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TENDER, MILD-MANNERED

There is precious little doubt that the rigors of life can rise up and impact even the “best of us” to become irritable, and quite frankly really unpleasant to be around. However we can never allow self the luxury of simply “shining on” these cases of bad behavior. Such a manifestation can be so off-putting to those we hold near and dear, driving them away from us as well as imposing misery upon any and all who would come in our presence. It is imperative that we gain mastery over self and learn the import of what is real strength. Consider the following quote, which seems paradoxical, but in reality is spot on. “Nothing is so strong as gentleness, nothing so gentle as real strength.” (Francis de Sales)

It takes strength to bring gentleness into one's life. By embracing the virtue of gentleness it gives rise to kindness. Notice what Paul wrote to the brethren in Ephesus, “with all humility and gentleness, with patience, showing forbearance to one another in love, being diligent to preserve the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace.” (4:2-3) Notice how gentleness is linked with patience and forbearance. Now consider that longsuffering is implied in the usage of the word forbearance. So go back to the quote of de Sales, it takes strength to deal with the aggravations and issues of life without visiting our frustrations on others. Being gentle with others, regardless of the circumstances, demands true inner strength. A virtue of the highest regard.

Paul, in his first letter to the Corinthians asked them quite frankly, “What do you desire? Shall I come to you with a rod or with love and a spirit of gentleness?” (1Corinthians 4:21) Clearly the behavior they had manifested was a far cry from what one would expect from a child of God. How-

ever, while not overlooking their sins, Paul was willing to come to them with a kind and gentle spirit. Consider what he had written to the brethren in Galatia. “But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control; against such there is no law.” (Galatians 5:22-23) Then notice the first verse of chapter six, “...you who are spiritual, restore such a one in a spirit of gentleness...” The main point in the writing of the first epistle to Corinth was to correct a number of issues. To in essence bring about restoration. In order to bring this about Paul exhibited humility, kindness and yes, gentleness.

“If possible, so far depends on you, be at peace with all men.” (Romans 12:18)

Peter, in noting the attributes of a child of God, goes to considerable length to note them as seen in his second epistle, chapter one and verses five through seven. “Now for this very reason also, applying all diligence, in your faith supply moral excellence, and in your moral excellence, knowledge; and in your knowledge, self-control, and in your self-control, perseverance, and in your perseverance godliness; and in your godliness, brotherly kindness, and in your brotherly kindness, love.” All of these become part of one's personal learned nature. “For if these qualities are yours and are increasing, they render you neither useless nor unfruitful in the true knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ.” (2Peter 1:8)

Look closely at Matthew 11:28-30. While Jesus encourages all to come to Him and find rest, in verse twenty-nine, He points out, “and learn from Me, for I am gentle and humble in heart...” We need to have humility and gentleness become part and parcel of who we are; a learned nature. “But sanctify Christ as Lord in your hearts...give an account of the hope that is in you, yet with gentleness and reverence.” (1Peter 3:15) (wbc)



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