Faith vs. Flesh: The Fruit of the Spirit – Gentleness
September 7, 2025

Today is the second-last Sunday in the sermon series called, Faith vs. Flesh: The Fruit of the Spirit. This morning we will focus on the second-last characteristic of the fruit of the Spirit, which is gentleness. Here again are our focus verses. (Galatians 5:16-17, 19a, 22-23) So I say, walk by the Spirit, and you will not gratify the desires of the flesh. For the flesh desires what is contrary to the Spirit, and the Spirit what is contrary to the flesh. They are in conflict with each other, so that you do not do whatever you want. The acts of the flesh are obvious, but the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, forbearance, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control. (1 Timothy 1:17) Now to the King eternal, immortal, invisible, the only God, be honor and glory for ever and ever. Amen.

We have been working our way week-by-week through Paul's list of the Fruit of the Spirit. Each week we have taken the next fruit on the list. The first four characteristics of the Fruit of the Spirit are largely internal. They recognize the awesomeness of our God, and they significantly impact the way we feel about our God. Consequently, they also significantly impact the way we think and the way we feel. Those four characteristics are love, joy, peace, and forbearance (which might be summarized as "patient endurance"). Those first four characteristics positively impact us internally. They also fuel the next five characteristics, which are largely external. The final five characteristics are kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control. Because we have the internal blessings of love, joy, peace, and forbearance through our gracious God, we therefore demonstrate outwardly to God and others the blessings of kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control.

Today we consider the spiritual fruit of gentleness. This world could use more gentleness, couldn't it? It seems as time goes on that people are becoming less and less gentle, and more rough, cruel, and confrontational. Undoubtedly our lives could use more gentleness too. What a blessing gentle words and gentle actions and gentle touches are! It was gentleness that Jesus demonstrated over and over again in his earthly ministry as he tried to reach people with God's message of love. It was the gentleness of Jesus our Savior, living, dying, and rising for us, that won forgiveness for us and restored our relationship with God. It was also the gentleness of Jesus our Savior that makes heaven possible for sinners like you and me. And ultimately when we get to heaven with our Savior, we will finally be fully gentle forever, and we will be surrounded by others who are also fully gentle. How very wonderful that will be, to be in heaven with our Lord and all those loved ones who died in faith! How wonderful to be there with all of God's people who lived and died in Jesus!

But in the meantime, we are stuck here in this world that is anything but gentle. It seems as if a lot of value these days is put on being aggressive, on doing whatever is necessary to climb to the top of the pile. Whatever the goal may be, whether success in the workplace, or a political point of view or candidate, or an ideological viewpoint, all that seems to matter to many is to forcefully push their position. In fact, many view gentleness as weakness. They see gentleness as a poor and ineffective way to accomplish goals.

Therefore, they embrace aggressiveness, and they don't seem to care how many people are steamrolled along the way to their destination. We see it in the workplace. We see it in our associates, and maybe even in some of our friends and family members. We certainly see it on the news. We see it all around us. Consequently even as Christians we tend to think that this is the way we should act too. If nothing else, even if we don't like it, we might be tempted to adopt a lack of gentleness to survive and succeed. Even if we know better. Even if we refuse to formally follow the aggressiveness of the world, we still recognize that there have been many times when we were anything but gentle in our words or our actions with others. Sometimes we were rough with our coworkers or fellow students. Sometimes with other associates. Sometimes even with our friends. Sometimes even with our fellow church members. Sometimes it has been with our most loved ones that we failed to be gentle. Once again our shortcomings condemn us. Once again we have fallen far short of God's expectations for us. Once again our transgressions cry out to God that we are guilty. How desperately we need a Savior! How desperately we need Jesus!

It's interesting how the Lord was pictured in our Old Testament reading for today. In some other places in the Old Testament the Lord is pictured in powerful and intimidating ways. Think, for example, of his appearance on the top of Mt. Sinai – a glorious cloud and thunder and lightning. The view was terrifying to the people below. But when God appeared to the despondent prophet Elijah, the Lord took a very different appearance. (1 Kings 19:11-12) The LORD said, "Go out and stand on the mountain in the presence of the LORD, for the LORD is about to pass by." Then a great and powerful wind tore the mountains apart and shattered the rocks before the LORD, but the LORD was not in the wind. After the wind there was an earthquake, but the LORD was not in the earthquake. After the earthquake came a fire, but the LORD was not in the fire. And after the fire came a gentle whisper.

That's when Elijah left the cave. He recognized when he heard the gentle whisper that God was now passing by. And while the Lord is certainly a powerful, righteous and glorious God, in his essence, he is gentle, and loving, and merciful, and gracious, and kind. If you want proof of this, remember Zechariah's prophecy of how Jesus would enter Jerusalem just before his death on the foal of a donkey. Matthew quotes his words when Jesus fulfilled that prophecy. (Matthew 21:4-5) This took place to fulfill what was spoken through the prophet: "Say to Daughter Zion, 'See, your king comes to you, gentle and riding on a donkey, and on a colt, the foal of a donkey.' "

Jesus knew he was about to die for the transgressions of the world. Did he enter Jerusalem with shouts and the swinging of a sword? No, but gentle and riding on a donkey, and on a colt, the foal of a donkey. Or consider the well-known words of the prophet Isaiah as he described Jesus in his substitutionary role for us. (Isaiah 53:6-8) We all, like sheep, have gone astray, each of us has turned to our own way; and the LORD has laid on him (Jesus!) the iniquity of us all. He was oppressed and afflicted, yet he did not open his mouth; he was led like a lamb to the slaughter, and as a sheep before its shearers is silent, so he did not open his mouth. By oppression and judgment he was taken away. … He was cut off from the land of the living; for the transgression of my people he was punished.

The only way you and I could be freed from the penalty we earned with our sin. The only way you and I could escape an eternity in hell. The only way you and I could be saved from the just punishment from God was if Jesus silently and gently took our place. So Jesus took our place, in the judgement hall, at the whipping block, under the weight of the cross, then nailed to the cross, then abandoned by his Heavenly Father to suffer the horrors of hell itself, and finally to give his life up and die. All of it Jesus endured in our place as our Substitute so that we could be forgiven and saved. And because gentle Jesus took our place in all these things, we are forgiven by God and we are saved. That means that instead of languishing in hell, we will now rejoice in heaven, forever and ever. That means that you and I will be some of those people pictured in Revelation who are before the throne of God and worshipping our Savior. In fact, everyone who places their confidence in Jesus and all that he did for us in our place will one day be there in the halls of heaven, celebrating a salvation they don't deserve, but which is theirs because they believed in Jesus. And that is a wonderful thing to consider. We will one day be there in heaven, in the very presence of the only God, realizing we shouldn't be there, but rejoicing that we are because of Jesus.

Listen to how that place is described by the Lord in Revelation. (Revelation 21:3-4, 7) And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, "Look! God's dwelling place is now among the people, and he will dwell with them. They will be his people, and God himself will be with them and be their God. 'He will wipe every tear from their eyes. There will be no more death' or mourning or crying or pain, for the old order of things has passed away. …Those who are victorious will inherit all this, and I will be their God and they will be my children." And in the very next verse, the Lord makes it clear that the evil people will never enter that place. No one who is ungentle will ever reach the gentle ones who will live there. No one and nothing that causes grief or hardship is allowed in that glorious paradise. What a joyous place to anticipate as Christians! But that wonderful blessing of heaven that Jesus secured for us isn't the only wonderful blessing Jesus gives us. Jesus didn't just provide us with an incredible future to look forward to enjoying one day. Jesus also provides us with an incredible existence in the here and now as well.

Listen to his own words. We heard them in our Gospel reading for the day. (Matthew 11:28-30) "Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy and my burden is light." Gentle Jesus issues us an invitation to come to him for rest. Jesus says to us, "All of you who are weary" of the aggressiveness of the people of this world. "All who are weary" of trying to solve all of your problems all by yourself. "All who are weary" of the hardships of life. "All who are weary" from the non-stop rat races you are running. "All who are weary" from the worries, the stress, and the anxieties in your life. "Come to me and I will give you rest." Jesus also says to us, "All of you who are burdened" with pain of any kind. "All who are burdened" with health issues or addictions of any kind. "All who are burdened" with grief, or sadness, or mourning. "All who are burdened" with difficulties that seem to have no answers. "All who are burdened" with insecurities and low self-esteem.

“Come to me and I will give you rest. All who are weary of trying to earn your own way into heaven. “All who are weary” of listening to Satan’s lies and his unending temptations. “All who are burdened” with guilt and shame from past mistakes. “All who are burdened” with ongoing sin and the impact that sin has in your life. “Come to me and I will give you rest. I am gentle and humble in heart” Jesus says to us. “Come to me … and you will find rest for your souls.” Brothers and sisters, everything we need, Jesus can and will provide. Every answer we need. Every material or financial thing we need. Every physical, mental, and emotional boost we need. And especially, every spiritual blessing we need, Jesus can and will provide. In fact, the Lord has already given us incredible spiritual blessings. The Lord has given us the powerful and life-changing Scriptures. The Lord has given us the sacraments of Baptism and the Lord’s Supper. The Lord has given us faith through the Gospel, and thereby forgiveness and salvation.

And the Lord has given us the wonderful blessings of the fruit of the Spirit. Those blessings that impact us internally like love, joy, peace, and forbearance. And those blessings which flow outwardly from those internal blessings. Traits such as kindness, goodness, faithfulness, and gentleness. The fruit of gentleness is a significant trait in a world filled with ungentle people. The world needs more gentleness, more gentle leaders, more gentle citizens, more gentle men, and more gentle women. This is something God wants his children to exhibit. In fact, the Holy Spirit stresses this repeatedly in the Scriptures. When speaking about Christian leaders, the Holy Spirit says this: (1 Timothy 6:11) But you, man of God, flee from all this, and pursue righteousness, godliness, faith, love, endurance and gentleness. When speaking about Christian citizens, the Spirit says this: (Titus 3:1-2) Remind the people to be subject to rulers and authorities, to be obedient, to be ready to do whatever is good, to slander no one, to be peaceable and considerate, and always to be gentle toward everyone. When speaking to Christians in general, the Holy Spirit writes: (Colossians 3:12) Therefore, as God’s chosen people, holy and dearly loved, clothe yourselves with compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience. And (Philippians 4:5) Let your gentleness be evident to all. The Lord is near. How gentle are we to be? (Ephesians 4:2) Be completely humble and gentle; be patient, bearing with one another in love. These aren’t the only examples. The trait of gentleness is emphasized throughout the Bible, in both the Old and the New Testament. So it should come as no surprise that this is part of the fruit of the Spirit. This is something God wants his people to do, so he empowers them to do so through the faith and the fruit of faith that the Holy Spirit produces.

How privileged we are to be gentle now in a world that needs more gentleness. And finally, how blessed we are when the Lord calls us home, to be gentle forever in heaven, in the very presence of our gentle and gracious Savior. Yes, how very privileged and blessed we are!