

THE FRUIT OF THE SPIRIT: GENTLENESS

Galatians 5:22-23

Scripture Reading: Titus 3:1-9

Intro: We come to the fifth word which the Apostle Paul used in describing the fruit of the Spirit. In the KJV the word Paul used, and it is only used by Paul, is the word “gentleness.” But one amazing fact about this word in the Greek, is that in the KJV out of the ten times Paul used this word, this is the only text where it is translated “gentleness.” In the other nine times it is translated either good or goodness, or kindness.

One thing this tells us about the Greek language is that there are different shades of meaning in many words, and the translators have had to decide which way the writer intended for it to be used in any particular passage. That’s why if you are using a different translation from the one I am using, you may find “gentleness” appears later, as it does in the NASB, or that it is not used at all. And that is true of other words as well.

In the Greek text every word in this verse is different. Obviously the Apostle Paul must have intended a different meaning for each word, or there would have been no reason for using different words. While I don’t pretend to anything like an authority on the Greek, I like thousands of other pastors, have gone to those who are authorities, to try to get to the message that the Spirit of God and the Apostle Paul meant when these words were used.

In the passage which John Ryan read for us in Titus 3, Paul used the same word that we are looking at here in Galatians 5:22, but there the KJ translators chose to use the word “kindness” in verse 4 – “But after that the kindness and love of God our Saviour toward man appeared . . .” It is the same word that Paul used in Galatians 5:22, but which is translated here “gentleness.” And both of these are good translations of this word. I don’t think that “good,” or “goodness” are the best words to use because we have the Greek word “goodness” as the word we will be looking at next week because it follows our word for today, “gentleness.”

What all of this means is the Greek language, which is the language in which the NT was originally written, is a very rich language, and was probably used originally because it is so wonderful in bringing out different shades of meaning. And yet there is a very close relationship between all of them. We need to look at each word and seek to determine what point

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the Apostle Paul, in this case, was seeking to make, while not eliminating other possibilities which are related to it.

One thing we can be sure of is that Paul, in giving us “the fruit of the Spirit” was describing a character and a life style that is completely different from what he had described just before verses 22 and 23.

Personally I believe that “gentleness” is a good translation of the word that Paul used here. But I also think that “kindness” is a close second. Going back to what we read in Titus 3 we can say that one characteristic which God exercised in saving us was unimaginable kindness and the most amazing gentleness. There is nothing in all of the histories of all of the nations of the earth, that can possibly even begin to compare with what God was doing when He manifested His love toward us, totally unworthy of such a work of salvation “which He shed on us abundantly through Jesus Christ our Savior.” So along with the other words in these two verses, Galatians 5:22 and 23, we are speaking about an attribute, an amazing characteristic of our great God, the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. The love we are to show, is God’s love. The joy that we are to show, is God’s joy. The peace that we are to experience, is God’s peace. The longsuffering that we are to show, is God’s longsuffering. You see, what the Apostle Paul is seeking to show us in these two verses which speak of “the fruit of the Spirit” is how amazing God is, and how amazing the Christian life is. These nine words, I would remind you, not only describe God for us, but they describe Jesus Christ for us, and they describe the Holy Spirit for us. That is why they are called the fruit of the Spirit. In working these characteristics in our lives the Holy Spirit is making us like Christ because that is the primary purpose that God had in saving us.

But not, what is this “gentleness,” or “kindness”?

One authority that I have consulted calls this “a beautiful word.” And he refers to all of the different ways that it has been translated in the NT. But then he went on to say that it is a characteristic which pervades and penetrates “the whole nature, mellowing there all that would have been harsh and austere” (Trench, p. 233).

Let’s think about this for a few minutes as this relates to God. And I am speaking now about God Who created the heaven and the earth, the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. He is the God of Isaiah who said, “I

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am God, and there is none else” (Isa. 45:22). Let’s not be deceived into thinking that there is more than one God. There are and have been many gods, but only one, true God. And He is the God with Whom all of us have to do.

The Bible makes it perfectly clear that God is a holy God. He is a God Who cannot tolerate sin. He cannot even stand to look upon it. He is a righteous God. He is a God of judgment. And we are all born under the judgment of God because we are born sinners. He is a God to be feared.

But the Bible tells us that that is not all that we need to know about God. He is also a God. Using our word for today, He is a God Who is gentle. He is kind. The Bible tells us that “God is love.” The kindness and gentleness of love of God appeared when His Son was born here on earth from a virgin mother, and He came to die for sinners so that those who believe in Him would not face the eternal judgment of God, but would be trusting the Jesus Christ paid the penalty for their sins so that all of the immovable barriers between God and them would be forever removed. You and I would not be here this morning if it were not for the amazing gentleness of God, for His infinite kindness, for His great love, for His grace and mercy.

Now Paul in writing this epistle which we call Galatians because it was written to churches in the Roman province of Galatia, was writing to people who had been delivered from the penalty of their sins by faith in Jesus Christ, and whose lives had been forever changed from the sinners they used to be into the saints that they were in Christ. They weren’t perfect yet. No Christian is in this life. But they were headed in that direction. And Paul was teaching them, and it applies to us also, that we need to live showing the gentleness of Christ so that people will see the change that faith in Christ has made in our lives.

Let me repeat what I just mentioned briefly a few minutes ago. Paul is the only one who used this particular word in his writings in the NT. It is the word, **χρηστότης**. There is another, shorter form of this word that others have used in writing the Scriptures. But this word, **χρηστότης**, the gentleness of God, the kindness of God, was Paul’s word. He was so blinded by his sinful heart that before he was saved, he spent his life doing all that he could to hinder the spread of the Gospel, thinking all of the time that he was serving the true God. He never forgot what he had been, and never ceased to marvel how God had forgiven him and the great

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change that the Lord had made in his life. He took none of the glory for himself, but to his dying day he considered himself the chief of sinners and that it was only by the grace of God that he had become what he was. Cf. 1 Tim. 1:15; 1 Cor. 15:10.

The gentleness of Christ is seen repeatedly during His ministry on earth, both with those who were guilty of sin and with believers who had failed in their walk with the Lord.

You remember, I hope, the story of the woman who apparently had been caught in the very act of committing adultery. The Jews brought her to Jesus saying that Moses had said that such a person should be stoned, and they asked Him what should happen to her. The Lord simply said that the one among them who was without sin should cast the first stone at her. Do you remember what happened? When the Lord said what He said, we are told that he said that the one among them who was without sin should cast the first stone. Then all of the Jews began to leave, beginning with the oldest one, until they were all gone. The Lord was left with the woman. He asked her what had happened to her accusers because He had been writing on the ground and did not watch them. He said, "Hath no man condemned thee?" When she said, "No man, Lord." Then the Lord said a very gentle word to her, a very kind word, "Neither do I condemn thee: go, and sin no more." Was He saying that she had not sinned? No. He knew that she had. But He told her to go and sin no more. He knew her heart because He had done a work in her heart. His response was in gentleness. And we can assume from his words that her life was changed.

It is interesting to think through the Gospels and see how the gentleness of the Lord was displayed so often.

One of the greatest examples of His gentleness was with Peter after Peter, although he had been told that he was going to deny the Lord three times, had done that very thing. Now this was the Devil's strike at the very leadership of the twelve disciples. The Lord had indicated earlier that Peter was to have a major role in the building of the church. How would you have felt about leaving Peter in that position after he had failed the Lord so miserably. The Lord did nothing until after His resurrection. Peter and several others had said that they were going fishing. They fished all night, but caught nothing. Some expositors feel that Peter in suggesting to the others that he was going fishing, might have been thinking of going back to the fishing business since he had done what he

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had done. Well, the Lord asked them about their catch. They told Him that they had caught nothing. He told them to cast their net on the other side of the ship, and suddenly they were not able to net in because it was so full of fish – 153 to be exact. They also found that the Lord had fish already cooking for them. They had breakfast together. When they had eaten, the Lord must have gotten Peter away from the other disciples, and the following event took place:

15 So when they had dined, Jesus saith to Simon Peter, Simon, son of Jonas, lovest thou me more than these? He saith unto him, Yea, Lord; thou knowest that I love thee. He saith unto him, Feed my lambs.

16 He saith to him again the second time, Simon, son of Jonas, lovest thou me? He saith unto him, Yea, Lord; thou knowest that I love thee. He saith unto him, Feed my sheep.

17 He saith unto him the third time, Simon, son of Jonas, lovest thou me? Peter was grieved because he said unto him the third time, Lovest thou me? And he said unto him, Lord, thou knowest all things; thou knowest that I love thee. Jesus saith unto him, Feed my sheep (John 21:15-17).

Peter was fully restored. But you say, How do you know that He was? I know because our Lord knew about those bitter tears that Peter had wept after he realized that he had done exactly what the Lord had told him that he would do. The Lord knew that Peter was a heart-broken man, and He knew that Peter was deeply repentant. He knew, too, that the Lord had told Him after He had informed Peter that he would deny Him, “But I have prayed for thee, that thy faith fail not” (Luke 22:32). I am sure that Peter never forgot those words. They were the words of a gentle Savior, an amazing kind Savior.

Think also about Abraham who lied about his wife to save his own life. Think about Jacob who lied to get the birthright from Esau. Think of Moses who killed an Egyptian so that he had to get out of Egypt, and was down in Midian for forty years, and then the Lord brought him back. Think about David who committed adultery with another man’s wife, and who then had her husband killed in order to cover his sin. God never closes His eyes to our sins. Nor does He ever excuse our sins. But He sent His Son to atone for all of the sins of all of His people to the end of time. Nothing could prove more conclusively the gentleness and kindness of our God and our Savior. Let us dwell on these illustrations when we are inclined to feel that God is through with us.

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Now all of those illustrations are illustrations of the tenderness of God, His gentleness, His kindness. Those are great examples from God's dealings with His people. But the point of our text is how His gentleness, produced in us by the Holy Spirit, is to be manifested first, toward God, and then toward each other.

Let us all ask ourselves this morning, Is there any way in which I am not being gentle and kind in my heart toward the Lord. Let us think of the many times He has been so gentle and kind with us. Think of how many times we have failed Him, but He has never given up on us – and He never will. Or, is there someone here today who knows he or she needs to be saved, but you have a hard time believing that the Lord would save you because of what you have done? The Bible tells us that the Lord Jesus came into the world to save sinners. He died for us because He knew how much we need Him, not only to save us, but to keep us saved.

And what about our relationships with each other. Husbands, wives, are there problems that have not been resolved? Are you waiting for the other one to make the first move toward reconciliation? Have you forgotten that God made the first move in saving you? He didn't wait for you to make the first move. Children, what about your relationship with your Dad or your mother. I know a young man who sat by the hospital bed on which his father was dying, and was unconscious, hoping that his Dad would recover so he could tell his Dad how sorry he had been for what he had done. But his Dad died before he could tell him.

God has sent His Spirit in our hearts to make us gentle, tenderhearted, and kind. And He gives us the grace to humble ourselves so that we will be as a dear missionary said in a message he sent when he could not make an appointment, "Tell them that I am on the in's with God, and on the out's with no man.

Concl: Let us learn from God, and from the Lord Jesus, and from the Holy Spirit, what it is to show the love of God, and the joy of God, and the peace of God, and the longsuffering of God, and the gentleness of God – to show it all toward God, first, then in our families, then to other believers, and then, by His grace, even to those we know who do not know the Lord. If we were more like the Lord, maybe others we know would want to know Him too.

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