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### UNBROKEN JOY GENTLENESS Philippians 4:5

Let your reasonableness be known to everyone. The Lord is at hand...

Two weeks ago I preached on conflict, and then I had conflict all week long. Last Sunday I preached on joy, and this week on gentleness. Obviously, I am not picking the topics; the topics are chosen for us as we are going through this final chapter in the book of Philippians. We are doing something that we don't often do -- we are really just slowing down to take in each subject. Normally, we would deal with a little bit larger sections of scripture, but we are slowing down. We are not rushing, and I have personally found it very helpful. This subject in particular - Gentleness - is not a topic that we will very often hear a message dedicated to, and if I could be honest with you, I hope the trend continues. I hope that I experience gentleness this week, because I need it. I mean, I need to grow in this particular character quality.

The elders were praying before the service and I said, "Guys, pray for me. I am not sure I can preach this sermon with a straight face. This is not a strength in my life." But it is the character of our Lord Jesus Christ, and his Spirit is creating this fruit in the lives of those who are followers of Jesus Christ. So, we are going to dig in. This is a sermon on character. It is not on character in general, but a specific character quality. What I would like to do is break it down into several topics.

1. The Character of Gentleness, or reasonableness
2. The Source of Gentleness
3. The Power of Gentleness, and then we will conclude with
4. The Purpose of Gentleness

Let's jump in with "The Character of Gentleness -- What is it?" Paul states, "Let your reasonableness be known to everyone." The English Standard Version translates this Greek word "reasonableness." The New International Version translates it "gentleness." I think I prefer that particular translation for this word. The King James translates it "moderation." Those are three good options, really: reasonableness, gentleness and moderation.

We need to say from the outset as we look at "The Character of Gentleness -- What is it?" that it is not a certain personality type. God is not here favoring introverts or individuals who are not Type A. If you are here and you are Type A, perhaps this will be a helpful sermon for you. There will be

specific applications, but it's not just for you. And it is certainly not to create in you a sense of condemnation because of the propensities of your given personality type. If the best translation is "gentleness," what do we mean by that? I'm going to quote from a dictionary here, a Greek-English dictionary, trying to help us find the specific word. It's this. Listen very carefully. "The quality of making allowances despite facts that might suggest reason for a different reaction." Okay? Listen carefully. "The quality of making allowances despite facts that might suggest reason for a different reaction." Synonyms for gentleness: graciousness, courtesy, indulgence, tolerance.

You might think of this quality being more prominent in a grandmother as opposed to a mother. "Making allowances," right? "Sure, Sweetheart, that's fine. Go ahead. Mommy will be fine with it." Or, you might think about a mom with an infant -- a tenderness, a gentleness. "Making allowances" might be understood to be "being careful with your expectations." So, a mother with an infant understands the fragility of that little one, the vulnerability, and has adjusted, or reasonable expectations. We find ourselves sometimes in an argument with someone and we want to say to them, "Just be reasonable. You are being unreasonable in this moment." It may help you to define this by thinking about a picture of when you are unreasonable. It is often expressed in harshness.

I remember a teacher from grade school who was exceptionally gentle, and because of that, very persuasive. I probably had a crush on her and didn't know it, in the second or third grade. But it was her gentleness that was so endearing, a quality that can be comforting, persuasive; and it is the character of Christ.

In 2 Corinthians 10:1, Paul writes, "I entreat you, by the meekness and gentleness of Christ..." It is also listed as a qualification for an elder in 1 Timothy 3:3. We could understand the term to be a fruit of the Holy Spirit. If you are familiar with the list of the fruits of the Holy Spirit in Galatians 5:22-23, gentleness is listed there, but it's a different Greek word than the Greek word here in Philippians 4:5. There are actually two or three terms that come close to this idea.

As we looked at the topic of joy last week, we brought some attention to the fact that in this passage in Philippians, Chapter 4, Paul is promising peace. He gives two prominent promises for peace to the believer. You remember we talked about some disciplines under the first promise, disciplines of joy and prayer and thanksgiving. We don't often think of joy as a spiritual discipline, but Paul presents it in that fashion. We are to exercise joy, prayer, and thanksgiving, and there is a promise of peace that accompanies that.

It's interesting. Right in the middle of that explanation is this verse: Let your reasonableness, let your gentleness be known to everyone. There is a sense in which a gentle spirit is the outward expression of inner peace. We might just say that when I am not at peace in my own heart, it

comes out in an anxious, fearful, even a harsh manner.

Let's diagnose ourselves for a moment before we move on, all under "The Character of Gentleness - What is it?" Ask yourself these questions:

- Am I harsh? Am I prone to be harsh with others?
- Am I intolerant?
- Would others say my expectations of them are excessive or unreasonable?
- Am I gracious to others?
- Am I courteous to others?
- Am I charitable in my judgments or assessments or measurements of others?

This is the character of Christ, a quality of Christ, and as his followers, we are to grow in this quality. His Spirit brings this forth in our lives. We don't mean by this that we will always be liked, that everyone will approve of us. In fact, in this very letter, in Philippians, the Philippians have been encouraged in the face of opposition to stand firm. So, it doesn't mean that we are agreeable to everyone. There are things that we stand for. There is truth that we stand for that is non-negotiable. That's "The Character of Gentleness."

Let's look at The Source of it. Where does it come from? How do I get it? Obviously, we have already made reference to the fact that I get it from Christ; that Christ comes in and makes me new. His Spirit lives within me, and over time the character of Jesus is produced in my life. The fruits of the Holy Spirit grow over time.

It is very helpful when you think in terms of gifts and fruit. We think about gifts and we think about power. Gifts can be given to the very immature. They can be very immature, but they are powerful. Fruit speaks of character, whereas gifts can come in a moment, given by God, developed over time. But they can be very powerful almost instantly. Fruit comes through seasons and develops over time. So it is that the character of Christ grows in our lives.

Let's just stop there for a moment. If we have this expectation that the character of Jesus is going to grow over time, is there more here that will help us cultivate that attitude or this character quality? There is! Here is how I want to set this up for us. I want to set it up with the idea, the understanding, that behavior scripturally is always linked to our thinking. How we act is a reflection of how we think.

I would like you to go with me to Ephesians, Chapter 4, if you will. I am going to take a minute and drill down here and try to teach this particular point: how as Christians our thinking leads to

behavior. I think we could say that that's true about everyone. We act according to what we believe to be true. But there is a particular biblical perspective that's very helpful here. Let's go to Ephesians 4:17: "Now this I say and testify in the Lord, that you must no longer walk as the Gentiles do..." Paul is after here -- just take note -- behavior. He wants them to walk in a certain way, to live in a certain way. "Do not walk as the Gentiles do," meaning unbelievers, "in the futility of their minds. They are darkened in their understanding, alienated from the life of God because of the ignorance that is in them, due to their hardness of heart."

Hold your finger right there at verse 19. Notice that Paul is mounting up these phrases that have to do with thinking. He is saying that without Christ we walk in a certain way, we behave a certain way, because of the futility of our minds, because we are darkened in our understanding, because of a general ignorance. He doesn't mean that people who don't know Jesus are not smart. He's not talking about intelligence or even intellectual gifts. He is not being unkind to unbelievers, but he is saying that in terms of morality, and right and wrong, and behavior, and honoring God, our thinking is off. He mounts up these terms to make a very powerful statement. There is an emptiness in our thinking, a darkness about our understanding, even (he calls it) "ignorance."

Verse 19: "They have become callous and have given themselves up to sensuality, greedy to practice every kind of impurity" -- so, a darkened understanding, empty thinking. We are locked into it because of the hardness of our hearts, our loves, our desires. In fact, he says we are calloused, because without Christ we continue in behavior that is dishonorable. Like dead skin that's calloused, we become insensitive to conviction; bad thinking, loves that are off, locked into that position, okay?

Verse 20: "But that is not the way..." now notice as he makes this transition, how again he goes to the mind. "That is not the way that you learned Christ! -- assuming that you have heard about him and were taught in him, as the truth is in Christ." Again, he is mounting up these terms that have to do with our thinking. You learned Christ. You were taught Christ. The truth is in him. "...to put off your old self, which belongs to your former manner of life and is corrupt through deceitful desires..." So, our loves are off, our hearts, our desires are off. Our thinking is off. We have learned Christ. We have been taught him. Look at verse 23: "...and to be renewed in the spirit of your mind, and to put on the new self, created after the likeness of God in true righteousness and holiness."

Look at me for just a moment, if you would. He takes us through this little progression of how change comes in the Christian. We have a behavior that's ungodly. It is described as immoral and impure without Christ. In that behavior our thinking is off and our hearts love the things that we

shouldn't love. It locks us into this position of bad thinking and bad behavior. Christ comes in and he makes all things new. We learn Christ. We are taught him and there is a renewal of our minds. It's an unusual phrase: "the spirit of our minds." The very way that we think, the patterns of thinking, the major thoughts that direct us -- we are renewed in Christ. Our thinking changes, our hearts change, and our behavior changes, so that he wraps it all up under this paradigm of: We put off the old self (heart, mind, action), and we put on the new self (heart, mind, action). Are you with me?

You are saying, "Wow, Brian, this is an enormous digression." Yes, it is. It's an important one, because I'm going to take you back to Philippians 4:5 in just a moment and you are going to say, "Wow!" Go ahead and practice right now. "Wow!" Listen, you cannot go and complain about this message because you told me just a few minutes ago how much you love me. It would be completely hypocritical of you. Are you with me? "Wow!"

Now watch what he does, okay? This is what I want you to see. The bible never tells you, "Just behave this way. Just do this and don't do that." That is a moralism that is foreign to scripture. It's true that we should not lie, not steal, not commit acts of immorality, but the bible is interested in changing your thinking. So, Paul, before he gets into the "don't lie, don't steal," and all of those commands, before he does he describes for you how God renews your thinking, how God is interested in your thoughts and your heart.

Now in verse 25 (we are still in Ephesians 4) he begins to get specific and he says, "Therefore, having put away falsehood..." Remember the paradigm: putting off the old, putting on the new? "...having put away falsehood, let each one of you speak the truth with his neighbor, for we are members one of another." What does he mean? I want to suggest to you that as Paul goes through listing what we should do and not do - putting off the old man, putting on the new, putting off falsehood, speaking the truth to one another - he gives these for how our thinking has now changed. And what is it in that verse? "...for we are members of one another."

You see, there is a whole new pattern of thinking. I'm not going to lie to you, because lying to you is like lying to me. Hurting you is hurting me. We are one in Christ. We are not only a part of humanity, but Jesus has died and made us one, so that my entire thinking and how I relate to you has changed. I'm not now seeing you as an object that I use to get to what I want. Now I see you as me. We are one. We are part of one another. And so our relationships change because our thinking has changed, and that was only possible because Jesus gave us a new heart. Wow! Do you see it?

If you are a parent, an exercise in futility is practiced when you just say, "Stop fighting with your

brother.” Right? Darkened hearts, empty thinking. There is conversion that’s needed. So we pour in the gospel. We pour in the truth. We pour in Christ and truth about him, knowing that I am not going to get exhausted tomorrow when you fight with your brother because we are on a journey together. Because not only might you -- you will fight with your brother tomorrow, but we are growing in Christ.

We could just keep going through Ephesians. But really, it was just a digression to make this important point: that we act according to what we think, and in Christ we are renewed in our minds as we are given new hearts. Go to Romans, Chapter 12, please, just one other verse to make this point. Romans 12:1-2:

I appeal to you therefore, brothers, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship. Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewal of your mind, that by testing you may discern what is the will of God, what is good and acceptable and perfect.

Here’s what’s interesting with these two verses in Romans 12:1-2. For 11 chapters – how long? – 11 chapters, Paul has been giving doctrine. His main emphasis has been teaching the gospel, laying out doctrine -- very solid. I would say the best explanation of the gospel we have in scripture is found in Romans 1-11.

When he gets to Chapter 12, he is now going to get to the behavior part. He says that in light of all of this truth that I have given you, here is how I want you to act. Chapter 12 and following is the behavior part, and he is transitioning into that. He says that based on the gospel, based on the mercy of God, Jesus Christ paid the penalty of your sin. You deserve judgment. He gave you mercy by paying for it. Here is how I want you to act. Then he says this is your reasonable response of worship, your reasonable act of worship. Climb up on the altar. No longer live for yourself. You are a living sacrifice.

He tells us then specifically, in our thinking don’t think like the world. Don’t follow the pattern of the world’s thinking. Don’t be conformed to the world. Instead, what? Be renewed in your mind. There is a process of renewal, and here is why I brought us to this passage, because he says something very interesting at the conclusion of verse 2: in order that “you may discern what the will of God is, what is good and acceptable and perfect.” Here is the point. As we take that final step of obedience – new thinking, new heart, new behavior – as we walk it out, it’s like the field test. We have moved now to a new place of implementing it, and we really see it at work, and our discernment level goes up.

For a quick example, I can talk to you about giving. I can teach you the principles about giving. I can talk to you about how your life is not found in what you own or how much you make, and that there is a greater joy in giving. Everything comes from God, and we give to participate in his kingdom, acknowledging that it all came from him. As I talk about that, that truth can renew your mind. It's a major, major area of heart and thinking. But when you actually take the step of giving and detaching your soul from the loves of this world, you begin to experience it and you begin to discern. You see the complexities of it, and you begin to experience the joy of giving. All of a sudden, your life is proof. You are proving out that which is good and acceptable and perfect. Wow.

Back to Philippians 4. The question here is: "If I am to be gentle, what does Paul give me here to help me with my thinking? What are the roots of gentleness?" Do you see it? It's in this phrase: the Lord is at hand. "Let your gentleness be evident to all, the Lord is at hand." What does he mean? He can mean one of two things. It can be spatial or temporal. Are you impressed with those words? Have I lost you right there? Wow. Yeah, not just another pretty face. Spatial - God is here, present with us. I am aware of the presence of God. Temporal - time. Jesus is coming back soon.

I have here listed in my notes (because of time I am not going to take you to those places) loads of references that promise God is with us, that he will never leave us. Jesus is with us, and he is coming again and we will see him face to face. The question is: Which does Paul mean right here? Does he mean, "Listen, be gentle! Let it be known to everyone, because the Lord is returning any moment" or "because the Lord is present here"? Yes. I think he means both. I think the reason it's ambiguous is because both work, and they work in both directions. They work backward in the text and they work forward in the text.

If we took the time to apply it out to the whole chapter, we could make those connections, but for your benefit I am not going to do that. I just want you to see this vital connection. When you are in the moment and temptation is rising up, and you are demanding of another person what they seem to be unable to give; you are unbending, unyielding, unreasonable; you are harsh and unforgiving -- there is a release that comes where you say, "Wait - Jesus is here. He is present with us, and he is able to do what I cannot do in the power of my flesh. He is present here and he is wanting me to walk this journey with him. If truly I am in the will of the Lord and what I am asking of this other person is pleasing to him, I have to have the confidence that God is walking with me. And he is not only here, but the day is coming when he solidifies all that with his return and makes it perfect." That's it.

## Unbroken Joy - Gentleness

Philippians 4:5 | Sunday, October 25, 2015 | By Brian Brookins



You never think of this, but Paul is making this connection. There is a direct connection between gentleness and an awareness of the presence of God. Think about it, alright? You have heard me tell this little story where one of my kids upsets me and I yell at them. Now, this is not a common practice in my house. It hasn't happened in years and years and years. Okay, I'm being sarcastic. Wow. Yeah, right? And then I realize the window is open and the neighbor is in the yard, or at the front door, and all of a sudden, "Gasp - I wonder if they heard me." Of course they heard you. The whole world heard you! Right? There is a conviction that should have been there when it was just me and the child. But God is present. Forget about the neighbor for a minute - God is present. And there is an awareness, not only that I want my activity to be holy to him, but also (and this is where it pushes it out, if you can get ahold of this)...okay - this is not in my notes, but I think this will help you.

Do you remember in 1 John, where John is talking about prayer and he says something to this effect? I believe it is Chapter 5, verses 14 and 15. He says something like this -- he says, "If you pray, and you pray according to the will of God, you know that God hears you. And if you know that he hears you, you know that you have what you ask for." That's a very loose interpretation. Have you ever been in that place of prayer - stay with me - have you ever been in that place of prayer where you were aware, somehow you were aware, that God is here!? God is hearing me! This is God's will and he hears me and I know he's going to answer me! Have you ever had that experience? It's wonderful!

What I generally do in that moment is - this is the truth - I ask God for everything I can think of. I just run off with it. Right? That's the sense of this teaching. God is here! You don't have to bludgeon your child to get him to obey, God is with you! God is for you! Your words are going forth in the anointing of the Spirit of God, and there is a process here. Trust the gospel as you are married, as you parent, as you are single, as you are a friend, as you are a home group leader, as you are in business, or work, or whatever it is you do. The kingdom of God is an unstoppable force and Jesus has promised to never leave you.

That is The Source of Gentleness, and I think I'm going to stop. I'm halfway through. I will end with this. I was going to take you through some various places to demonstrate how gentleness, when it's rooted to a confidence in the gospel and God's presence, has the power to deliver, the power to forgive, the power to transform and change. This particular quality of Christ, when it finds expression that is rooted in faith and confidence in God, is very powerful in our lives.

I will end with this, building on that, that there is something interesting here about The Purpose of Gentleness. Paul wants it to be evident to everyone. He wants it to be obvious to others. There is

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a witness dimension to your reasonableness. You are communicating to the world, to everyone, "My God has this." I am not in a panic all the time, because I have to control it! If you haven't learned this -- you cannot control it. So trust God. And for all of us Type A people, what a glorious truth, to say, "I can just back off, make space for God to work. I'm going to be obedient. I'm going to be faithful. I'm going to speak as he wants me to." The one-thousandth time that I tell my wife to do something is not more helpful than the first. It's usually much less helpful. There is a point of diminishing return, where it has now become about my flesh rather than the will of God.

Gentleness.