

8 Gentleness: The 8 Fruit of Submission

It is amazingly fitting that in the Bible the Holy Spirit is symbolized by a dove, Jesus is symbolized by a Lamb, and His followers are referred to as sheep. All of these are symbols of gentleness—the spiritual fruit of submission.

The descent of the Holy Spirit upon Jesus at the time of His baptism in the Jordan River was in the form of a dove. John the Baptist, the herald of Jesus, did not introduce Him as an all-powerful conqueror, but as the Lamb of God, who would take away the sins of the world. His submissive nature is summarized in these verses: “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 her shearers is silent, so he did not open his mouth” (Isaiah 53:7). “When they hurled their insults at him, he did not retaliate; when he suffered, he made no threats. Instead, he entrusted himself to him who judges justly” (1 Peter 2:23).

Jesus called His disciples sheep: “I am the good shepherd; I know my sheep and my sheep know me . . . and I lay down my life for the sheep” (John 10:14–15). Sheep are peaceful, submissive animals. The Spirit-filled Christian who manifests the fruit of gentleness will be submissive and useful to the Lord, his Shepherd.

This lesson will help you to understand the importance of gentleness as the fruit of the Spirit. As a faithful sheep, may you follow where your Master leads you.

lesson outline

Gentleness Identified

Gentleness Described

Gentleness Illustrated

lesson objectives

When you finish this lesson you should be able to:

1. Identify the biblical use of *praotes* as gentleness.
2. Compare secular and biblical definitions of *praotes*.
3. Give examples of lessons learned from Jesus's gentleness.
4. State ways in which gentleness increases effectiveness for Christ.
5. Explain the Lord's promise that the meek will inherit the earth.

learning activities

1. Study this lesson in the same manner that you have studied previous lessons. Answer all study questions, and be sure you can fulfill all the objectives of the lesson.
2. Read all Scripture texts indicated, and find the meanings of any key words you do not understand.
3. Take the self-test and check your answers.

key words

discipline	meekness	restraining
fortitude	<i>praotes</i>	submission
incapacity	proneness	superiority
inferiority	resolution	tamed

lesson development

GENTLENESS IDENTIFIED

Biblical Definition

Objective 1. *Identify the biblical use of *praotes* as gentleness.*

“But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness . . .” (Galatians 5:22–23). The word *gentleness* in Galatians 5:23 comes from the Greek word *praotes*. It is probably the most difficult of the attributes to define, since it speaks of an inward attitude rather than external action. The three main ideas of gentleness as the fruit of the Spirit are these:

1. *Submission to the will of God.* This is what Jesus was talking about in Matthew 11:29, when He said, “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.” Here Jesus describes Himself as having gentleness and humility. Both of these are characteristics of one who has submitted totally to the will of God.
2. *Teachableness.* This is willingness to learn, or not being too proud to learn. James 1:21 speaks of this: “Humbly accept the word planted in you, which can save you.”
3. *Being considerate.* Most often *praotes* is used in reference to showing consideration, moderation, calmness, or care, or bearing with others because of love.

Gentleness is the opposite of harshness. It is to be moderate, peaceful, and submissive without the idea of weakness or inferiority. There is nothing cowardly about gentleness—in the Bible we see it related to courage, fortitude, and resolution. Moses was a very gentle man, but at the same time he was ready to move and act in times of difficulty.

Praotes describes a condition of mind and heart which is spiritual in nature and is a fruit of power. In Galatians 6:1 the apostle Paul says, “Brothers, if someone is caught in a sin, you

who are spiritual should restore him gently. But watch yourself, or you also may be tempted.” Being spiritual in the biblical sense means to be indwelt, controlled, and directed by the Holy Spirit instead of the human spirit. This is the sort of gentleness described by Paul in 1 Timothy 6. In verse 11, he says that the man of God must, among other things, be gentle. But in the next verse Paul tells Timothy to “fight the good fight of faith” (v. 12).

Gentleness and firmness go together. The French have a saying, “One must have hands of steel in gloves of velvet.” Paul himself was like a tender mother caring for and feeding her children (see 1 Thessalonians 2:7). But when the Corinthians challenged his spiritual authority as an apostle of Jesus Christ, he asked them: “What do you prefer? Shall I come to you with a whip, or in love and with a gentle spirit?” (1 Corinthians 4:21). As a man who bore the fruit of the Spirit, he could combine both firmness and gentleness.

Application

- 1** Which statements are TRUE concerning the biblical definition of gentleness as the fruit of the Spirit?
 - a)** The word *praotes* usually speaks of our outward behavior toward someone.
 - b)** Gentleness in the biblical sense of Galatians 5:23 has to do with being submissive, teachable, and considerate.
 - c)** Gentleness is the same quality as weakness or inferiority.
 - d)** It is possible to have gentleness and firmness simultaneously.
 - e)** Galatians 6:1 implies that to restore gently someone who has been caught in a sin might include gentle discipline.
 - f)** One aspect of gentleness is humility.
 - g)** A spiritual person is free from temptation if he deals gently with a sinful person.
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Secular Definitions

Objective 2. *Compare secular and biblical definitions of praotes.*

Xenophon (434–355 B.C.) was a historian, essayist, and soldier. He used *praotes* to describe the brotherly understanding which develops between soldiers who have been fighting together for a long time.

Plato (427–347 B.C.) was a brilliant Greek philosopher. He used *praotes* in the sense of politeness and courtesy, adding that those two virtues are the cement that holds together the human society. He also used the term to describe a tamed thoroughbred horse who uses its strength for its master's desires and needs. Its strength becomes more beneficial as it is disciplined. Perhaps Jesus had this in mind when He said, "Take my yoke upon you and learn from me" (Matthew 11:29).

Socrates (470–399 B.C.) was another brilliant Greek philosopher. He used the term *praotes* to compare between scolding and gentleness. He also used the term of animals which, after being tamed, accepted discipline.

Aristotle (384–322 B.C.), another great Greek philosopher, defined *praotes* as the balance between too much anger, or the proneness to anger, and not enough anger, or the incapacity to feel anger. In other words, *praotes*, according to Aristotle, is the quality of a man who is always angry at the right time and never angry at the wrong time. It is the proper self-control of anger.

These secular definitions help us to understand better the significance of the word *praotes* used by the apostle Paul to describe the spiritual fruit which we call gentleness.

Application

2 Find in the biblical definitions those that can be compared to the following secular definitions. Write them in the blank spaces.

a) A tamed thoroughbred horse who uses its strength for its master’s desires and needs:

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b) Politeness and courtesy:

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c) Brotherly understanding between soldiers:

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d) A balance between too much anger and too little anger:

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GENTLENESS DESCRIBED

God’s Gentleness

Objective 3. Give examples of lessons learned from Jesus’s gentleness.

Gentleness should be an essential mark and characteristic of Christians, the followers of Jesus, because every Christian is born of the Spirit, who dwells within him. Our God is a gentle God. Why, then, does the psalmist say that God is a righteous God who expresses anger every day (Psalm 7:11)? God’s anger is only against sin and evil, and it does not affect His love and compassion for us. This is divine gentleness. Human anger is often sinful. That is why Ephesians 4:26 warns us, “In your anger do not sin.” At the same time Scripture instructs us to “hate what is evil” (Romans 12:9). God is our example of perfect gentleness combined with firmness.

Jesus was gentle and humble (Matthew 11:29), but this does not mean He was indifferent about things that were wrong. In an earlier lesson we saw that when He found merchants desecrating the house of God, He made a whip of cords and drove them out of that sacred place (John 2:15–16). He could with force remove from the temple men who were profaning it, and another time forgive a woman who had been caught in the act of adultery (John 8:10–11). He illustrated that gentleness as the fruit of the Spirit is combined with strength—it has nothing to do with weakness.

Jesus taught that gentleness would be an essential mark of discipleship in the Church Age. When a Samaritan village would not welcome Jesus, some of His disciples asked if He wanted them to call fire down from heaven to destroy the village. Jesus rebuked them, saying, “Ye know not what manner of spirit ye are of. For the Son of Man is not come to destroy men’s lives, but to save them” (Luke 9:55–56, KJV). In other words, He was reminding His disciples that the gospel message was the ministry of the Holy Spirit, and therefore would be ministered in gentleness (see also 2 Corinthians 3:8).

The gentleness of Jesus is strikingly portrayed in John 13:5. Here Jesus humbled himself to wash the feet of His disciples as an example to them of the principle of “servant” ministry.

Jesus’ greatest demonstration of the gentleness of the Holy Spirit upon Him is seen in the hours prior to His crucifixion. His prayer was one of total submission to the will of the Father, even though that meant suffering and death (Matthew 26:39). He could have called for twelve legions of angels to rescue Him at the time of His arrest, but He willingly allowed the soldiers to capture Him (vv. 50–54). When He was accused by the chief priests and the elders, He made no answer, not even to a single charge (Matthew 27:14). The eternal Lamb of God, in a spirit of love and gentleness, gave himself willingly to atone for the sins of all humanity. In gentleness He spoke words of forgiveness from the cross for those who had crucified Him.

Application

3 Explain the place of anger in divine gentleness.

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4 Give an example of the submissiveness of Jesus.

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5 Give an example of the humility of Jesus.

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6 State three lessons we can learn from examples of the gentleness of Jesus.

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Biblical References to Gentleness

Often in the Bible gentleness is linked with other attributes or contrasted to wrong practices. These references give us important guidelines as to the manifestation of the fruit of gentleness in our lives. We want to consider some of these and their message for us.

Gentleness versus sin. “The Lord sustains the humble [gentle] but casts the wicked to the ground” (Psalm 147:6). The Hebrew word for gentleness is translated as “humble” in this passage. Here the psalmist contrasts the gentle person with the wicked person. The inference is that a gentle or humble spirit is a restraining influence against sin. Gentleness as the fruit of the Holy Spirit will serve as a safeguard against sin in our lives.

Gentleness and meekness. In 2 Corinthians 10:1 the apostle Paul made an appeal to the Corinthians “by the meekness and

gentleness of Christ.” Meekness in this passage refers to bearing injury with patience and without resentment. Gentleness refers to mildness in manners or disposition—the opposite of harshness, sternness, violence, or roughness. Paul did not want to deal harshly with those who were living by the standards of the world, but he was ready to defend the gospel and his ministry above everything else. His approach was that of a loving brother who wanted to give the wrongdoers every opportunity to make things right in a spirit of submission and obedience.

Gentleness and humility. Gentleness is not possible without humility. Ephesians 4:2 says, “Be completely humble and gentle; be patient, bearing with one another in love.” Being humble is the opposite of being proud or boastful. It is an attitude of submission and deference to others.

Gentleness and wisdom. “Who is wise and understanding among you? Let him show it by his good life, by deeds done in the humility [*praotes*] that comes from wisdom” (James 3:13). *Praotes*, which is translated as “gentleness” in Galatians 5:23, is translated as “humility” in this passage. The wise man is a humble, gentle man. Again, this speaks of a spirit of submissiveness or teachableness, which is an evidence of the fruit of gentleness.

Gentleness and quietness. In 1 Peter 3:1–6 the apostle exhorted wives to be submissive to their husbands, so that if any of them were unbelievers, they would be won over by the purity and reverence they saw in their wives. Peter went on to say that a wife’s beauty should not depend on how she adorns herself outwardly, but “it should be that of your inner self, the unfading beauty of a gentle and quiet spirit, which is of great worth in God’s sight” (v. 4). The word *praotes* includes the idea of something calming and soothing as a balm. While this passage is directed to wives in particular, the principle applies to all of us—a gentle, quiet spirit will do more to attract the unbeliever to Jesus Christ than any argument or outward display of religious superiority.

Gentleness and salvation. “For the Lord takes delight in his people; He crowns the humble with salvation” (Psalm 149:4).

In this Old Testament passage the word *humble* is from the Hebrew word for gentle. In the New Testament we see this connection again: “Therefore, get rid of all moral filth and the evil that is so prevalent, and humbly accept the word planted in you, which can save you” (James 1:21). The word *humbly* in this passage is translated from *praotes*. It means gentleness from the Spirit that causes us to surrender to the Lord, preparing the ground for the Word of God to sprout within us, so that we will bear abundant fruit. Matthew 13 speaks of ground that the seed could not penetrate because it was too hard and dry. The heart can become this way because of rebellion against God. The humble heart has been softened by gentleness, so it can accept the Word which brings salvation.

Gentleness and guidance. “He guides the humble [gentle] in what is right and teaches them his way” (Psalm 25:9). This guidance is in two ways: a way before men and a way leading to heaven. In this verse God promises His blessing in both ways: in what is right (before men) and in His own way (before himself).

Application

7 The following exercises will help you to summarize the truths found in these Scripture verses. Fill in the blanks.

- a)** The characteristic opposite of pride or boastfulness and which is a vital part of gentleness is called
- b)** A submissive wife has the opportunity to win her husband by having a and spirit.
- c)** Gentleness is important for receiving because, just as rain prepares the ground for seed, gentleness softens the and prepares it to receive the
- d)** Gentleness serves as a safeguard against



GENTLENESS ILLUSTRATED

Examples of Gentleness

Objective 4. *State ways in which gentleness increases effectiveness for Christ.*

We could give many examples of the fruit of gentleness or the lack of it in the lives of God's people in the Old Testament and in the early church. As you read of events in the Bible, you might ask yourself whether gentleness is a characteristic of the people involved. Where a lack of gentleness is evident, you might consider how the story could have had a more positive result if this fruit had been manifested. We will give only a few examples here.

Abraham. A remarkable example of gentleness in settling a dispute is seen in these words of Abraham to Lot:

So Abram said to Lot, "Let's not have any quarreling between you and me, or between your herdsmen and mine, for we are brothers. Is not the whole land before you? Let's part company. If you go to the left, I'll go to the right; if you go to the right, I'll go to the left" (Genesis 13:8–9).

At first sight it seems that Abraham is losing ground. But the end of the story is that the Lord prospered Abraham, who gave Lot first choice! Abraham's son Isaac followed his father's example in order to settle a quarrel over wells (see Genesis 26:20–26). He, too, was blessed by the Lord (v. 24).

Moses. Numbers 12:3 says that "Moses was a very humble [gentle] man, more humble than anyone else on the face of the earth." There are many examples of his meekness. Exodus 15:24–25 tells how the people grumbled against Moses, and immediately he turned to the Lord. Again in Exodus 17:3–4 the same thing occurred, and once again Moses went to the Lord. The next time the people cried out against Moses, God defended him and spoke directly to Aaron and Miriam in behalf of His servant Moses. Here we are taught that the Lord upholds

the meek and gentle. In Numbers 16 we are told of a rebellion against Moses as the leader. Once again his gentleness was manifested, and God defended him.

Paul. As we have already seen, the apostle Paul often wrote about the importance of a gentle spirit. This fruit of the Spirit was regularly manifested by Paul in his dealings with those under his charge, and in his submission to the will of his Lord and Savior. Before his conversion he was an angry, militant man who desired to destroy those who were following after Christ. But after his conversion he lived and taught the gospel message of love and compassion, in gentleness and humility.

Application

8 Read 2 Timothy 4:16. What words in this Scripture verse reflect the fruit of gentleness in the life of Paul?

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9 Based on examples given here, state three ways you can be more effective for Christ by manifesting the fruit of gentleness in your life.

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Practical Applications

Gentleness is essential for effective ministry for the Lord. God has chosen us to represent Him to a lost and dying world. What the world sees in us is what will draw people to Jesus Christ. All of the aspects of gentleness—submission, teachableness, consideration, control of anger—are necessary elements of our Christian witness and service, whether witnessing to the lost, making disciples for Jesus, or restoring a weak brother.

Witnessing and sharing. In 1 Peter 3:15–16 we are given this instruction for sharing Christ with others:

But in your hearts set apart 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, keeping a clear conscience, so that those who speak maliciously against your good behavior in Christ may be ashamed of their slander.

Application

10 What words in this Scripture passage emphasize the importance of submission?

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11 What words emphasize the need to be considerate when witnessing?

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Remember that the kingdom of God is not forced into the heart—it is admitted. If Jesus had wanted to force His kingdom upon the world He would have done so in the Garden of Gethsemane. Gentleness as the fruit of the Spirit is closely related to our effective witness for Christ. An inconsiderate Christian may drive away from the kingdom of God someone who is lost. He tries to force his opinions on others, rather than show the gentleness that comes through Jesus Christ. On the other hand, a loving, considerate Christian, by his behavior alone, will cause the ungodly to be ashamed of their evil words against him, and they will be attracted to Christ by his gentle witness.

Making disciples for Jesus. Salvation is the work of God alone, but making disciples is the responsibility of the church.

A vital element in this teaching ministry is gentleness as the fruit of the Spirit:

Don't have anything to do with foolish and stupid arguments, because you know they produce quarrels. And the Lord's servant must not quarrel; instead, he must be kind to everyone, able to teach, not resentful. Those who oppose him he must gently instruct.
(2 Timothy 2:23–25)

Sometimes, in the process of making disciples, someone arises to contradict us. We are not to allow ourselves to be distracted by foolish arguments, but instead we must call upon the Holy Spirit to produce His fruit of gentleness in us, so that we may teach the truth in kindness and firmness. Arguments reach only the head. Gentleness reaches the heart. In the world it is rare to combine gentleness with correction, but in the church of God it is possible through the power of the Holy Spirit.

Application

12 (Choose the correct completion.) The disciple will gain the most benefit from spiritual instruction if he will

- a)** argue with his teacher whenever he disagrees or questions what is being taught.
- b)** be submissive and teachable.
- c)** remind his teacher often that he must teach with gentleness.

13 The teacher's main responsibility when making disciples is to

- a)** combine firm, truthful instruction with gentleness.
- b)** defend his position whatever the cost.
- c)** prove that he is correct in what he is saying.



Restoring a weak brother. “Brothers, if someone is caught in a sin, you who are spiritual should restore him gently” (Galatians 6:1). To assist and discipline a faulty brother, *praotes*

as the fruit of the Spirit is required. If someone is overtaken in a fault, he must be corrected. But the correction must be done with gentleness, and this is only possible by one who is spiritual.

Application

14 Which attitude would be found in a spiritual person who needs to correct a brother who has sinned?

- a) He would have a sense of satisfaction that he, himself, is not capable of committing such a sin, and he would deal harshly with his brother so that the brother would recognize how wrong he was.
 - b) He would have great love and compassion, recognizing that it is the power of the Holy Spirit that keeps us from sin.
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Rewards of Gentleness

Objective 5. *Explain the Lord's promise that the meek will inherit the earth.*

In Psalm 37:11 are these words: “But the meek [gentle] will inherit the land and enjoy great peace.” In this Scripture verse are mentioned two rewards of gentleness. One is future—those who have the fruit of gentleness produced in them by the Holy Spirit will possess the kingdom of God in its full expression and manifestation when the King comes. The other is for the present—great peace to enjoy. Sometimes people get what they want through great effort and scheming. But in the kingdom of God the saints inherit their blessing from the Lord by their gentleness. Jesus confirmed this when He set forth the guidelines of the Kingdom He came to establish (Matthew 5:5).

Application

15 Read Matthew 5:5. What did Jesus mean when He said that “the meek . . . will inherit the earth”?

- a)** If the fruit of gentleness is in us, we will be blessed with many earthly possessions, which will give us great peace.
 - b)** Those who have the fruit of gentleness will share with Jesus in the Kingdom He will establish on this earth.
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We will see other rewards of gentleness on a daily basis in the response of those around us to our gentle spirit. Think about occasions when the fruit of gentleness in your life would have made a difference. Ask the Holy Spirit to produce this fruit in you abundantly. Then you can truly be submissive to the will of the Lord, teachable, able to control your anger properly, and able to be kind and considerate in your relationships.

self-test

SHORT ANSWER. Answer each question briefly.

- 1 Explain what each of these symbols refers to in the Bible:
 - a) Dove
 - b) The sacrificial Lamb
 - c) Sheep
 - d) Each of these symbols represents the characteristic of
- 2 . A..... tamed thoroughbred horse represents the aspect of
gentleness which is
- 3 *Praotes*, according to Aristotle, is the quality of a man who is always at the right time and never at the wrong time.
- 4 Being humble is the opposite of being
- 5 In restoring a weak brother we must combine correction with

MULTIPLE CHOICE. Circle the letter in front of the best answer to each question.

- 6 Which of these most closely represents the meaning of *praotes*?
 - a) Gentleness and humility
 - b) Gentleness and weakness
 - c) Strength and power
 - d) Gentleness and firmness
- 7 Gentleness as the fruit of the Spirit includes the aspects of submissiveness, teachableness, and
 - a) consideration.
 - b) harshness.
 - c) anger.
 - d) discipline.

- 8** God's judgment against evil is an example of
- a)** harsh anger.
 - b)** anger at the wrong time.
 - c)** anger at the right time.
 - d)** weakness.
- 9** The examples of Jesus reveal that He strongly resisted
- a)** attempts to physically harm Him.
 - b)** any action that brought dishonor to God's house or name.
 - c)** sinners who came to Him for help.
 - d)** personal abuse or insult.
- 10** The gentleness of the Spirit preparing the heart for salvation can be likened to
- a)** sheep following a shepherd.
 - b)** an animal being tamed.
 - c)** rain upon dry ground so that it can receive seed.
 - d)** a teacher who corrects his disciple.
- 11** A submissive wife can best win her unbelieving husband to the Lord by
- a)** making herself outwardly beautiful.
 - b)** talking to him until he is convinced of his need for salvation.
 - c)** putting the activities of the church in first place in her life.
 - d)** having a gentle, quiet spirit.
- 12** Two rewards of gentleness (meekness) are peace and
- a)** prosperity.
 - b)** a share in the kingdom of God.
 - c)** great responsibility in the church.
 - d)** great honor among men.

answers to study questions

- 8** “May it not be held against them.” (He spoke forgiveness to those who had deserted him.)
- 1** All but **a)**, **c)**, and **g)** are true
- 9** Your answers.
- 2** Your answers. Here are mine:
- a)** Submission to God’s will, or teachableness.
- b)** Being considerate; bearing with others because of love.
- c)** Courage, fortitude, and resolution.
- d)** Combining gentleness with firmness when necessary for correction (the way to deal with a brother caught in a sin).
- 10** “In your hearts set apart Christ as Lord.”
- 3** God’s anger is always against sin and evil; He is gentle and loving with those who belong to Him and who follow Him.
- 11** “Do this with gentleness and respect.”
- 4** Submission to His Father’s will and to the arresting soldiers
- 12 b)** be submissive and teachable.
- 5** Washing the feet of His disciples—a lesson in servanthood.
- 13 a)** combine firm, truthful instruction with gentleness.
- 6** Your answer.
- 14 b)**
- 7 a)** humility.
- b)** gentle, quiet.
- c)** salvation, heart, Word of God.
- d)** sin.
- 15 b)**

