Gentleness as a Christian Virtue

# Introduction

A **gentle** answer turns away wrath, but a harsh word stirs up anger (Proverbs 15:1)

But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, **gentleness**, self-control; against such things there is no law. (Galatians 5:23)

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. (Matthew 11:28-30)

Therefore put away all filthiness and rampant wickedness and receive with [**gentleness**] the implanted word, which is able to save your souls. (James 1:21)

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. (Titus 3:1-2)

Be completely humble and **gentle**; be patient, bearing with one another in love. Make every effort to keep the unity of the Spirit through the bond of peace. (Ephesians 4:2-3)

## Social Media

## Toxic Masculinity

“In a patriarchal society, masculine gender identity is often moulded by violently toxic stereotypes. A dominant, winning, oppressive masculinity model is imposed on babies at birth. Attitudes, languages and actions end up progressively conforming to a macho virility ideal that removes vulnerability and dependence. Any possible reference to femininity is aggressively banned, as it is considered a threat against the complete affirmation of a masculine prototype that allows no divergencies. Toxic masculinity, in fact, nourishes abuse, violence and sexism.”

## Complexity

Universal Application?

1 Cor 4:21 What do you wish? Shall I come to you with a rod, or with love in a spirit of gentleness?

Translation?

 *praütēs* (πραΰτης)and *epikeia* (ἐπιείκεια)

Matthew 11:28-9 “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” (ESV)

Matthew 11:29 Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am …

KJV: *meek* and lowly

RSV: *gentle* and lowly

DBY: *meek* and lowly

DRA: *meek* and humble

NRSV: *gentle* and humble

NJB: *gentle* and humble

NAB: *meek* and humble

NASB: *gentle* and humble

NIV: *gentle* and humble

NET: *gentle* and humble

ESV: *gentle* and lowly

CSB: *gentle* and humble

Matthew 5:5 Blessed are the *meek*, for they shall inherit the earth (ESV)

Matthew 11:29 Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am *gentle* and lowly

(ESV)

Matthew 21:5 Say to the daughter of Zion, 'Behold, your king is coming to you, *humble*, and mounted on a donkey, on a colt, the foal of a beast of burden’ (ESV)

*praütēs*

A calm which is not overcome by hostility, misfortune, or emptions, but responds gently and with composure: it is an imperturbable gentleness or mildness, perhaps composure, serenity, forbearance, or tolerance. (Walker)

*epikeia*

Definite behavioral choices which involve declining to act with the full rights of one’s person. (Walker)

1 Corinthians 10:1 ESV: Paul, myself entreat you, by the meekness (*praütēs*) and gentleness (*epikeia*) of Christ.

Related to other characteristics:

 Humility

 Self-Control

 Patience

 Kindness

 Niceness

# The Gentle Character of God

Psalm 85:5 (LXX): Because it is you, O Lord, who are kind and gentle and abounding in mercy to all who call on you.

Exodus 34:6-7 The LORD passed before him and proclaimed, "The LORD, the LORD, a God merciful and gracious, slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love and faithfulness, keeping steadfast love for thousands, forgiving iniquity and transgression and sin, but who will by no means clear the guilty, visiting the iniquity of the fathers on the children and the children's children, to the third and the fourth generation."

1 Sam 12:22 For the Lord will not cast away his people for his great name's sake, because the Lord graciously took you to him for a people.

Isaiah 40:11 He will tend his flock like a shepherd; he will gather the lambs in his arms; he will carry them in his bosom, and *gently* lead those that are with young.

[MT: “carry at his breast”; LXX: “comfort those that are with young”.]

Jeremiah 31:20 Is Ephraim my dear son? Is he my darling child? For as often as I speak against him, I do remember him still. Therefore my heart yearns for him; I will surely have mercy on him, declares the LORD.

Romans 5:8 God shows his love for us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us.

# The Gentle Character of Jesus

Matthew 11: 29-30 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. For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light.

Matthew 12:17-21 This was to fulfill what was spoken by the prophet Isaiah: “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. He will not quarrel or cry aloud, nor will anyone hear his voice in the streets; a bruised reed he will not break, and a smouldering wick he will not quench, until he brings justice to victory; and in his name the Gentiles will hope.”

Matthew 21:5 Say to the daughter of Zion, ‘Behold, your king is coming to you, humble, and mounted on a donkey, on a colt, the foal of a beast of burden.’

Matthew 23:37 O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, the city that kills the prophets and stones those who are sent to it! How often would I have gathered your children together as a hen gathers her brood under her wings, and you were not willing!

Luke 23:34 And Jesus said, “Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do.”

Matthew 5:39-48

The portrait of Jesus as a king, *praus* and humble of heart (11:29-30) […] implies rejection of anger, withdrawal from hostility, and refusal to meet aggression with aggression. Far from being evidence of passive servitude, Jesus’ own words to the servant [“Put your sword back into its place. For all who take the sword will perish by the sword”] and the crowd at the arrest and his prayers to God in Gethsemane indicate that humility is part of choosing obedient sonship to the will of God, even to the point of death. Jesus’ sovereign bearing is seen in contrast to the demeanor of tyrannical Gentile rulers dominating their subjects or Herod’s anger causing the slaughter of the innocents. (Good)

# The Gentle Character of the Christian

## Fruit of the Spirit

Galatians 5:22-23 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.

James 1: 18 Of his own will he brought us forth by the word of truth, that we should be a kind of firstfruits of his creatures. 19 Know this, my beloved brothers: let every person be quick to hear, slow to speak, slow to anger; 20 for the anger of man does not produce the righteousness of God. 21 Therefore put away all filthiness and rampant wickedness and receive with [*praütēs*] the implanted word, which is able to save your souls. 22 But be doers of the word, and not hearers only, deceiving yourselves.

 ESV: ‘meekness’

 NIV, CSB: ‘humbly’

James 313 Who is wise and understanding among you? By his good conduct let him show his works in the [*praütēs*] of wisdom. 14 But if you have bitter jealousy and selfish ambition in your hearts, do not boast and be false to the truth. 15 This is not the wisdom that comes down from above, but is earthly, unspiritual, demonic. 16 For where jealousy and selfish ambition exist, there will be disorder and every vile practice. 17 But the wisdom from above is first pure, then peaceable, gentle, open to reason, full of mercy and good fruits, impartial and sincere. 18 And a harvest of righteousness is sown in peace by those who make peace.

ESV: ‘meekness’

NIV: ‘humility’

CSB: ‘gentleness’

Galatians 6:1 Brothers, if anyone is caught in any transgression, you who are spiritual should restore him in a spirit of gentleness. Keep watch on yourself, lest you too be tempted.

Galatians 6:10 So then, as we have opportunity, let us do good to everyone, and especially to those who are of the household of faith.

## Christians and outsiders

Titus 3:1 Remind the people to be subject to rulers and authorities, to be obedient, to be ready to do whatever is good, 2 to slander no one, to be peaceable and considerate, and always to be gentle toward everyone.

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

## Relating to Others (in the church)

Ephesians 4: 2 Be completely humble and gentle; be patient, bearing with one another in love. 3 Make every effort to keep the unity of the Spirit through the bond of peace.

Colossians 3:12Therefore, as God's chosen people, holy and dearly loved, clothe yourselves with compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience. 13 Bear with each other and forgive one another if any of you has a grievance against someone. Forgive as the Lord forgave you.

# The Gentle Character of the Christian Leader

## Character

1 Timothy 6:11 But as for you, O man of God, flee these things. Pursue righteousness, godliness, faith, love, steadfastness, gentleness.

1 Timothy 3:3 An overseer is not violent but gentle, not quarrelsome

1 Peter 5: 2 shepherd the flock of God that is among you, exercising oversight, […] 3 not domineering over those in your charge, but being examples to the flock.

2 Corinthians 1:24 Not that we lord it over your faith, but we work with you for your joy, for you stand firm in your faith.

## Opposition

2 Timothy 2:24 And the Lord's servant must not be quarrelsome but must be kind to everyone, able to teach, not resentful. 25 Opponents must be gently instructed, in the hope that God will grant them repentance leading them to a knowledge of the truth,

Galatians 1:9 As we have said before, so now I say again: If anyone is preaching to you a gospel contrary to the one you received, let him be accursed.

Matthew 12:34 You brood of vipers! How can you speak good, when you are evil?

## Restoration

Galatians 6:1 Brothers and sisters, if someone is caught in a sin, you who live by the Spirit should restore that person gently. But watch yourselves, or you also may be tempted.

# Some Particular Issues

## Always Gentle?

1 Cor 4:21 What do you wish? Shall I come to you with a rod, or with love in a spirit of gentleness?

2 Cor 10:1 I, Paul, myself entreat you, by the meekness and gentleness of Christ-- I who am humble when face to face with you, but bold toward you when I am away!

## Gentleness: Men, Women and Toxic Masculinity

1 Peter 3:4 [B]ut let your adorning be the hidden person of the heart with the imperishable beauty of a gentle and quiet spirit (πραέως καὶ ἡσυχίου πνεύματος), which in God's sight is very precious.

Isaiah 66:2 All these things my hand has made, and so all these things came to be, declares the LORD. But this is the one to whom I will look: he who is humble and contrite in spirit and trembles at my word.

# Conclusion

Let your gentleness be evident to all. The Lord is near. (Philippians 4:5)

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