

ALIVE: The Marks of a Christian
“Aloof, Patronizing, Condescending?”
Gentleness: I Thessalonians 2:1-12

- 1 You know, brothers and sisters, that our visit to you was not without results.
- 2 We had previously suffered and been treated outrageously in Philippi, as you know, but with the help of our God we dared to tell you his gospel in the face of strong opposition.
- 3 For the appeal we make does not spring from error or impure motives, nor are we trying to trick you.
- 4 On the contrary, we speak as those approved by God to be entrusted with the gospel. We are not trying to please people but God, who tests our hearts.
- 5 You know we never used flattery, nor did we put on a mask to cover up greed—God is our witness.
- 6 We were not looking for praise from people, not from you or anyone else, even though as apostles of Christ we could have asserted our authority.
- 7 Instead, we were like young children among you. Just as a nursing mother cares for her children,
- 8 so we cared for you. Because we loved you so much, we were delighted to share with you not only the gospel of God but our lives as well.
- 9 Surely you remember, brothers and sisters, our toil and hardship; we worked night and day in order not to be a burden to anyone while we preached the gospel of God to you.
- 10 You are witnesses, and so is God, of how holy, righteous and blameless we were among you who believed.
- 11 For you know that we dealt with each of you as a father deals with his own children,
- 12 encouraging, comforting and urging you to live lives worthy of God, who calls you into his kingdom and glory.

Introduction

After earning his doctorate in Islamic Studies at the University in Edinburgh, Scotland, J. Christy Wilson and his wife Betty spent 22 years as missionaries in Afghanistan (1951-1973). Upon their ouster by the Afghani government, Dr. Wilson became professor at Gordon-Conwell Seminary. He was my professor of World Missions and Evangelization. Christy Wilson was one of the most gentle, wise, dedicated persons I’ve ever known.

On an Overseas Missions Practicum trip to Pakistan to minister among Afghan refugees, Christy and the team of students arrived at the airport with a large solar oven they intended to give to these displaced people. An airline employee said the transport would require an additional fee of several hundred dollars. With his well-known gentle spirit, Christy said to the clerk, “Well, let me pray about that... Lord, You know this situation, and You know that the Afghan refugees need this solar oven.” Right there at the counter, Christy continued to pray, asking the Lord to work in this situation and to provide a resolution. When he had finished praying, the clerk was either so impressed or so shaken that he waived the fee. (Where No One Has Heard, a biography of J. Christy Wilson, Jr. by Ken Wilson).

After his journey to heaven in 1999, one journalist wrote, “I never met J. Christy Wilson, but I’ve been struck at how many people have mentioned this nonprolific teacher as someone who had a tremendous influence on their lives.” I’m one of them.

This morning we come to the 8th gracious fruit of the Spirit: “the fruit of the Spirit is gentleness.” This word describes in inwrought grace of the soul, a mild even meek person. But gentleness isn’t weakness. This is a person whose life has been empowered by the Spirit of God coming from a faith energized by the Word of God.

I. The Imperfect Gentleness of Christians

In I Thessalonians 2, Paul lists some wrong ways to share Christ with others. I’ve experienced them coming from my own actions or attitudes as well as coming from others. I’m sure you have as well. How many turned away from God because of the imperfect gentleness of Christians motivated by “impure motives” or “trying to trick” others into losing the argument? How many hear a watered-down version of God’s truth by those “trying to please people, rather than God? “Using flattery” or “looking for praise from people?”

Both are problems in sharing the gracious gospel: being noisy and harsh (you know, whoever shouts loudest wins) or being wishy-washy (you know, all religions are pretty much the same; we’ll all be surprised by who’s in heaven and who’s not; the “go along to get along” approach, or just never talking about your faith in Christ).

Paul is able to say to the early church, “You know, brothers and sisters, that our visit to you was not without results... with the help of our God we dared to tell you his gospel in the face of strong opposition... we speak as those approved by God to be entrusted with the gospel... God tests our hearts... God is our witness.”

Paul’s preaching faced difficult opposition. With singleness of mind and striking enthusiasm, some thought him to be crazy, mad, off his rocker. Jesus experienced this from family and foe alike. In Mark 3, when Jesus entered a house, and a crowd gathered, so that he and his disciples were not even able to eat, his family heard about this and went to take charge of him, for they said, “He is out of his mind.” And the teachers of the law who came down from Jerusalem said, “He is possessed by Beelzebul! By the prince of demons he is driving out demons” (Mark 3:20-22).

In the context of this letter to the Thessalonians, other charges from Paul’s detractors were: he was trying to trick and deceive people or he was preaching for what he could get out of it with prestige along with their money. Claiming the authority of an apostle, he was thought to be authoritarian like a dictator.

So, Paul defends himself with the witness of the early believers. “Instead, we were like young children among you. Just as a nursing mother cares for her children, so we cared for you. We were delighted

to share with you not only the gospel of God but our lives as well. With toil and hardship, we worked night and day in order not to be a burden to anyone. We dealt with each of you as a father deals with his own children, encouraging, comforting and urging you to live lives worthy of God.” Paul’s gentleness was like a nursing mother or a wise father.

Our culture rails against such gentleness. Bookstores, internet, infomercials, seminars constantly tell us to look out for #1. What Jesus taught is hopelessly impractical and naïve for living and getting ahead. “Blessed are the meek? for they will inherit the earth.”? Good luck with that. “Blessed are the merciful? for they will be shown mercy?” Gentleness isn’t a normal, native plant growing out of the human soul. It isn’t a natural part of our makeup. It will only grow as the Holy Spirit nurtures it.

By no means perfect, Paul yet showed the effective fruit of the Spirit. “You know, brothers and sisters, that our visit to you was not without results.”

II. The Perfect Gentleness of God

In Matthew 11, we heard Jesus praying: “I praise you, Father, Lord of heaven and earth, because you have hidden these things from the wise and learned and revealed them to little children.” And calls out to us human beings: “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 11:25-30).

Paul knew this Jesus. God wants for us to know this Jesus – gentle and humble in heart. Notice how Jesus says not – “Come to God and receive these promises.” He says, “Come to Me!” In most religious constructs, the founder/leader says, “Go there... find life, peace, fulfillment there.” Socrates said, “If you will take my advice, you will think very little of Socrates and much more of the truth.” Jesus says, “Come to me... I am the way and the truth and the life.” When Jesus speaks, he invokes in us a “come to God” as well. For Jesus is God as the creeds and confessions of the church profess.

“We believe in one God, the Father almighty, And in one Lord Jesus Christ, God from God, Light from Light, true God from true God, of the same essence as the Father.”

In God’s perfect gentleness, Jesus invites those who are “weary and burdened,” those struggling and carrying too much, those who know their need. This is the first and constant condition for faith. You and I need a Savior. We find this throughout the Bible. Psalm 145:13-18 says it this way: “The LORD is trustworthy in all he promises and faithful in all he does. The LORD upholds all are falling and lifts up all who are bowed down. The LORD is near to all who call on him, to all who call on him in truth.”

Now Jesus wasn’t all that gentle toward the Roman rulers or religious leaders. Why? Because they were self-assured. They didn’t need anyone else. They thought (and wrongly so) that they could control

things in their own power or righteousness. Jesus consistently offered good news to the poor and needy. “Blessed are the poor in spirit.”

“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.” A yoke is a wooden bar or frame for two work animals harnessed at their necks for pulling a plow or heavy load. A yoke can also be a frame fitted to a person's shoulders to carry a load in two equal parts. A yoke is hardly what the weary and burdened need. In the Bible, yoke is used figuratively of severe bondage or affliction, subjection or servitude.

But Jesus says, “Take my yoke upon you,” a new way of carrying life. Trade the old for the new. “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.”

Conclusion

Friends, this is the Good News. The saying, “Talk is cheap” is quite appropriate here. With the fruit of the Spirit (love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness), are we sharing the gospel? Am I? Are you? It’s high time we started sharing the gospel with the people around us.

Here’s what it boils down to: Find a way to start to share your faith. Pastor Chris and I would be glad to help you. We don’t know what the best method is. But we do know that you should do something. It won’t be perfect. But it will be something.

You don’t have to be a Christy Wilson. But, you and I are meant to be empowered by the Spirit of God coming from a faith energized by the Word of God.

This is the 8th of 9 sermons on the fruit the Spirit wants to grow in our lives. They are all about how we treat people, how we care about Jesus Christ being in their lives. Will you ask God to fill you with the fruit of gentleness as you speak and act with others in ways that communicate the Good News?

The apostle Peter wrote to the church: “In your hearts revere Christ as Lord. Always be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks you to give the reason for the hope that you have. But do this with gentleness and respect” (I Peter 3:15).

Let us pray for that with and for one another.

Matthew 11:25-30

25 At that time Jesus said, “I praise you, Father, Lord of heaven and earth, because you have hidden these things from the wise and learned and revealed them to little children.

26 Yes, Father, for this is what you were pleased to do.

27 “All things have been committed to me by my Father. No one knows the Son except the Father, and no one knows the Father except the Son and those to whom the Son chooses to reveal him.

28 “Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest.

29 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.

30 For my yoke is easy and my burden is light.”