

MBC – 4/12/2015 – Pastor Doug Thompson  
“Patient, Gentle, Graciousness”  
Philippians 4:5

- Philippians 4:4–7 <sup>4</sup>Rejoice in the Lord always; again I will say, rejoice. <sup>5</sup>Let your reasonableness be known to everyone. The Lord is at hand; <sup>6</sup>do not be anxious about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God. <sup>7</sup>And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.

**Intro: “How are you known?”**

Look with me at—

- <sup>5</sup>Let your reasonableness be known to everyone. The Lord is at hand;

Do you notice that in v.6, we are to let our *requests* be *made known* to God. But in v.5, we are to let our *reasonableness* be *known* to people. God should know you from your constant prayers to Him. People should know you for your reasonableness, or as I’m going to define it this morning: *your patient, gentle, graciousness*. Is that how people would describe you? How are you known to everyone?

- Are you even known as a Christian? I remember years ago I was in at a mall and heard some behind me yell out, “Hey Christian!” I turned around and saw a guy I had known years earlier. I couldn’t remember his name, and he couldn’t remember mine – but I’m glad he remembered I was a Christian!

Isn’t it interesting how people *want* other people to know them? “I have a good sense of humor and everyone likes me. . . I get along with people until they cross me or my friends, and then, look out. . . (This is the self-description I hear often:) “I’m blunt and honest. You might not agree with me, but at least you always know where I stand!” A Christian should never want to be for being a person like that. That’s just self-centered pride. People don’t need to know where you stand on everything. And I guarantee you, they don’t care.

But when we come to v.5, God isn’t commanding Christians to be known for their “unflinching, uncompromising, doctrinal dogmatism.” Or their boldness. Or their passion. Those are good things – in their place. But we are *commanded* to be known to others for our patient, gentle, graciousness.

Martin Luther said about this passage:

- “Observe the beautiful aptness of the words, “Let your forbearance be known unto all men.” You may ask: “How can one be known to all men? Must we boast of our forbearance, proclaiming it to everyone?” God forbid the latter. Paul does not say, boast of and proclaim your forbearance. He says, let it be known by your behavior. Exercise forbearance in your deeds before men’ not think or speak of it, but show it in your conduct. Thus men generally must see and grasp it – must have experience of it . . . the mouth of the fault-finder will be stopped by the fact that all men know your forbearance.”

Of course, Martin Luther was not known for his patient, gentle, graciousness. I have a coffee cup with some of his sharpest insults – unfortunately, this is what Luther was better known for.

- “I would not smell the foul odor of your name.”
- “What pig sties could compare in goings-on with you?”
- “May God punish you, I say, you shameless, barefaced liar, devil’s mouthpiece, who dares to spit out, before God, before all the angels, before the dear sun, before all the world, your devil’s filth.”
- “You seem to me to be a real masterpiece of the devil’s art.”
- “For you are an excellent person, as skillful, clever, and versed in Holy Scripture as a cow in a walnut tree or a sow on a harp.”
- “Snot nose!”
- “You sophistic worms, grasshoppers, locusts, frogs and lice!”
- “You are a brothel-keeper and the devil’s daughter in hell.”
- “You are desperate, thorough arch-rascals, murderers, traitors, liars, the very scum of all the most evil people on earth. You are full of all the worst devils in hell – full, full, and so full that you can do nothing but vomit, throw, and blow out devils!”
- “But I love you in the Lord.”

And I can’t repeat his best lines! Yes, God used Martin Luther mightily to bring the church back to the Scriptures and the Gospel, but *in spite of* his crudeness, and lack of gentleness, not because of it. God uses crooked sticks to draw straight lines, but we can’t let Luther off the hook. What might he have accomplished if he had been known for his patient, gentle, graciousness?

### I. What does it mean?

Now the first thing we have to do is define this word, *reasonableness*. The Gk. word is *epieikes*. It shows up 5 times in the NT. In the ESV, it’s translated as “gentle” 4 times, and here as *reasonableness*. Your translation might say gentleness, your gentle spirit, moderation, modesty, forbearance, gentle and kind, graciousness. The Amplified says “*your unselfishness, your consideration, your forbearing spirit;*” I like the word forbearance, because the Gk. word has the idea of restraint and self-control. The Message paraphrase says this—

- Philippians 4:5 <sup>5</sup>Make it as clear as you can to all you meet that you’re on their side, working with them and not against them.

So you start to get a feel for this word. It’s how we treat people. I want to use 3 words together to translate it: *patient, gentle, graciousness*. All of these are directed toward other people. This is a people word.

**1.) Patience** – you are waiting on God to work in others, the same way you are waiting on Him to work on you. You cut people slack. You hold back, you bite your tongue. When people expect you to blow up at them – maybe your wife, or your kids, you surprise them because you control yourself. That’s patience. You have submitted people, and circumstance and your own rights to God, so when someone pushes your buttons, your concern is how you can help the person or heal the relationship.

- If you want to have an interesting week, decide that you are going to preach or do a Bible study or Sunday School class – on *gentle, patient, graciousness!* Just see what fun God has planned for you during that week! Notice the people God puts in your path! I’ve had so much *impatience* exposed in my own heart this week. And at the root of my impatience is lack humility: Who am I to think that people should meet my expectations when I am a sinner just like they are? I don’t meet God’s expectations, but He is so patient with me.

Oh, listen to what I’m about to say: It’s *only* when God’s patience towards you, *grips you*, that you can be patient with others. Otherwise, you are just trying to crank out what is a fruit of the Spirit – in the flesh. And your flesh can’t carry that load. Look at the Scripture in your bulletin—

- Colossians 3:12–13 <sup>12</sup>Put on then, as God’s chosen ones, holy and beloved, compassionate hearts, kindness, humility, meekness, and patience, <sup>13</sup>bearing with one another and, if one has a complaint against another, forgiving each other; *as the Lord has forgiven you*, so you also must forgive.

That’s the key right there – to be overwhelmed with God’s patient mercy toward you in Christ. And this is how we are to be known to everyone – for being a patient person. And how much more if you are shepherding God’s flock—

- Years ago Janice and I knew a dear godly man, Dr. Fred Barshaw. He was a teacher, preacher, counselor, author. One of his sons went to Hawaii to pastor a church and he called his dad one day for counsel. He launched into all the problems at the church how the people wouldn’t serve, they were unmotivated, immature, they gossip, and on and on. . . Finally he said, “So dad, what you think?” His dad said, “I think, if that’s the way you feel about God’s children, then need to get out of the ministry!” He got the message and never forgot it.
- J. C. Ryle said, “Our Lord has many weak children in his family, many dull pupils in his school, many raw soldiers in his army, many lame sheep in his flock. Yet he bears with them all, and casts none away. Happy is that Christian who has learned to do likewise with his brethren.”

**2.) Gentleness** – If you want just one word to translate the word Paul uses here, *gentleness* probably comes the closest. Gentleness is being *careful* – and *thoughtful* – in the way we treat others, and especially, the way we talk to others. And the words that we use. It’s being soft and tender.

- Are you careful in the way you treat people? Do you think before you react – and before you speak? Think about the way you would handle a fragile glass Christmas ornament that has been in your family for generations – that’s the way we should people because people are fragile and hearts are breakable.

The opposite of gentleness is being harsh, rough, insensitive, overbearing. Christ's followers should never be known for being like that. *Love* "is not arrogant or rude. It does not insist on its own way; it is not irritable or resentful." They will know we our Christians by our gentle love.

Men, we especially need the Spirit's power to make us gentle. We don't come by it naturally. We don't have those nurturing hormones that our wives have. And we can tend to equate gentleness with weakness. We like passages like—

- 1 Corinthians 16:13 that says, "Act like men, be strong!" But we miss the very next verse: "14Let all that you do be done in love."

Gentleness is not weakness, it's strength under the Spirit's control. Someone said, "Rudeness, yelling, anger, and swearing are a weak man's *imitation* of strength." No man was ever stronger than Jesus, and no man was ever more gentle. A real man is like Jesus – strong as a lion, but gentle as a lamb.

Gentleness will win people over when nothing else will. Let me quickly show you 5 kinds of people that gentleness can win over. See if some people come to mind in these categories—

#### **1. Those in sin.**

- Gal 6:1 Brothers, if anyone is caught in any transgression, you who are spiritual should restore him in a spirit of *gentleness*.

#### **2. Those in error.**

- 2Ti 2:24-26 And the Lord's servant must not be quarrelsome but kind to everyone, able to teach, patiently enduring evil, correcting his opponents with *gentleness*. God may perhaps grant them repentance leading to a knowledge of the truth, and they may come to their senses and escape from the snare of the devil, after being captured by him to do his will.

#### **3. Those who are questioning.**

- 1Pe 3:15 but in your hearts honor Christ the Lord as holy, always being prepared to make a defense to anyone who asks you for a reason for the hope that is in you; yet do it with *gentleness* and respect,

#### **4. Those with whom you are unequally yoked.**

- 1Pe 3:1 Likewise, wives, be subject to your own husbands, so that even if some do not obey the word, they may be won without a word by the conduct of their wives, (v.4) . . . the imperishable beauty of a *gentle* [same word] and quiet spirit, which in God's sight is very precious.

#### **E. Those who are angry.**

- Pro 15:1 A gentle answer turns away wrath, But a harsh word stirs up anger.

Have you seen a harsh word stir up anger? And have you also seen a gentle word turn away wrath? We are to be known for being patient, gentle and —

**3.) Graciousness** – This goes beyond patience and gentleness. Grace means *gift*, doesn't it? Something undeserved and freely given, like God's mercy and forgiveness, right? Christian, you are to be *known* for treating people with grace – regardless of how they have treated you, or what they deserve – you grace them: give them something good and helpful. Lighten their load, lift their burden. Seek their edification. That's what Paul said in—

- Ephesians 4:29 <sup>29</sup>Let no corrupting talk come out of your mouths, but only such as is good for building up, as fits the occasion, that it may give grace to those who hear.

Isn't that a beautiful thought: that a person would leave a conversation with you, built up, encouraged – closer to Christ than they were before? But you have to be walking with Christ to be ready to *grace* people when the opportunity comes—

- Colossians 4:5–6 <sup>5</sup>Walk in wisdom toward outsiders, making the best use of the time. <sup>6</sup>Let your speech always be gracious, seasoned with salt, so that you may know how you ought to answer each person.

I missed several opportunities this week, but by God's grace, I was also ready for some:

- I was at Mugshots when I saw a brother and asked how he was doing. He said that his wife was struggling in pain, and in her walk with God, and he said, "I actually prayed last night that I would see you on your walk so that I could ask you to pray for her!" I told him that I would pray, but then I walked outside with him and his wife was standing there, so I put my arms around them both and prayed for them right on the sidewalk. She was so grateful and so touched.
- A couple days later I was at the checkout at Hardesters chatting with one of the checkers and she happened to say, "Well nobody's perfect!" I said, "Jesus Christ is perfect, and when we trust in Him, God gives us His perfection. And He treats us as He treats His own Son!" She said, "I'm so glad you came here this morning and told me that. It's just what I needed to hear." Another sister heard the conversation, and said she was encouraged too!

Ask yourself: the way you *treat* people, the way you *talk* to people; are you helping or hurting? Building up or tearing down? Graciousness is giving more than just what is necessary – isn't that what Jesus said Christians are to be known for? When someone asks for your shirt, you give them your coat. When they asks to go one mile, you go two. That's grace. And that is the way God always, always, treats His children. *Always*.

### III. How can you become more patient, gentle, and gracious?

#### ***A. Remember: you are to be like Jesus.***

Jesus is always our perfect model to follow in this. Listen to the patient, gentle, graciousness in Jesus' invitation to sinners—

- Matthew 11:28–30 <sup>28</sup>Come to me, all who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. <sup>29</sup>Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. <sup>30</sup>For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light."

Jesus relieves our burdens! He gives us rest. You know people like that: when you spend time with them you feel refreshed. Your load is lighter. And you know people who do the opposite: you spend time with them and you leave with more stress, and not only do have the burden you had before, but they have added theirs to yours!

But notice that Jesus says, “*Learn from Me,*” this is a command. And when we study Jesus, and watch how He deals with people what do we learn? *He is gentle and lowly in heart.*” I believe this is the only place in the Gospels where Jesus described Himself, and of all that He could have said that we should learn and imitate, He said, “*I am gentle and lowly in heart.*”

- There is nothing more like Jesus than gentleness. Gentleness should be the calling card of His followers. What we are *known* for. Because that is what Jesus is known for.

I want us to take a moment to learn gentleness from Jesus. Turn with me to Matthew 12, to one of my favorite passages about Jesus—

Jesus had just healed a man with a withered hand in a synagogue, on the Sabbath. And instead of the Pharisees rejoicing with one of their own, they were furious that Jesus had broken their man-made laws against healing on the Sabbath. They wanted to kill Jesus. So blind. So hard-hearted. And this is what the Holy Spirit inspired Matthew to write in response—

- Matthew 12:15–21 <sup>15</sup>Jesus, aware of this, withdrew from there. And many followed him, and he healed them all <sup>16</sup>and ordered them not to make him known. <sup>17</sup>This was to fulfill what was spoken by the prophet Isaiah: <sup>18</sup>“Behold, my servant whom I have chosen, my beloved with whom my soul is well pleased. I will put my Spirit upon him, and he will proclaim justice to the Gentiles. <sup>19</sup>He will not quarrel or cry aloud, nor will anyone hear his voice in the streets; <sup>20</sup>*a bruised reed he will not break, and a smoldering wick he will not quench*, until he brings justice to victory; <sup>21</sup>and in his name the Gentiles will hope.”

A reed is a slender, frail, hollow stalk. In Jesus’ time they used reeds for weaving baskets, but if the reed was crushed, it was useless. You know what it’s like if you have a tulip, or a lily, or an amaryllis, and the stem gets broken – there’s no bringing it back.

- And a smoldering wick is one that is about to go out. It isn’t putting out light, just smoke. It’s just polluting the air, so you want to pinch it and put it out.

But God isn’t talking about flowers, He’s talking about people here. People like you and me. We are like little children, we’re “sinners, poor and needy, bruised and broken by the fall.” We are weak, discouraged, and we come to Jesus because we have no One else who can help us.

- Bruised reeds are damaged goods. Failures. The Pharisees had no use for people like that, except to exploit them. A lot of churches today have no use for people like that. They don’t want bruised reeds – but Jesus does. He doesn’t kick you to the curb, He comes along side with gentleness, and love, to encourage you, and restore you. Where you are weak, that is exactly where He promises to be strong! He won’t cast you aside. He will hold you close and He will heal you.

And the smoldering wick – these are people who seem to be more bother than they are worth. They offend people with their personalities. They step on toes without meaning to. They're a liability, not an asset! The world would never pick them for their team.

But Jesus does! He brings them back in the game. He doesn't snuff them out, He fans the flame!

The very ones that the Pharisees ridiculed, or ignored, were the ones Jesus said would be great in His kingdom. He is kind, and gentle with those who are needy, and humble, and poor in spirit, and who come to Him to save them, and love them, and make them useful for Him. Jesus said, *"Whoever comes to Me I will never cast out."*

***I want you to see the patient, gentle, graciousness of Jesus in the Gospels.***

- We hear it when He spoke to that woman caught in adultery; *"Woman, where are those who accuse you? Neither do I accuse you. Go and sin no more."*
- We hear it again in Jesus' voice when He was talking to the woman at the well. Remember, He asked her where her husband was. That was a loving thing to do, because she would never see Him as her Savior until she saw her sinfulness. But when she changed the subject, Jesus didn't keep pressing her, and rubbing her face in her sins. She left that conversation and evangelized the whole town.
- When He saw the multitudes, He cared that they were hungry and He had compassion on them because they were like distressed, downcast sheep without a shepherd.
- When a poor, outcast leper came to Jesus and said, "Lord, if you will, you can make me clean," how did Jesus respond? "IF? IF?" No, He said, *"I am willing, be clean."*
- He was so approachable and tender that mothers would ask Him to hold and bless their babies. And He picked up little kids and sat them on His lap.
- He defended a woman who anointed Him with oil, when His own disciples thought it was an embarrassing waste.
- When tax-collectors were universally despised, Jesus invited Matthew to be one of His followers, and He said to shorty tax-collector Zacchaeus who climbed a tree to see Him: "Zacchaeus, come on down here, I'm coming to your house today!"
- Think about how patiently Jesus dealt with His disciples who messed up so much! And how gracious He was when James, John, and Peter fell asleep instead of praying when they were just a few hours from the cross. Jesus covered for them: *"The spirit is willing, but the flesh is weak."*
- Even when He was hanging on the cross in indescribable pain, He asks John to take care of His mother, Mary. And then asks His Father to forgive those who are crucifying Him!
- After Jesus' resurrection, Peter was a broken man. He had denied His Lord and His best friend – three times. He really felt like a bruised reed and a smoldering wick, but Jesus didn't put out the

spark, do you remember? “Peter, do you love Me? Then feed My sheep!” I.e., “I still have work for you to do for Me, Peter. Get back in the game! I’m not done with you yet.”

No lecture, no finger-pointing. Just patience, gentleness, and graciousness. And that’s what every one of His followers are to be known for. That’s why we need to learn from Jesus by spending time with Jesus in His Word – especially the Gospels.

***B. Remember: You are not like Jesus.***

I was at a Ligonier Conference 15 years ago in Orlando. And during a Q&A session with the main speakers, someone asked the question of Doug Wilson – well-known pastor and author: “In your message, you spoke about love and compassion, but then you blasted and mocked pastors in the Seeker-sensitive movement. So where was the love?”

All eyes were on Doug Wilson. How would he answer? He said, “I’m just being like Jesus. Jesus blasted the hypocritical religious leaders of His day. He didn’t cut them any slack. He was sarcastic and cutting, so that’s what I do. I’m just being like Jesus.”

People applauded. And I’m thinking, “One big difference here, Doug Wilson: You’re *not* Jesus!”

- You see, when I’m seeking to be like Jesus, I need to remember a huge difference between me and Jesus: and it’s sin, in *me*!

Now think with me here: When the Bible exhorts Christ’s followers to be gentle, and patient, and gracious, it’s grounded in the fact that we are forgiven *sinners*. I.e., it’s not grounded in how we are *like* Jesus, but in how we are *unlike* Jesus – we are sinners, just like the people we are tempted to be impatient, or harsh, or sarcastic, with. So because we are just forgiven sinners, we must extend that same grace to other sinners—

- *as the Lord has forgiven you, so you also must forgive.*

That was Jesus’ point in His parable in Matt.18, a slave owed his king an unpayable fortune – but the king cancelled his entire debt, and then that slave went out and choked a fellow slave who owed him pocket change! The king hauled in the first slave and said this: “*You wicked slave, I forgave you all that debt because you pleaded with me. Should you not also have had mercy on your fellow slave, in the same way that I had mercy on you?*” (Matthew 18:32–33)

- You are *not* like Jesus: and when someone offends you or hurts you, it’s sinner to sinner. You need to treat them the way Jesus has treated you—with patient, gentle, graciousness.

You can never go too far emulating Jesus’ compassion and gentleness and tenderness. But when I, as sinner, seek to be like Jesus in His anger, indignation, or sarcasm – I need to be very careful. Because I’m not Jesus. In my flesh I’m wired to put down stupid people, and slice and dice with my words.

- But I’m always safe to put down the bullhorn, lay down the sword, and pick up the towel.

But Paul himself gives us the incentive here—



**C. Remember: the Lord is at hand.**

- Philippians 4:5 <sup>5</sup>Let your patient, gentle, graciousness be known to everyone. The Lord is at hand. (or, the Lord is near)

Now this could mean that Jesus is near to us, close to us. And that's true. "Lo I am with you always!" So when you remember that Jesus is always with you, always near to you, watching and listening – are you going to yell at your kids? Or be rude to your wife? Or honk at the person who turned right in front of and didn't use their turn signal and call them a 'moron' . . . ?

- No. Not as long as you sense how near Jesus is to you, and how treating others like that is so unlike Jesus. If you want to be more patient, gentle and gracious, remember that you are always in the presence of the Lord Jesus.

But I think that Paul probably meant this eschatologically, i.e., Jesus' return is imminent. He could come back at any time. So what do you want to be doing when Jesus returns? What do you want to be saying when Jesus returns?

- And also, if you live in the light of Jesus' return, doesn't it put all the little petty things that set you off into an eternal perspective? So the guy turned in front of you and didn't use his turn signal – the Lord is at hand. And you will become like Him and spend all of eternity with Him. You can restrain your horn and your lips! You can be patient.

And the other side of that coin is that you can also trust that God will deal with people. You can leave vengeance in the hands of God, because He will repay. That's what the Word says.

This was why James exhorted Christians who are mistreated and exploited by others to keep their cool. Look—

- James 5:7–9 <sup>7</sup>Be patient, therefore, brothers, until the coming of the Lord. See how the farmer waits for the precious fruit of the earth, being patient about it, until it receives the early and the late rains. <sup>8</sup>You also, be patient. Establish your hearts, for the coming of the Lord is at hand. <sup>9</sup>Do not grumble against one another, brothers, so that you may not be judged; behold, the Judge is standing at the door.

How are you known by others? What do you need to pray about – to be more like Jesus? It's not just your reputation that is at stake. It's His.

Let me close by telling you about a 19th century preacher named Richard Weaver. He had been a professional, bare-fisted boxer. And he was a coal miner who was raised in Shropshire, a brutal hard man. But through the testimony of some Christians and especially his own wife he was transformed by the grace of God. His early months as a young Christian working underground with his old companions were not an easy time as they challenged his faith in many ways. One day he had an argument with a workman called Tom who tried to take Richard's coal wagon from the boy who was assisting Richard Weaver, but Richard was too strong for Tom. The ensuing encounter between the two men is told in Richard Weaver's own words:-

Then said Tom: "I've a good mind to smack thee on the face." "Well," I said, "if that will do thee any good, thou canst do it." So he struck me on the face. I turned the other cheek to him, and said, "Strike again." He struck again and again, till he had struck me five times. I turned my cheek for the sixth stroke; but he turned away cursing. I shouted after him: "The Lord forgive thee, for I do ;" and "the Lord save thee."

This was on a Saturday; and when I went home from the coal-pit my wife saw my face was swollen, and asked what was the matter with it. I said: "I've been fighting, and I have given a man a good thrashing." She burst out weeping, and said, "Oh, Richard, what made you fight?" Then I told her all about it; and she thanked the Lord I had not struck back. But the Lord had struck, and his blows have more effect than man's. Monday came. The devil began to tempt me, saying, "The other men will laugh at thee for allowing Tom to treat thee as he did on Saturday." I cried, "Get thee behind me, Satan;" and went on my way to the coal-pit.

Tom was the first man I saw. I said, "Good morning," but got no reply. He went down first. When I got down, I was surprised to see him sitting on the wagon road waiting for me. When I came to him he burst into tears, and said: "Richard, will you forgive me for striking you?" "I have forgiven thee," said I. "Ask God to forgive thee. The Lord bless thee." I gave him my hand, and we went each to his work. After a time I heard some one coming towards me, sobbing as he came. It was Tom. He said he could not rest until he felt sure he was forgiven. He told me he had sent his wife to our house to ask my forgiveness on the Sunday, but I was out. "Oh Richard," he said, "do you really forgive me?" I said, "Yes; the Lord bless thee." We got down on our knees. He who had wounded was graciously pleased to hear our cry and to heal; and Tom went back to his work rejoicing. Before parting from this incident I should say that the Lord had given me an exceedingly joyous Sunday. He had also on that day given me to see some others of my class turning to the Lord. Would I have had either of these blessings had I struck back on the Saturday?