

Fruits Of The Spirit – Gentleness

Galatians 5:22-23 (ESV)

²² But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, ²³ **gentleness**, self-control; against such things there is no law.

? How does our society view gentleness?

Group Activity:

Define Gentleness: As a group come up with a working definition for the word gentleness.

Consider how gentleness is portrayed in both the Bible and our culture.

Leader's Note: Don't spend more than 7-8 mins on this, but let the group air out their ideas before you chime in. Some major elements of gentleness that you may want to hit are: a sensitivity of disposition and kindness of behavior, founded on strength and prompted by love and humility. Gentleness is a willingness to yield to God's righteousness and truth.

? Do you think that Gentleness is something our culture values?

- Why or why not?

Read to the group:

Matthew 5:38-42

³⁸ "You have heard that it was said, 'Eye for eye, and tooth for tooth.' ³⁹ But I tell you, do not resist an evil person. If anyone slaps you on the right cheek, turn to them the other cheek also. ⁴⁰ And if anyone wants to sue you and take your shirt, hand over your coat as well. ⁴¹ If anyone forces you to go one mile, go with them two miles. ⁴² Give to the one who asks you, and do not turn away from the one who wants to borrow from you.

Cultural Context

The Hebrew law explains how the Jewish people were supposed to respond to criminal behavior. The "Eye for an Eye" law (Exodus 21:24, Leviticus 24:20, Deuteronomy 19:21) dictated that the Jews were suppose to mete out a punishment equal to the crime. This stood in contrast to other cultures of the day where the punishment was often far worse than the crime. In this way, God's law was an example to people that displayed the fairness of His Justice.

Jesus' reframes this law in Matthew 5, explaining the law was not designed to condone vengeance at all. Instead of seeking retribution, God wants his people to find comfort in His ultimate justice and Christ's redemption.

Jesus' View Of Gentleness

All of Jesus' examples in Matthew 5 suggest creative, non-violent ways to protest oppression. For

example, in the era that Jesus lived, people reprimanded those who were inferior with a slap using the back of their right hand. People only used their right hand because it was considered “clean;” so by turning the other cheek, a person would force their attacker to hit them with the inside of their hand signifying they were equal. In the same way, giving a coat and shirt to someone who was suing you would leave you naked and culturally shame your accuser. Finally, Roman soldiers were allowed to command Jews to carry their packs for one mile. By going further, a Jewish person would highlight the Roman’s infringements on their personal liberty. In all of these cases, Jesus calls his disciples to correct others gently out of a place of love and humility rather than aggression or retaliation. God cares about social justice, but He also cares about our behavior in pursuit of that justice.

Questions for Discussion:

? How do the responses in this passage embody gentleness?

Possible Answers: Jesus encourages his disciples to not respond out of anger or retaliation but to respond out of humility and an assurance of their standing with God. Jesus wants the disciples to trust in God’s ultimate justice instead of trying to enact “justice” on their own.

? How is Jesus’ view of gentleness different from our cultural understanding of gentleness?

Possible Answers: Our society often views gentle people as those who are passive or unwilling to stick up for themselves. Jesus isn’t asking His followers to be passive, but to surrender their right to personal revenge. The law called for personal limitations on vengeance, but Jesus wants us to give up our desire for vengeance altogether. When we find our strength in Christ’s redemption we find that gentle behavior can be a defense against those who oppress us.

? What are some other biblical examples of gentleness that fit with this understanding of gentleness?

Possible Answers: Jesus healing the servant’s ear during his arrest in Luke 22:47-53. Jesus’ responses to pharisees’ questions throughout the NT. Adulterous woman in John 8. Jesus avoiding a rebellion when the people tried to make him King in John 6.

PART TWO

Read to the group:

1 Peter 3:14-17

But even if you should suffer for what is right, you are blessed. “Do not fear their threats; do not be frightened.”¹⁵ But in your hearts revere Christ as Lord. Always be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks you to give the reason for the hope that you have. But do this with gentleness and respect,¹⁶ keeping a clear conscience, so that those who speak maliciously against your good behavior in Christ may be ashamed of their slander.¹⁷ For it is better, if it is God’s will, to suffer for doing good than for doing evil.

Questions for Discussion:

? How do we often fail to act out of gentleness and respect when sharing the message of Christ's love with our oppressors?

Possible Answers: We can become defensive and prideful in thinking that we know better than they do, or we can become aggressive and attack others' views. We fail to act in gentleness and humility because we fear others and their opinions of us more than we fear God.

? What does it look like for someone to speak maliciously against your good behavior?

- How could you respond with gentleness in those situations?

Possible Answers: In all of these situations we are called to speak truth, but in gentleness we should try to love even those who don't agree with us. When conversations get heated, we should be understanding and comforting.

? Proverbs 25:15 says "Through patience a ruler can be persuaded, and a gentle tongue can break a bone." This verse implies that gentleness has great strength. Why is it more effective to respond to difficult situations with gentleness?

Possible Answers: Gentleness can be a non-violent way to protest injustice. Our society responds to oppression with violence; being gentle in these situations set Christians apart from the rest of the world. Gentleness won't always solve all our problems, but it is a way for us to model Christ's behavior in the midst of sin.

? What gives us the strength to respond in gentleness when facing our own sin or the effects of someone else's sin?

Possible Answers: God's sovereignty gives us the courage to be gentle in any situation. God's grace and redemptive work on the cross should humble us and overshadow anything that gives us anxiety in this life – giving us the strength to overcome the obstacles of sin. We act out of gentleness and love because we recognize Christ's love for us.

? In which areas of your life do you need to express more gentleness?

Application Questions:

? How should we confront evil in this life while leaving ultimate justice in God's hands?

? How could walking with the Spirit lead to increased gentleness in your life?

? What is our community application?