashamed upon reading this, even as our own soul bows in shame at the writing.

For who of us would dare say that his own hands are clean for the battle?

But let that not dishearten! For we must feel ashamed. God's word must bring upon us, again and again, a conviction of sin that burns as a fire into our very inmost being.

Only let us take care that our principles remain founded upon the true foundation.

If we fight for the church of God and neglect the evil within our own hearts, however men may attempt to justify such action, we incur the judgement of God.

"When we acknowledge our own guilt, acknowledge the justice of the accusation against our false zeal, then pardon is assured us. And the Lord will lead us on."

A. Kuyper

“When I lay sucking at my mother’s breasts,  
I had no notion how I should afterwards eat,  
drink, or live. Even so we on earth have no idea  
what the life to come shall be.”

M. Luther

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