

Fruits of the Spirit. Gentleness & Self Control
(Galatians 5 v 16-26 Luke 18 v 31-34)

Jesus said, “Blessed are the meek, for they will inherit the earth”. People misunderstand “meek”, thinking it means “weak” and in the modern world we might think the Lord Jesus got this wrong. It seems to be the strong ruthless people who get rich and call the shots.

Jesus is not wrong. Those who humbly trust in God find their needs generously provided by our gracious Father in Heaven, and at the end of the age the heartless and cruel people who have ignored the cries of their hungry neighbours will find themselves judged, while the helpless and oppressed who have thrown themselves on God’s mercy will share new heavens and earth in resurrection glory.

Recognising our sin, our need, our vulnerability should make us not only humble before God but considerate of others in their need. Meekness or gentleness combines trust in God with consideration of other people. Grateful for the Lord’s compassion and kindness we seek to mirror it to a needy world and God promises to bless us for it!

We’ve been studying the fruit of the Spirit, nine Christ-like qualities Paul lists in Galatians 5. You may have noticed this passage gives us a dramatic contrast between a “grim list” of vices and harmful attitudes which threaten to take us over if we give in to our sinful human nature, and this list of virtues which grow in our hearts and minds as we submit to the Holy Spirit of Christ living in us.

Live to please yourself and you’ll find yourself increasingly under the control of things like lust, jealousy, bad temper, selfish ambition, substance abuse, even the sort of devious manipulation involved in witchcraft. But Christians have sought to put these sort of things behind us, we regard them as crucified, dead and buried. The more we hunger and thirst for righteousness and the new life guided and empowered by God’s Spirit the more we find our thoughts and feelings directed and motivated by love, joy, peace, patience,

kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control. As we pray and seek to keep in step with the Spirit daily these qualities help us become more like Jesus, and walk in His freedom.

Here we're considering the last two, gentleness and self-control and the best demonstration of these we find inevitably in the Lord Jesus Himself. There are many instances throughout the four Gospels.

Observe for example how Jesus treats women and children with such unfailing courtesy and respect and dignity and love. The compassion He shows to the crowds of sick and hungry and bereaved. How even though at times He was deeply disturbed He never lashed out uncontrollably but spoke and acted with purpose and restraint. Even the driving of the money-changers from the Temple courts was more solemn indignation than temper.

In Luke 18 the Lord is on His way to that final Passover in Jerusalem. On His way to the cross, Jesus takes His disciples aside and tells them quite graphically of the suffering He is about to endure. Yet as He strides with purposeful steps to the climax of His earthly ministry He takes time to graciously heal and affirm a blind beggar.

Please observe with me four things in these verses which help illustrate these qualities of gentleness and self-control that the Lord seeks to nurture in us His followers.

1. Purposeful focus
2. Restraint
3. Consideration
4. Strength applied softly

1. Purposeful focus. This is part of self-control. It is the self-discipline to keep uppermost in our minds the things that are most important and not let ourselves get sidetracked. Jesus "set His face" to go to Jerusalem. He was determined to go to the cross to atone for our sins and nothing was going to stop Him or delay Him. He wasn't likely to get sidetracked on secondary issues. He had a mission and a

calling to fulfil and He was absolutely committed to staying on course.

What about us? How clear are our priorities? Are we living first and foremost to glorify our Saviour and extend His Kingdom? Do we waver in this or at times wander from it? Are we sufficiently in control of our desires and ambitions and emotions to stay on course?

2. See also here tremendous restraint, especially in the face of unbridled hatred and brutality. Jesus tells the disciples ahead of time the treatment He expects, to be mocked, insulted, spat on, flogged, executed. How much of that could we tolerate? How long would our dignity hold before we would scream curses on those tormenting us?

An old hymn puts it “He could have called 10,000 angels” to His rescue. But our Saviour maintained a dignified silence. He was the Lord God, holding the life of those executioners, corrupt judges and religious hypocrites in His hand yet He did not strike back. There will be a Day of Judgement, but gentleness and self-control hold back, allowing fully for the day of grace.

3. Let me suggest a third element here, that of consideration. Jesus took His disciples aside and tried to prepare them as well as possible for the horror that was ahead. His own heart must have been crushingly heavy with dread and sorrow and yet He thought of them, and also paused on that dark road to bring light and hope to a hopeless destitute.

Do we sometimes feel overwhelmed with our own worries and burdens? The Lord understands. He listens. He comforts. And in His wisdom His Spirit enlarges our bruised hearts to care for others in their sorrow at the same time. Let’s never close our hearts to consideration of our fellow men and women!

4. Finally a simple definition of gentleness? - strength applied carefully. We watched one day in fascination in Donegal as a man operated a huge digger in our back garden. The machine must have

weighed a couple of tons yet he moved that heavy shovel with such precision. Power applied carelessly leaves a mess. Gentleness applies power with care and accuracy to make a good job.

Jesus, being Lord and God, could have unleashed divine power in spectacular, chaotic, destructive fashion but He didn't. Gently, with dignity and restraint He went to the cross and provided the most powerfully transforming force on earth, divine grace, saving love, applied with precision to individuals like the blind man, or to you or to me if we call out to Him in faith.

Son of David – have mercy on me!

Lord Jesus, Son of David, Messiah, Saviour, have mercy on us – forgive our sin, comfort our sorrow and fear, grant us Your Spirit that we might be strengthened to know and practice Your gentleness and self-control, for your glory.

Amen