

Gentleness

by Wayne Goff

The next trait in the list of the “fruit of the Spirit” is gentleness (NKJV) or meekness (KJV). It is an important characteristic in the New Testament.

It is listed in Galatians 5 as a “fruit of the Spirit,” and is one of the Lord’s beatitudes in Matthew 5. Furthermore, it is mentioned in at least nine New Testament books. “*Gentleness*” conveys more the **conduct** of the person, while “*meekness*” speaks of the heart’s **attitude**. There is no perfect English translation for the Greek concept, but perhaps meekness is best.

“Meekness,” sad to say, in the English language often conveys an idea of being weak, helpless and sometimes a bit cowardly. But the word in the New Testament **never** means these things! The Greek word carries the idea of **power under control**, and imparts the attitude of being less self-centered and less self-asserting than others. The Greeks used this word of the domesticated animal, and therefore the word suggested to them strength and control (see William Barclay, *The Gospel of Matthew*, pp. 96-97).

The two sole characters who were commended in the Bible for their **meekness** were Moses and Jesus. But Moses had the courage and power to grind the golden calf into powder and to make the idolatrous Israelites drink (Num. 12:3; Ex. 32:20)! Jesus likewise burned hot in anger against the Temple’s money changers (Matt. 11:29; Jn. 2:13-22). So, as Albert Barnes commented, “gentleness” is not “...surrender of our rights, or cowardice; but it is the opposite of sudden anger, of malice, of long-harbored vengeance. . . . It comes from a heart too great to be moved by little insults” (Barnes, *Albert Barnes’ Notes on the New Testament*, one volume, p. 20).

The “gentleness” or “meekness” of Christianity is based upon humility. It implies submission. Toward God, meekness accepts His dealings with us without murmur or resistance. It means that we are submissive to His will. We will learn and be made better because of our obedience to Him. In fact, James tells us that we are to receive the Word of God with meekness, James 1:21.

Toward man, meekness accepts opposition, insult, and provocation, as did Jesus Christ when He was mistreated by men, Hebrews 12:2-3. It is not characterized by self-will, envy, pride, presumption or obstinacy. It does not flash into anger, it does not answer again, but it takes harsh words gently and humbly.

In the New Testament, some special situations where “gentleness” or “meekness” is required include the following:

1. In giving others a defense of our faith, 1 Peter 3:15.
2. In correcting brothers or sisters in Christ who are in error, Gal. 6:1.
3. In the home, the wife is to be a “meek and quiet spirit,” 1 Peter 3:1-6.

In Galatians 5, “*meekness*” or “*gentleness*” is a fruit of the Spirit, and without any specific application, we may conclude that it is to depict the general conduct of the child of God. We cannot be proud, boastful and self-centered and be a Spirit-led Christian! But if we can develop the disposition of humanity and submission, then we can be taught how to behave, and to center our thoughts and lives on God and on others. Then we shall be a blessing to both God and man, just as was Jesus Christ, Luke 2:52.

293103