

“GENTLENESS”

The Fifth Characteristic of “the Fruit of the Spirit”

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"The fruit of the Spirit" has many attributes. Just as an orange has attributes like round, orange, and sweet, the fruit of the Spirit has the attributes of love, joy, peace... By inspiration of the Holy Spirit, Paul gave the fifth attribute of "the fruit of the Spirit" — gentleness. The word gentleness comes from the Greek word "chrestotes" and means goodness of the heart or kindness. It is normally associated with moral goodness. It carries with it the idea of a "kindly disposition" and is more often translated "goodness" and "kindness" in the King James Version. Thus, this attribute is always sweet, kind, and full of graciousness.

In the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus said, "Be ye therefore perfect, even as your Father which is in heaven is perfect" (Matthew 5:48). As Christians we are to imitate God, the Father. Thus, Jesus' statement is brought home in application when we consider God's goodness. Paul wrote, "Or despisest thou the riches of his goodness and forbearance and longsuffering; not knowing that the goodness of God leadeth thee to repentance?" (Romans 2:4). The word "goodness" is the same as "gentleness" in the original language. God is rich in goodness! "Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, and cometh down from the Father of lights..." (James 1:17), and "in him we live, and move, and have our being" (Acts 17:28). God is so good to us that "while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us" (Romans 5:8). If we have the mind-set to imitate God and live godly, then we will also be rich in goodness/gentleness.

Please notice the application Paul makes in Romans 2:4. God's goodness ought to lead us to repentance! Generally, when tragedy hits, we turn to God, or, in the least, it causes us to think about our soul's destiny. It is an illness, an accident, or a death of a loved one that causes us to consider more seriously our eternal fate. But God's goodness ought to do the same. His kindness shown by His supply of our daily welfare . . . His spiritual provisions given to us through His word . . . His generous care as He watches over the affairs of this world . . . these things ought to impel us to live as God would have us to live.

One aspect of the goodness of God emphasized in scripture is the goodness God has shown toward us through Jesus Christ. In Ephesians 2:7, Paul wrote, "That in the ages to come he might shew the exceeding riches of his grace in his kindness toward us through Christ Jesus." It is through the kindness that God has shown to us through Jesus, the Christ that we will be able to praise God throughout eternity. Again, the word "kindness" in this text is the same as in Galatians 5:22. Paul also makes this thought clear in Titus 3:4. After reminding us what we were, he wrote,

"But after that the kindness and love of God our Saviour toward man appeared." Here is the point: God showed His kindness and love toward mankind in the sending of His Son, Jesus Christ, to this world of woe and in the sacrifice and death of His Son for our sins.

Notice, also, God's goodness and severity is contrasted. Again, to the Christians in Rome, Paul wrote, "Behold therefore the goodness and severity of God: on them which fell, severity; but toward thee, goodness, if thou continue in his goodness: otherwise thou also shalt be cut off" (Romans 11:22). The severity of God fell upon the unbelieving Jews while the goodness of God was shown toward the Gentiles because of their faith. The conditional nature of salvation is under consideration. As long as the Gentiles continued in faithfulness, they would see the goodness of God, but if they became unfaithful like the Jews, they would be cut off. The same could be said of us. Jesus is "the author of eternal salvation unto all them that obey him" (Hebrew 5:9). Our salvation is contingent upon our obedience to Jesus. As long as we obey, we have salvation, but when we quit obeying, we no longer have salvation. Sadly, this was the state of affairs in Galatia. Rather than living for Jesus, some Galatian Christians turned back to the old law, and Paul assessed they were "fallen from grace" (Galatians 5:4). Let us determine not to follow their example but be as John exhorted – "faithful unto death" so that we may receive "a crown of life" (Revelation 2:10).

Another application of this verse that needs to be made concerns the way we look at God. Our view of God must be a balance between His goodness and His severity. To consider one more than the other or one above the other leaves us with a perverted view of the Almighty. If we only believe in the goodness of God, we are led to conclude that God will overlook all our faults no matter if we have made any attempt to change or live as He instructs. On the other hand, if we can only see the severity of God, then we are led to believe that God is some destructive creator who has created us to be condemned. Both goodness and severity are characteristics of God. We can see the goodness of God in all that He has done for us, but we ought also to understand that those who will not obey God will see His severity. Justice, equity, and righteousness demands such. It is not fair...it is not just...it is not righteous to reward both the obedient and the disobedient with the eternal glories of heaven. Because of God's goodness and severity, "they that have done good," will be raised "unto the resurrection of life; and they that have done evil, unto the resurrection of damnation" (John 5:29).

Not only is gentleness a characteristic of God, Jesus' life was characterized by it. Certainly, we hear the kind and gentle voice of Jesus when he said, "Come unto me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you, and learn of me; for I am meek and lowly in heart: and ye shall find rest

unto your souls. For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light" (Matthew 11:28-30). And we can see the goodness of the Lord as He received sinners (Luke 7:37-50; John 8:1-11). Because of Christ's example of gentleness, Paul writing to the Christians in Corinth wrote, "Now I Paul myself beseech you by the meekness and gentleness of Christ, who in presence am base among you, but being absent am bold toward you" (2 Corinthians 10:1). Paul recognized the example of Jesus. So even though he was accused of being bold while not in their presence, he wrote with all gentleness — the gentleness of Christ. What a tremendous example for us! Even in the face of opposition, Paul acted with gentleness just as the Lord had done.

There are many facets of life in which we need to show gentleness, goodness, and kindness. The tongue is one such area. As we go into the world to evangelize, we need to show kindness. Paul wrote, "Let your speech be always with grace, seasoned with salt, that ye may know how ye ought to answer every man" (Colossians 4:6). Wise Solomon of old wrote, "Pleasant words are as an honeycomb, sweet to the soul, and health to the bones" (Proverbs 16:24).

Not only should we show kindness in our words, we ought to show it in our actions. The Good Samaritan is a marvelous example (Luke 10:30-37). Jesus testified that he was a neighbor to the man that fell among the thieves, and then He made this application, "Go, and do thou likewise." Also, what was the difference between the sheep and goats of Matthew 25:31-46? The sheep did acts of kindness! They clothed the naked, visited the sick, and fed the hungry while the goats did nothing. Let us, therefore, be kind one to another (Ephesians 4:32).

Each morning as we get up from bed, one of the first things we do is put on our clothes. Just as we put on clothes, Paul exhorts us to put on some attributes and virtues. Among them is kindness. To the Christians in Colosae he wrote, "Put on therefore, as the elect of God, holy and beloved, bowels of mercies, kindness, humbleness of mind, meekness, longsuffering; forbearing one another, and forgiving one another" (Colossians 3:12-13a).