



#6 In the All Things New Series Gentleness & Self Control

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God has given us amazing minds! They are capable of so many things, take for instance the prefrontal cortex which is responsible for the success of the human species.

- It enables us to learn from our mistakes and make plans.
- When the PFC is healthy, we behave consistently in ways that enable us to reach our goals.
- When it works as intended, we are organized, goal directed, thoughtful, empathetic, and able to express feelings appropriately, but if it is damaged there can be serious issues!

Awhile back I read about a lady was attending a Church conference with co workers and friends. She had been in a car accident that damaged her PFC a few years earlier. As we sat waiting for the next presentation, they overheard two women in the row in front of them talking about why they were heavy. One said to the other, “I don’t know why I’m overweight; I just eat like a bird.” In a voice loud enough for everyone around us to hear, she said, “Yeah, like a condor.” Horrified, all of her companions gave her a look that asked, Why would you say that out loud? Meanwhile the embarrassed and angry women moved away from us. Her response was kind of alarming she put her hand over her mouth and said, **“Oh no, did that get out?”**

This week we will finish our series called “All Things New”.

Paul remarked:

1

Romans 6:4

Therefore we have been buried with Him through baptism into death, so that as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, so we too might walk in newness of life.

We have been exploring how do we become this new person? How do we walk in this Newness of Life?

- And why do Christ followers often look, act, and feel the same as those who never claim to know Christ.

The Fruit of the spirit are visible indicators of God’s spirit working within us.

2

Gal 5:22

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.

Last week we discussed the Spiritual attributes of Goodness and finished with faithfulness.

Faithfulness is a translation of the Greek word, pistis.

- This translation points to remaining faithful in all our covenants with God and with others.
- Some versions just translates it as “faith,” which points to our deep trust in God. It can — and probably does — mean both.

However, here’s what we often miss when we’re considering Faithfulness.

The Greek word, pistis, in Galatians 5:22 is at its root more about “holding fast or steady.”

- In fact, pistis is considered here to be one of God’s strongest personal characteristics.
- God, the original covenant-maker, is our model of Faithfulness,
- God is always faithful to the Divine part of any covenant, even when we don’t stick to ours.
- Now, that is powerful faithfulness!

The last two fruits of the spirit on the list deal with our steadiness, these attributes equip us to succeed but I should warn you that they both may make you uncomfortable.

3

I. Gentleness

Gentleness is translated as “meekness” in the King James Version of the Bible,

- As in “blessed are the meek.”
- The Greek word connotes the opposite of roughness or hardness.
- In secular Greek, gentleness is equated to mildness or friendliness.

“Meekness” is one of those words that has taken on a mostly negative connotation.

- Meekness brings to mind being a “doormat” or “wishy-washy” or “Wimpy”

Matthew 5:2-6

And he opened his mouth and taught them, saying:

“Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

“Blessed are those who mourn, for they shall be comforted.

“Blessed are the meek, for they shall inherit the earth.

“Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they shall be satisfied.....

4

It seems important to note that in the beatitudes ‘the meek’ come between

- Those who mourn over sin
- Those who hunger and thirst after righteousness.

The particular form of meekness which Christ requires in his disciples will surely have something to do with this sequence.

- **This meekness denotes a humble and gentle attitude to others which is determined by a true estimate of ourselves.**

It is comparatively easy to be honest with ourselves before God and acknowledge ourselves to be sinners in his sight.

- But it is much more difficult it is to allow other people to say things like that about us!
- We instinctively resent it and push back at it.

- It is much easier to condemn ourselves than to allow somebody else to condemn us.'

These 'meek' people, Jesus added, 'shall inherit the earth'.

We might expect the opposite.

- That 'meek' people get nowhere because everybody ignores them or else rides roughshod over them and tramples them underfoot.
- Culture says it's the tough, the overbearing who succeed in the struggle for existence; weaklings go to the wall.

Even the children of Israel had to fight for their inheritance, although the Lord their God gave them the promised land. But the condition on which we enter our spiritual inheritance in Christ is not might but meekness.

Remember Jericho, Marching around the walls to secure a victory.

- Doesn't seem very intimidating or mightily does it.
- But at the end of the day the walls fell and the fear of the Lord Grippled the whole land.
- I wonder if one reason our nation seems to no longer fear the Lord is that his people have traded in Gentleness and Meekness for more personally satisfying options.

Gentleness and Meekness cannot be separated.

5

2 Corinthians 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 in this context is much more about being

- pliable
- moldable
- teachable

- humble
- ready to be taught

This understanding of Gentleness that is neither shy nor retiring, but more about being open, and willing to learn, aware that there is *always* more to learn.

Let's for a moment consider Samson.

Samson was born during a tense time in Israel's history when the nation was at war with its enemies, the Philistines.

- Samson's parents had been having a hard time conceiving.
- An angel told them they were finally going to receive some good news.
- Not only would they have a baby but also the little guy would grow up to be the deliverer of Israel.
- Manoah and his wife were given clear instructions by the angel on how to raise their son to be a Nazarite.
- This was a strict order of Israelite men dedicated to serve God.
- They had to totally abstain from alcohol, never touch a dead body or cut their hair.

Just as the angel predicted, Samson was born and his awestruck parents raised him exactly as they had been instructed.

But Samson refused to follow anyone.

Samson grew up to have immense strength in all ways except in himself.

In spite of his continued directive from God to fight the Philistines, Samson pursues a much more personal connection with them.

He falls in love with several Philistine women most notably the notorious Delilah, who has been tasked by her people to find the secret of Samson's strength.

- Three times she begs to know the secret of his strength, and three times he lies to her. Finally, after Delilah nags persistently, he confesses: "A razor has never come to my head; for I have been a nazirite to God from my mother's womb. If my head were shaved, then my strength would leave me" (Judges 16:17).

- Delilah takes advantage of this new information, lulling Samson to sleep and shaving off his hair. He immediately weakens, and God's power leaves him. Delilah hands Samson over to the Philistines, who gouge out his eyes, and force him to grind at a mill in prison.

6

II. Self Control

Back in the 1980's drug use became epidemic among young people, and teen pregnancy rates were skyrocketing. A relatively new disease called AIDS was on the rise - and gangs were turning many inner-city neighborhoods into battlefields.

Someone came up with a simple solution to these risky behaviors: JUST SAY NO.

The thought was we could solve all these problems if we could just teach young people to say "No"

- to drugs
- and sex
- and the violence that comes with it.

The idea caught on, and with the help of 1st Lady Nancy Regan and the cooperation of the mass media - the Just Say No Campaign blanketed America with school curriculum, TV advertisements, and celebrity endorsements.

Police Departments joined the effort and developed the DARE program that schoolchildren and parents all across the country are familiar with today:

- Drug Abuse Resistance Education.

It's a simple strategy:

- Teach young people the dangers of these risky behaviors,
- Train them how to respond to temptation and peer pressure.

Sounds good doesn't it?

Except it didn't work.

Surveys and studies have revealed again and again that educational programs like this not only FAIL to REDUCE risky behaviors - but in some cases, they actually INCREASE them.

- In 2001, the U.S. Surgeon General officially placed the DARE program in the “Does Not Work” category.

The reason it doesn't work is that it doesn't go deep enough.

Saying “No” isn't something we do with our minds or our mouths.

It's something we do with our hearts.

- Saying “No” requires something deep inside that most teenagers haven't yet learned: **self-control**.

7

Paul writes to Timothy in **2 Timothy 2:7**

for God gave us a spirit, not of fear, but of power and love and self-control.

Fascinating thing to me that one of the things the Spirit of God does in us is give us self control. Or self discipline.

- Not a Spirit of timidity or fear or cowardice...
- But of love, power and self control.
- We all need that! So much!

As the followers of Jesus we get a Spirit of self discipline, that empowers us to live faithfully.

It allows us to not be controlled to our fleshy desires and egos and pride.

8

Paul Accurately describes human nature in Romans 7:14

We know that the law is spiritual; but I am unspiritual, sold as a slave to sin. 15 I do not understand what I do. For what I want to do I do not do, but what I hate I do... 18 For I know that good itself does not

dwell in me, that is, in my sinful nature. For I have the desire to do what is good, but I cannot carry it out. 19 For I do not do the good I want to do, but the evil I do not want to do—this I keep on doing.

You know what you want to do, or you should be doing... but you keep messing up.

Pauls says, “For I have the desire to do what is good, but I cannot carry it out.”

And my guess is that is the case for everyone of us. For some obvious, glaring flaws... for others more secret but no less damaging flaws.

The issue is self control.

So how does that work? Are you zapped with the Spirit of God and never struggle again?

- Do you become a Christian and all bad habits, toxic thought patterns, addictions to sin and sinful things disappear?
- We know that from our own experience... we know from Paul’s description in Romans 7...That the answer is NO!
- And also Paul wouldn’t have to remind Timothy of what he had received if it wasn’t an issue.
- No... we need to learn to appropriate what God has given us...
- To allow his Spirit alive and at work within us.

For Paul there were two states of life or two ways of living...

- And we either end up in one category or the other.
- Life according to the flesh and life according to the Spirit.

9

Galatians 5:16-26

But I say, walk by the Spirit, and you will not gratify the desires of the flesh.

So then we get descriptions of what the two kinds of lives look like...

10

19 The acts of the flesh are obvious: sexual immorality, impurity and debauchery; 20 idolatry and witchcraft; hatred, discord, jealousy, fits of

rage, selfish ambition, dissensions, factions 21 and envy; drunkenness, orgies, and the like.

These are the things that destroy lives and relationships, that cause pain and brokenness in our lives!

So then the life of the Spirit is contrasted and the fruit it produces in our lives...

11 **22** *But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, forbearance, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, 23 gentleness and self-control. Against such things there is no law.*

Here's the key to self Control.....

12 **24** *Those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires.*

Conclusion:

One of the things that made Lincoln a great Leader was his powerful self-control. The nation was coming apart at the seams with a civil war that had everybody's emotions operating at extremes. To add to the tension, some army contractors were ripping off the government. This made Lincoln very angry. Seward, his Secretary of State wrote a scathing letter to a thieving contractor, and showed it to Lincoln. "Not half strong enough" said Lincoln. Seward was delighted. He wrote another letter that scorched the paper. "There" said the president, "that serves him right!" "Very well, Mr. President, I'll mail it at once", said Seward. "Oh no", said Lincoln, "don't mail it, throw it into the waste basket."

Lincoln knew he could not afford to alienate any more people if he was going to win the war. So he controlled his desire to blast those taking advantage of the situation for personal gain. If Lincoln would have sent all the nasty letters he wrote, he probably would have lost the war. His self-control is, in great measure, the cause of why we are a free nation. It is not enough that Lincoln was a good man, for had he not been a self-controlled man, all his goodness could have been in vain.

This last fruit of the Spirit is not at the end, as a sign that it is the least important of the nine. It is, in fact, essential to keep all the others from being perverted.

Every virtue can become a negative thing if it is not controlled.

- Even love needs the balance that comes with self-control.
- Joy out of control can lead to extremes of wildness.
- Peace and patience can be so extreme that it leads to lethargy and indifference to a hurting world.
- Kindness can lead us to be enablers of other peoples brokenness,

Almost every failure to be Christ like can be traced to a lack of self-control, but, on the other hand, almost every success at being Christ like can be attributed to the power of self-control.

When Jackie Robinson was signed up as the first black man to play in the major leagues, he was warned by Branch Rickey that he would be persecuted. What will you do, asked Rickey, when someone without provocation hauls off and hits you in the face? Jackie said, "I have another cheek-isn't that right Mr. Rickey?" That was how he won over all the opposition. Had he lost his temper he would have lost his place in history. By self-control he not only won for himself, but he won for all blacks who followed him. The only way he, or anyone else, can obey the Sermon On The Mount, is by the power of self-control.