

Gentleness and Self-Control in Jesus

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Introduction.

- A. As we continue devouring the fruit of the spirit two at a gulp, at last we come to gentleness and self-control. Both of these are certainly words we can find in the dictionary, but to many Americans of today, they may as well be Greek. Gentleness is not a concept that our culture regards with favor. In the words of a recent truck commercial, we like to "Grab life by the horns." We exert all the strength we have to accomplish our goals, and anybody else needs to get out of the way or get run over! We automatically assume that anyone who doesn't display this macho forcefulness is a wimp, and needs to grow a spine. By contrast, the Biblical picture of gentleness is one of strength that, rather than being allowed to run wild, is restrained and controlled. When we could squish someone else but choose not to out of regard for them, that's Scriptural gentleness.
- B. Similarly, self-control is not an idea that's terribly popular. It seems like every ad on TV tries to convince us that rules are bad, and that we need to rebel against authority and show what rugged individualists we are by buying the same mass-produced gadget as five million other people. We assume that anybody who is self-controlled is a whiny little mama's boy who probably carries a pocket protector and a graphing calculator everywhere he goes. In reality, of course, the truly uncontrolled of our day aren't found in their bright yellow SUV's, cruising the California desert, but in their bright orange jumpsuits in prison.
- C. Basically, friends, we have flipped the Biblical idea of strength on its head. Strength isn't trampling other people just because we can. Strength isn't living a wild, crazy, and unrestrained life. Strength is displayed in gentleness toward others and control of the self. Jesus, of course, exemplifies this. Jesus has enough power to destroy the universe right now, but while He was on earth, Jesus' strength was primarily notable for the way He controlled it. Let's look, then, at gentleness and self-control in Jesus.

I. Gentleness.

- A. Despite the many stories of Jesus' run-ins with the Pharisees, the Scripture depicts Him as a very gentle man, and one of the ways that He manifested this gentleness was in **RECEIVING OTHERS**. Look, for instance, at the story of the woman anointing Him for burial in Mark 14. Here's what happens: shortly before His crucifixion, a woman comes to Jesus with a vial of very expensive perfume and pours it on His head. Many of those who see this start rebuking the woman for "wasting" the perfume in this way instead of selling it and giving the money to the poor. We see Jesus' response to this criticism in Mark 14:6, 8-9. Jesus stands up for this woman, explaining that she had done what she could for Him, and had done what was right.
- B. Just like Jesus was, so too we need to be gentle with those around us who try to serve the Lord. There are some folks out there who, it seems, enjoy nothing more than watching other people work and criticizing them for what they're doing. Sadly, this occurs even in the Lord's church. There are plenty of people who are willing to jump on the songleader's back for singing too slowly, or the prayer leader for praying too quietly, or the preacher's back for preaching too long, and so forth. In our lives, we need to be careful about unleashing this kind of criticism. It's important that we help one another grow spiritually, and tell our brethren things that will help them grow spiritually, but just like Jesus here, there are times when we need to recognize that our brother has done what he could. Most Christians who serve do so as amateurs. They aren't compensated for their service to God; they do it out of love for Him and for their brethren. It's not fair, friends, to expect a professional skill level out of people like that. Let's be gentle in our criticism of them.
- C. We also see the gentleness of Jesus displayed in **COMFORTING OTHERS**. This is evident in the story of the woman with the flow of blood in Mark 5. The woman in this case has been afflicted with a flow of blood for many years, and she needs healing from Jesus. However, she doesn't have the courage to ask Him outright for healing. What she does, then, is sneak up behind Him in a crowd and touch the hem of His cloak in the belief that it will be enough to heal her. It works, but Jesus notices that the power has gone out of Him and starts asking who is responsible. The story picks up there in Mark 5:32-34. The woman is scared to death that she's going to be in trouble, but Jesus praises her and sends her on her way with a blessing.
- D. There are going to be many times in our lives, friends, when we also encounter people who are afraid. They're afraid of God, they're afraid of doing what's right, they're afraid of being rejected by others, or they're even afraid of us. When we encounter fear like that, we should be gentle and seek to allay it. For most people who are trapped in a prison of fear like this, the situation isn't as bad as they think it is, and we should try to help them see the truth. Even in cases where the fear is justified, as with the sinner who fears the wrath of God, we should point out the way of escape that God offers. Gentleness helps others to overcome fear.
- E. Likewise, the gentleness of Jesus expressed itself in **PROTECTING OTHERS**. Consider the story of the Samaritan village in the last part of Luke 10. Jesus is on His way to Jerusalem, and this village in Samaria has refused to give Him shelter. The story picks up then in Luke 10:54-56. James and John want to follow in the

footsteps of Elijah and blast this village to smithereens. Jesus, of course, isn't about to let them do that. He rebukes them, and the group of disciples travels on peacefully to another village.

- F. Like Jesus, friends, we aren't here to destroy others, but to save them, and so is every other Christian. We don't have the power to call down fire from heaven, which is probably a good thing, but there are still ways that we can destroy people. In our anger, we can say things that are more lastingly hurtful than a kick in the teeth would be. We should never behave like that, nor allow those around us to behave like that. It accomplishes nothing useful. Let's be gentle when we're offended, and encourage others to be gentle too.
- G. Finally, the gentleness of Jesus was apparent in His **FORGIVING OTHERS**. Perhaps the most telling example of this is His forgiveness of the woman taken in adultery in John 8. A group of Jews comes to Jesus with a woman whom they have caught in the act of adultery. They want Jesus to agree that she ought to be stoned. Jesus replies that whoever is without sin should be the first to throw a stone. Sensibly, all the Jews make themselves scarce. We see the ensuing conversation of Jesus with this woman in John 8:10-11. Once her accusers are gone, Jesus isn't going to accuse her either, and He allows her to go in peace.
- H. We too should be gentle in our willingness to forgive others. It's evident from Jesus' actions that this is a penitent woman, but in terms of justice, she obviously doesn't have a leg to stand on. Sooner or later, we're going to find ourselves in Jesus' shoes. There's going to be someone who has sinned against us, is begging forgiveness, but clearly deserves to get nailed. When we're there, friends, and it's so easy to lay into someone for what they've done, we need to remember that we too deserve to get nailed. We too have sinned enough to turn God's stomach. Let's be gentle, then, and grant the forgiveness we need so much ourselves.

II. Self-Control.

- A. Just as much as Jesus displayed gentleness, though, so too He also displayed self-control. One of the first ways we see Him do this is by **PRESERVING GOD'S GIFTS**. Look at the story of Matthew 4:2-4. It's not immediately obvious why it would have been a sin for Jesus to do this, but most likely, it's because such a miracle would have been a misuse of His divine power. God gave Him the ability to work miracles to confirm the word, not to use it to satisfy His own desires. Jesus preserved God's gift for God's work instead.
- B. It's interesting, friends, to think about how many of the sins that bedevil us involve a misuse of something God has given. Gluttony is a misuse of the food God has provided, lying is a misuse of the gift of speech, murder is a misuse of divinely given strength and will, and so on. We need to recognize, friends, that all of our abilities are gifts from Him and are consecrated for His work. We don't have the right to use our minds and bodies for sin any more than Jesus had a right to make stones from bread for His own use. There are thousands of legitimate uses for what God has provided. Let's seek those out and preserve God's gifts for Him.
- C. Jesus' self-control also appears in **PURSUIING GOD'S GOALS**. One little verse that says volumes about this is Luke 9:51. Jesus knew that the time had come for Him to go to Jerusalem. He also knew what would happen to Him once He got there. God wanted Him to go anyway, so He gritted His teeth and went.
- D. All of us have much to learn from His self-control in serving God here. There are times when working for the Lord is going to be easy, when we're just having a blast going to services or studying the Bible with somebody or whatever. There are also going to be times, though, when working for the Lord ISN'T going to be easy, when we have a million earthly concerns pressing on us, when we're tired, when we're uncomfortable, and when doing the right thing just looks miserable. Those are the times when the people who look on Christianity as a hobby drop out. It's just not important enough to them to keep their noses to the grindstone. We need to be better than people like that. Christianity needs to be our life, not our hobby. If it is, we'll follow Jesus. We will pursue the goals of God in every circumstance, whether it's easy and fun or not.
- E. We also see the self-control of Jesus made apparent in **ACCEPTING GOD'S WILL**. Look at His famous prayer in the garden of Gethsemane in Matthew 26:39. Once again, God's plan isn't shaping up in a way that's advantageous for Jesus, but Jesus explicitly says that it's God's will, not His, that matters.
- F. Sometimes, friends, we may find ourselves praying a prayer like that one. There are going to be times when God allows something we value greatly to be taken from us. There may be times when God causes that thing to be taken from us, as in the case of the new Bible student who realizes her marriage is unscriptural. When we're in that situation, it can be terribly easy to turn against God. It can be easy to rage against His unfairness. We need to have the self-control, though, to accept God's will, even when we just don't get it.
- G. Finally, Jesus showed self-control in **DYING FOR GOD**. Look at Jesus' self-description in John 10:17-18. It wasn't like Jesus had no choice about going to the cross. He had all the choice in the world. What He chose to do with His free will, though, was to submit it entirely to the will of God. In a very real sense, friends, we're in the same boat as Jesus. God expects us to lay down our lives like Jesus did. We have the power to make the choice, and God isn't going to force us. We need to have the self-control, not once, but continually, to live that way. Clearly, this is not the way of the weakling. Nobody without an iron determination to obey God is going to walk the walk of Jesus. We need to have that determination, though, so we can be like Him.

Conclusion. If you want to obey Jesus and dedicate yourself to serving Him, today's the day.