

## A New Hope – Gentleness, 2 Peter 1:3-11

Through our sermon series on the Fruit of the Spirit, we've talked about how there are not various fruit, but one fruit with many different characteristics. And this fruit is also characteristics of God, characteristics that God wants to build in our lives... furthermore, the Fruit of the Spirit also suggests that – everyone of us - need our personality transformed! We need it because none of us have all of the characteristics if the Fruit of the Spirit. And that transformed personality is what is known as sanctification, or growing to become Christ-like.

But before we go on, please... I hope you haven't taken these sermons to be a kind of "try harder" seminar. I'm not saying – "Just try harder to be patient or joyful, or try harder to be more loving or gentle." **My hope...** is that we all start to understand that it's when we allow the Holy Spirit to work within us, when we allow the Holy Spirit to change and transform us into the kind of person God wants us to be – that is when we produce the Fruit of the Spirit. In the 15<sup>th</sup> chapter of the Gospel of John, Jesus talks about an image of a vine and branches, and he explains that a branch bears fruit not by striving or agonizing, but simply by abiding or resting in the vine. For believer in Jesus Christ, this means when we depend on the Lord, we produce Fruit of the Spirit.

Think back to **2 Peter 1:3-11**, and as I read, listen to what this scripture says about abiding or resting, or in other words, participating in God's divine power, which will produce fruit.

Did you hear it? In verse 3, the Lord's divine power has given us everything we need for life and godliness, and this power is available through our knowledge of him who called us... Jesus Christ.

Today we're going to consider the next characteristic of the Fruit of the Spirit that we have been talking about from Galatians 5, and that is gentleness. And once again, we need ask – "What is gentleness?" The Greek language in which the N.T. was originally written, which is a precise and expressive language, always presents a word and then not only gives it a careful definition, but almost always illustrated it too.

**Now bible's definition of gentleness is "power under control"**

And it is illustrated with the image of a horse that had been tamed. Gentleness is power under control. Or think of the Hoover Dam... water that's under control; water rushing through a dam turning turbines, which generates electricity for millions of people. On the other hand, water out of control as in past weeks causes floods, mud slides and destroys or washes out everything in its path... roads, bridges, etc. When you think about gentleness, think of power under control.

Another example... when under control, the tongue can bless, build up and encourage... or if it is not under control it causes all sorts of problems. Do you know any VDPs, "Very Draining People?" They're the people who say things that set you on edge, and you're convinced they enjoy doing it! They walk into your home and say, "Where did you find that wall-paper?" And you know they're not asking because they want to buy some for themselves. They're the ones who ask you outright, "Ooh, how much weight have you gained?" It's almost as if they suffer from a neurological condition known as Tourettes Syndrome, where people lose control over the words they speak or movements their body makes. They talk without any concern of how their words hurt others. And one reality of life is that these people are all around us!

And why are they like that? We've heard their excuses. They say, "It's not my fault. That's just the way I am. It's in my genes. I inherited it from my mother or father. I'm just German or Swedish." But the truth is that we live in a "blame game" society where what we do and how we act are never our own fault. We like to blame our temperament, our personality, how we treat others - - on everyone else, it's always somebody else's fault. At times I just want to shake these people and ask them, "What about God? What about the Holy Spirit? Don't you know how much you hurt people and that God wants to transform your attitudes, actions and personality?"

So let's look at ways Jesus **demonstrated** gentleness for us by looking at 3 events where Jesus showed/spoke gentleness. Keep this question in mind: "If we had these people in our church, how would we treat them?"

1. With that in mind, in the 4th chapter of the Gospel of John, we see His gentleness in the familiar story about the woman at the well. In verse 7 we're told, "When a Samaritan woman came to draw water, Jesus said to her, 'Will you give me a drink?'" And in **parentheses** it says, "His disciples had gone into town to buy food."

If the disciples had been there, this would have been a very complicated situation. But verse 9 says, "The Samaritan woman said to Him, 'You are a Jew and I am a Samaritan woman. How can you ask me for a drink?'" Then it says in parentheses, "For Jews do not associate with Samaritans."

You see, in the Jewish culture of Jesus' day, a man didn't talk publicly to a woman, and a Jew certainly didn't talk to Samaritans who were considered half-breeds. So if Jesus were a normal Jewish man, He would never have spoken to her. But Jesus deliberately broke down the barriers between them. And well, you know the rest of the story - she mocked Jesus and spoke unkindly to Him. Yet Jesus responded with patience and kindness and love.

It turned out that she was married 5 times and was currently living with a man. She was guilty, no question about that. But Jesus sees in her... more than just a woman who was married 5 times and now living with a guy. He saw a thirsty, hurting, needy person; so He offered her living water that would quench her thirst, not just for a moment, but forever. A living water that offered healing and wholeness to her broken life.

2. There's a similar story in the 8th chapter of the Gospel of John. A woman was caught in the act of adultery. She was guilty, and Jesus could have judged her harshly - she deserved to be condemned - she deserved punishment and judgment. But Jesus treated her gently, he wrote in the sand, and shamed her accusers into slinking away. Then he said to her, "Neither do I condemn you. Go and sin no more." Jesus didn't condemn her, but he didn't accept her destructive behaviors – he told her to go and sin no more.
  3. Then there's another story in Luke 19 about a man named Zacchaeus. You might remember a song about him, the wee little man who climbed up a sycamore tree to see Jesus. But he got his life purpose and self-esteem from stealing money, he was a crooked tax collector. But Jesus looked at him and said, "Zacchaeus, come down. I am coming to your house today." Soon we see a changed Zacchaeus and hear Jesus saying, "Today, salvation has come to this house."
- How would you deal with people like these in our church? A dishonest business man, immoral women, a woman who has lived with several men, searching for Mr. Right? How would you deal with them? Would you judge them harshly?

Would you tell them that they're not welcome here? **My point is that is exactly what the word Gentleness is dealing with hurt and broken in life, with grace.**

- **Why didn't Jesus condemn them?** Well, his motivation is very different. He didn't enable dysfunctional behaviors, but he didn't come just to judge either. Rather, **Jesus came to restore and to save.** We've all heard John 3:16, "For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whosoever believes in Him shall not perish but have eternal life." But verse 17 is equally important, it says, "God did not send His Son into the world to condemn the world, but to save the world through Him." We must never forget that the whole reason Jesus came was "to seek and to save the lost." This means to bring spiritual and emotional healing and wholeness.

**Now finally, let's look at how can we be gentle?** Galatians 6:1 says, "Brothers, if someone is caught in a sin." Notice Paul said, "if someone is caught." Like a lure or a trap. A person is caught and wrapped up in sin. Then he said, "You who are spiritual" in other words, you who are filled with the Holy Spirit, "restore him gently."  
***How can we be gentle? We are gentle when we use it to restore others!***

Let me explain... do you know that in our community... in fact in our church... there are many, many people whose lives are broken and falling apart? The problem is that no-one wants to let anyone know the condition their in! But just listen and you can hear people around you crying out because of their suffering! Have you noticed the mangled lives & relationships - all because people made bad choices?

Maybe someone made a bad business decision and their integrity is in question, their about to lose their job. Someone else made a bad moral choice and now they're infected with a sexually transmitted disease, and their marriage is in ruins. Another woman decided to abort her child and now is dealing with guilt. While other people made wrong choices about drugs or alcohol and they are trapped, they can't see a way to escape the bondage that holds them.

God is saying, "When you see people who are caught in sin - like the woman at the well, like the woman caught in adultery, like Zacchaeus" - He says, "When you see people like that... ***Christians, be gentle! Don't enable, but be careful, their lives***

*are fragile and can break even further.* They can be healed and restored. Jesus is saying, "Treat them with gentleness; hold them gently; show them how to repent and how to come back to me, because they are mine. I created them and I want to come to me. More than anything else, I want them to want me and the saving, healing grace I offer."

There is a prophecy about Jesus in Isaiah 40:11 that talks about how much he cares, it explains, "He tends His flock like a shepherd: He gathers the lambs in His arms & carries them close to His heart; He gently leads those that have young." This sounds like a nursery rhyme, you know, "Humpty Dumpty." "Humpty Dumpty sat on a wall. Humpty Dumpty had a great fall. And all the king's horses & all the king's men; couldn't put Humpty Dumpty together again."

I read once that the Humpty Dumpty nursery rhyme was originally written about broken and people. People who fell off the wall and people who found their lives smashed. And all the king's horses & all the king's men could not put them back together again. That is of course, except God, you see, the Lord can, and he does that by teaching us to be a church that knows how to be gentle! Gentle with each other, but gentle with the world, and then the Jesus starts using us to being healing to people.

**So we have two goals:**

**First of all, realize how gentle God has been with us,** remember how many times He could have condemned us, how many times He could have punished us. But gently, time and again, the Lord has reached out and taken us in His arms and holds us close to His heart. He gently leads us.

**Secondly, we need to realize how important it is that we become gentle care-givers to those around us who are hurt and need the grace of God** which is available through Jesus Christ. It's a harsh and cold world out there, and humanity needs to see that Jesus makes a difference. He brings our tempers and our temperaments and our personalities under control so we can participate in God's plan. Going back to verse 4 in today's scripture, through the glory and goodness of Jesus Christ, he has given us great and precious promises, so that we can participate in the divine nature and escape the destructive and corruption in the world caused by evil desires.

In past sermons, we have talked about how there is God's part in our faith life and there is our part in our faith life. Verse 5 explains that our part includes a step of faith, that we are to "...make every effort to add our faith goodness; and to goodness, knowledge; and to knowledge, self-control; and to self control, perseverance; and to perseverance, godliness; and to godliness, brotherly kindness; and to brotherly kindness, love." For if we do, God's part is to keep you from being ineffective and unproductive in your faith; as well as a rich welcome into the eternal kingdom of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.

Are you a gentle person this morning? Have you treated others with gentleness? God created them. God loves them - more than anything, God wants to restore them and wants to use you with your God given gentleness to bring them back to Him and bring healing and wholeness.

This morning, if you need the gentleness of Christ in your life, there is a gift awaiting you. Communion