

## **The Strength of Gentleness**

Scripture: Ephesians 4:2

Code: 49-16

We have been looking in the last number of weeks, with a few interruptions, at the book of Ephesians. So open your Bible to Ephesians chapter 4. And this is a very important book, and I have chosen to go through it, if ever so slowly, because it is so foundational to our Christian life. And we find ourselves now in chapter 4, and we're trying to work our way through verses 1 to 6. This is the third message in chapter 4:1 to 6, and we will actually get a third of the way through verse 2. But you'll see why.

Let me read the text to you, chapter 4, verses 1 to 6, "Therefore I, the prisoner of the Lord, implore you to walk in a manner worthy of the calling with which you have been called, with all humility and gentleness, with patience, showing tolerance for one another in love, being diligent to preserve the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace. There is one body and one Spirit, just as also you were called in one hope of your calling; one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all who is over all and through all and in all."

What clearly strikes you here is the repetition of "one" in verses 4, 5, and 6. And this is the foundation of our unity. That is a creed, you might say. That is a theological creed that celebrates the oneness of divine reality—realities related to salvation. And based upon that we are to be diligent, verse 3 says, "to preserve the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace."

Everything about our salvation, everything about the work of God has a oneness to it, a unity. That should be displayed in the church. The church should manifestly declare its transformation by its unity. John 13, Jesus said, "By this will all men know that you're My disciples, if you have love one for another." John 17, Jesus prayed that they may be one, that the world may know the Father sent the Son. This is clear, unmistakable—and yet elusive in the experience and life of the church in the world. So I want to take a little bit of time as we go through this to help you understand these very important components that lead up to unity, that will make our living consistent with the creed.

Now let's think back to how we got to chapter 4 in Ephesians, and let's talk about what all true Christians possess. It started in chapter 1, verse 3, we're all "blessed with all spiritual blessings in the heavenlies in Christ Jesus." All true Christians possess all spiritual blessings, and Paul delineates these blessings, all the way from election to glorification, down through verse 14 of chapter 1 and culminates it in verse 15, which expresses our love for the saints. We are all possessors of the same full range of blessings in Christ, salvation blessings, and they culminate in love for all the saints.

As he goes on in that chapter, Paul continues to talk about what we all possess as true believers. We possess these same spiritual riches. We have been lavished with spiritual riches, with power, with strength, because we are in Christ. He is our life, He is our head, and we are His body. So we are connected to Christ in that unity, that spiritual unity.

As you come to chapter 2, Paul says we all started out in the same condition: We were dead in

trespasses and sins; we were walking according to the course of this world; we were under demonic and satanic influence. But we were all saved by grace through faith, not of works, but we were saved unto good works, which God before ordained that we should walk in them. So we all started out with all the same spiritual blessings; we all came to engage with these blessings, to receive these blessings, when we were saved by God's divine grace through faith. We have now become Christ's, and Christ is ours; and we are in Him, and He is in us. We are His body. We have been basically created anew for good works which God has before ordained that we should walk in them. And I told you when we went over that passage that just as your glorification was a matter of divine election, so was your sanctification.

As we go further into chapter 2 we find—again celebrating our unity—that all believers, whether Jew or Gentile, are one new man. It doesn't matter what their ethnicity is; we're all one new man. We are fellow citizens. We are all members of God's household, God's family. We are one building. We are one holy temple for the Lord. We are built together into a dwelling of God in the Spirit. It also says that in chapter 2. So again, all of these things mark out our unity.

And then in chapter 3 we read that we are “fellow heirs, fellow members of the body, fellow partakers of the promise in Christ Jesus through the gospel.” And that collectively and together, verse 19 of chapter 3, we are “filled up to all the fullness of God,” so that, verse 21, God can be glorified “in the church and in Christ Jesus” the church displays its redemption “to all generations forever and ever.”

So Paul has been going through these three chapters, lavishing on us all our spiritual blessings, and the idea is to help us understand we all have the same blessings. We are all one. And that comes out, as I read a moment ago, in verses 4 through 6, where Paul goes back to the foundations of our faith: one body, one spirit, one hope of your calling, one Lord, one faith, one baptism, and one God and Father. All of this is a plea for unity in the church. But even with all these pleas there are some necessary attitudes and some necessary spiritual dynamics that have to be at work in a church to fulfill this calling. And that's what we find in this passage before us.

First, there is the call to walk worthy. Look at verse 1, “Therefore I, the prisoner of the Lord”—he was actually a prisoner when he was writing this—“the prisoner of the Lord, implore you to walk in a manner worthy of the calling with which you have been called.” We looked at that a couple of weeks ago, the call to walk worthy. The word “worthy” is *axiōs*; it means equivalent. In other words, our conduct should match our convictions, our duty should match our doctrine, our behavior should match our belief. This is Christian life 101. If you say you belong to the Lord, you ought to walk the way He walks.

This is a message that Paul is giving us right here. He's begging us “to walk in a manner worthy of the calling to which we are called. This is such a common reality, this is so basic, that Paul repeats it frequently in his epistles. Let me give you illustrations.

Philippians 1:27, “Only conduct yourselves in a manner worthy of the gospel of Christ.” And what does that look like? “That you [would be] standing firm in one spirit, with one mind striving together for the faith of the gospel.” Again, if you're going to be living out the transformation that God has wrought inside, if you're going to walk in a manner that is worthy, you're going to be manifesting yourself in one spirit, with one mind striving together for the faith. In other words, there will be unity.

In Colossians he says similar things—different order of words, but exactly the same message. Colossians 1:10, “So that you will walk in a manner worthy of the Lord, to please Him in all respects, bearing fruit in every good work and increasing in the knowledge of God; strengthened with all power, according to His glorious might, for the attaining of all steadfastness and patience; joyously giving thanks to the Father, who qualified us to share in the inheritance of the saints in Light.” And again he says, “Walk in a manner worthy of the Lord,” which means “[pleasing] Him in all respects.”

In his letter to the Thessalonians, 1 Thessalonians chapter 2 and verse 12, he says, “Walk in a manner worthy of the God who calls you into His own kingdom and glory.” This again is the basic perception of the Christian life. Walk consistently with your calling. Basically, let your life match up with what God has done for you and in you.

It is a high calling; we have said that. The Scripture calls it a high calling. It is a holy calling. It is a heavenly calling. And by calling, we mean an actual calling, where God sovereignly calls us out of darkness into light, out of death into life, out of lies into truth. It is the actual, saving call where the Lord awakens the dead sinner and gives him life. So if that has happened in your life and you have been called by God, Paul says you have to walk in a way that is consistent with that calling.

This is the basic reality of every Christian’s life. What you are in position, what you are in possession, you need to be in conduct. Anything other than that is hypocrisy, and anything other than that, of course, cripples the message of saving power, because it doesn’t demonstrate that transformation to the world if people are hypocritical. And again, we have to come back to the fact that the unity of the church is the church’s greatest testimony, and yet it seems to be the hardest thing to see realized.

So the call to a worthy walk, we talked about it. As you come to verse 2, then we look at the characteristics of this worthy life or this worthy walk, and the characteristics might be a little surprising because given that this is such a high calling, heavenly calling, holy calling, what the Lord wants from us is lowliness. Verse 2, “With all humility and gentleness, with patience, showing tolerance for one another in love, being diligent to preserve the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace.”

Again, the goal is always the unity of the Spirit; that is the demonstrated testimony of transforming gospel power. But in order to get to that unity, there has to be some virtues that are manifest and that are established as the priorities in the life of every Christian. And notice in verse 2—and I want to take time with this because these are what is essential to being a Christian in the church in such a way that the church becomes one and its testimony is clear—“with all humility.” The Christians invented this word. Literally, the word means to think lowly of yourself, to think lowly of yourself. That is a far cry from the unconverted world’s interests. In fact no such word existed in classical Greek. Apparently the Christians coined this word because thinking lowly of yourself was the last thing that Greek culture wanted to advocate as a virtue.

We would be the same in our culture today, as would be almost every culture throughout human history. You’re supposed to think highly of yourself, promote yourself, because of course, in your fallen condition, pride is the default position of every human sinner. But Christians have come up with this: by virtue of God’s design and God’s revelation, that we are to be defined by all humility—not some, but all humility. This is the virtue of the person who is aware of his own unworthiness and weakness. In other words, to walk worthy you have to recognize you’re unworthy.

In Acts 20 and verse 19, Paul described what he did as “serving the Lord with all humility.” So he’s passing on what he actually was doing. He is not just the teacher; he is the example, “serving the Lord with all humility.” And you would think if you were the apostle Paul and you had his credentials— You are an apostle, yes. You’ve had at least four visions of Christ, and nobody else had any. You had a trip to heaven and back. You have been used more than any human being in history. You have taken the gospel to the Gentiles; you are the apostle to the Gentiles. You have been marked with honor. Just about everybody in the Gentile world who was a believer was a believer because of your influence. You would think that for the apostle Paul there would be a tendency to have a high view of himself; and humanly speaking, you would be right to think that. That’s a tremendous amount of success, a tremendous amount of spiritual success. So the Lord had to mitigate that in his life.

Turn to 2 Corinthians chapter 4, and listen to what Paul says in verse 5, “We do not preach ourselves but Christ Jesus as Lord, and ourselves as your slaves for Jesus’ sake.” Now that’s about as low as you can go. Paul’s high calling, apostolic calling, missionary calling still had to have the perception that he was a slave of Christ and a slave of those to whom he ministered. In fact in verse 7 he says, “We have this treasure in earthen vessels”—the treasure meaning the glory of the gospel shining in the face of Christ. And he says, “I’m a clay pot”—“So that the surpassing greatness of the power will be of God and not from ourselves.”

Paul is never going to be the explanation for his spiritual success. In fact in verse 8, “We are afflicted in every way, but not crushed; perplexed, but not despairing; persecuted, but not forsaken; struck down, but not destroyed; always carrying about in the body the dying of Jesus, so that the life of Jesus may also be manifest in our body. For we who live are constantly being delivered over to death for Jesus’ sake, so that the life of Jesus also may be manifested in our mortal flesh. So death works in us, but life in you.” His life was just a constant exposure to death, to hostility, to enemies. It was a crushing thing, but it didn’t put out the light; it didn’t daunt his spirit. And that’s why he says the things he says: “I’m all the way committed—to death, if need be. So let death work in us if life can work in you.” So there is an immense humility in that recognition that you are disposable, that you are dispensable, that you need to look at yourself with a sense of unworthiness.

In chapter 12 of 2 Corinthians—you might want to look at that—Paul, at the beginning of the chapter, talks about his trip to heaven and all the visions and all the revelations that he had. But he comes down into verse 7, and we read this: “Because of the surpassing greatness of the revelations, for this reason, to keep me from exalting myself, there was given me a thorn in the flesh, a messenger of Satan to torment me—to keep me from exalting myself!” This is the apostle Paul, who had the most preeminent credentials of anybody in the New Testament except our Lord Himself. And in his fallenness and in his recognition of his own sinfulness, he knew that he was tempted to be proud because of his spiritual success and spiritual accomplishments.

And perhaps there were those expressions of pride, because the Lord has to do something to humble him. And it says in verse 7 that “because of the surpassing greatness of the revelations, for this reason, to keep me from exalting myself, there was given me the thorn in the flesh.” “Thorn,” not like on a rosebush, but it really means a point of a spear. The Lord literally took a spear and ran it through his otherwise proud flesh.

What was that? What was that tortured instrument? What was that torment driven into his flesh? He

says, “A messenger of Satan to torment me.” What is “a messenger of Satan”? Well, that word is used—“messenger” is used many, many, many times in the New Testament. It always means a person. Doesn’t mean malaria or eye disease, or things like that that some people have said. It’s a person; it’s a person. In this case it could be a human person, because *aggelos* is used, at least in Revelation, to refer to a human person. But better to understand—it’s the word *aggelos*, so what is a satanic *aggelos*? That’s a demon. And I think he’s talking about the demon who was leading the opposition to the church at Corinth and tearing up his work there.

Paul was heartsick about the fact that he had left after immense effort there, and false teachers had come, possessed by demons, to destroy his ministry. They were saying terrible things about him. They were brutal and merciless. They said he was in it for favors from women and to make money, and he lied about his credentials. They made up everything possible, and this was damaging to the church that he loved so much. This was as deep as pain because in chapter 11 he says, “I can take the physical pain. What’s hard for me is the care of the churches, because who’s weak and I don’t feel the pain; who sins and I don’t feel the agony?”

So what was going on in the church was a torturous experience for him. He uses the term “torment.” Why would the Lord allow a demon-possessed false teacher to do damage to a church? To humble Paul. That is a stunning reality. Unless you think it’s some kind of isolated reality, remember that Jesus said to Peter in Luke 22, “Satan desires to have you that he may sift you like wheat. And he’s going to do that; I’m giving him permission to do that. And when it’s over and you’re converted, you’ll be able to strengthen the brethren.”

There are times when the Lord lets Satan loose on one of His own, to humble him. There are times when God commands demonic forces—because they are under His command—to be the instrument of the humbling of a preacher like Paul. That’s how important humility is. That’s how important humility is. I say this to ministers all the time, “Embrace your suffering, embrace your disappointments, embrace your failures, because in those embraces you’re going to find your greatest spiritual growth and usefulness.”

So Paul prays, in verse 8, three times for the Lord to get that demon-possessed influence out of the church at Corinth. And the Lord says to him, “My grace is sufficient for you, for power is perfected in weakness.” This is the divine principle that I want you to notice: “No; I’ll give you sufficient grace to endure this, and it’ll produce in you distrust and weakness that’ll make you dependent on Me.”

There’s so many people who are too strong to be useful, so few who are weak enough to be useful. Paul was humble; and where he wasn’t humble, he was humbled in very epic fashion. But he learned a lesson, verse 9, “Most gladly, therefore, I will rather boast about my weaknesses, so that the power of Christ may dwell in me.” So that’s where Christian life begins: with your recognition of your weakness, your weakness.

But far too much fake preaching these days that tries to elevate people, telling them that because they are a child of God they should think of themselves in some elevated fashion. That is absolutely the opposite of what the Scripture would say. Paul calls himself the chief of sinners. Paul says, “I don’t do what I want to do, I do what I don’t want to do. I’m a wretched man.” This is the kind of humility that is honest, and it’s not what the world exalts or elevates, but it is the foundation for all Christian living.

Go back to Matthew 5 for a moment. In Matthew 5, our Lord starts the Sermon on the Mount, and He's inviting people to His kingdom. And notice the nature of those who will be received, verse 3, Matthew 5, "Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven." Intuitively you might say, "Blessed are the rich in spirit, blessed are the super-spiritual, blessed are the highly educated," whatever. But it's the opposite—"Blessed are the poor in spirit." It means spiritually bankrupt. Blessed are the people who have nothing to offer. That's how you come to the kingdom: with an empty hand.

In fact, not only are you bankrupt in your spirit, but, verse 4, "Blessed are those who mourn," they're the ones that are going to be comforted. They're mourning over their insufficiency and unworthiness.

And then in verse 5, they're the gentle—or they're the meek—who don't assert themselves. They're the ones that inherit the earth. And then they are described as "those who hunger and thirst for righteousness," which means they know they don't have it, but they're the ones "satisfied." They're "the merciful" who will "receive mercy." They're "the pure in heart" who will "see God." They are "the peacemakers"—not the troublemakers; they are the ones, in verse 10, who are "persecuted . . . . Blessed are you when people insult you and persecute you, and falsely say all kinds of evil against you because of Me. Rejoice and be glad, for your reward in heaven is great; for in the same way they persecuted the prophets who were before you."

It is nothing new for God's people to be vilified, mistreated, and persecuted. What it does is it just humbles the heart. And Paul is trying to get us to the place where we don't look on our own things but we look on the things of others, where we humbled ourselves.

Again, this is the foundational attitude in the Christian life. First Peter 5:5, "Be clothed with humility." It's not just an item of clothing; it's the robe. "Be clothed with humility: for God resists the proud, and gives grace to the humble."

When we're talking about humility, what are we talking about? Well I think there are three things that would simply help you to see what humility essentially perceives. Number one, self-awareness, self-awareness. A humble person is aware of his own limitations, his own boundaries, his own competencies and incompetencies, his own weaknesses, his own sins. Self-awareness—you start by being honest about yourself. And you hear Paul say, "I'm the chief of sinners," or you hear him say, "I don't do what I want to do; I do what I don't want to do. I'm a wretched man." Paul is declaring his unworthiness. So the worthy walk is a walk of one who is convinced he is unworthy. Honesty about yourself because, as we said, the default position for fallen sinners is to overestimate themselves; and pride is the dominating, default sin.

Occasionally I like to read psychologist Jordan Peterson because I think he's got some amazing practical insights. And he loves to confront university students who tell him they want to change the world. When he asks them what they would like to do, they might say, "End global warming." They might say, "Eliminate poverty. Eliminate sexual traffic. Eliminate drugs. Eliminate crime." They've got these grandiose ideologies; they want to have a large impact on society; they want to fix the world. And I love how he responds to that.

He says, "Well, why don't you start by fixing your own life? That's a big enough challenge. And you

may find that you'll never be able to do it in your whole life, but it's a good place to start. Before you fix the world, fix what's wrong with you. That's a big challenge."

I mean, it comes down occasionally to something like this: "You're going to change the world, but you can't even stay on a diet. Really? Maybe you can start by cleaning your room. And then, when you get yourself fixed, fix your family. You want a job? Forget the world; just try to fix your family. Maybe you ought to start there."

It's bizarre for people to think they can leave their own weaknesses and inabilities where they are and somehow, with all of that weakness never dealt with, they can make a change in the entire world. You've got to start by being honest about your weakness because that throws you at the mercy of the Lord, doesn't it? That's why you come with a Beatitude attitude. That's why you live the Christian life with all humility. Humility says, "I'm not worthy; I'm not capable; I'm not able. I understand that. And so whatever suffering the Lord brings into my life, I want to embrace that suffering. Whatever He's doing to refine me and break my confidence in myself, I want to embrace that because it's only when I am weak that I am strong. When I get out of the way and trust Him, then there's real strength." So it starts with an honest self-awareness.

And then, secondly, I would say it's a Christ awareness. When you're overestimating your significance, your importance, your value, your competencies, you probably have been looking to compare yourself with someone less than you, not likely Christ. But as you gaze at the glory of Christ, and as you see Him for who He is, you get smaller and smaller. John the Baptist said, "He must increase, and I must decrease."

And then it's also a view of God, like Isaiah 6. Isaiah, who's the prophet, sees God; and having seen God, he puts a curse on himself and says he's a man with a dirty mouth, and pronounces judgment on himself.

So humility comes from an honest evaluation of yourself and a true vision of Christ and a true vision of God. And the purer your vision of yourself and your Lord and God, the more useful you become.

In Jeremiah 9:23 and 24, Jeremiah wrote this: "Thus says Yahweh, 'Let not a . . . man boast in his wisdom, let not a mighty man boast in his might, let not a rich man boast in his riches; but let him who boasts boast in this, that he understands and knows Me, that I am Yahweh who shows lovingkindness, justice and righteousness on earth; for I delight in these things,' declares Yahweh." If you're going to boast, boast in the Lord. That's what we're after here.

So this is humility. But we talked about that last time, so let's go on to the next word, and the next word will be enough to occupy us for a few more minutes: "gentleness." You might say, "Well, I get it," but you probably don't. Now listen, this is foundation, right? We've had three chapters of doctrine—incredible, lavish layout of doctrine—and now we're supposed to walk worthy. We're supposed to match up our living with our doctrine. And he gives us these very simple words: "in all humility and gentleness." So we'd better know what they mean.

What is gentleness? Or some translations translate it "meekness," *prautēs* in Greek. It means "mild" or "gentle," so "meekness" works, "gentleness" works. It's gentle-hearted. On a negative side: no spirit of revenge, no spirit of retaliation, no vindictiveness, no bitterness, no hostile anger, no angry

assertions. It's gentleness.

And sometimes the word was used to describe a soothing medicine in ancient times. Other times it was used to describe a gentle breeze. And other times it was used to describe a young colt that had been broken; where it was unruly, it now became tame, gentle, and its power could be channeled in a productive way.

Secular Greek uses it of people who are mild or friendly or gentle or pleasant, as opposed to rough, harsh, hard, violent, angry. It's a godly virtue. It's a godly virtue. It's used twelve times in the New Testament. We saw it there in Matthew 5:5, "Blessed are the gentle," or the meek. We see it in Galatians 5:23 where it appears as part of the fruit of the Spirit: "gentleness." We see it in 1 Timothy 6:11 as a virtue of a man of God who is marked by his gentleness.

And again, there might be people who think, "Well, this is weakness. How can you be a strong leader and be gentle?" You can if you understand this term. And I think one of the best ways to understand it is to see it defined as power under control. It doesn't refer to impotence or lack of power or lack of courage. And it is a byproduct of humility. If you're a humble person, you may have immense power, you may have immense capabilities, you may have immense competencies. You may be a force. But if you are humble, all of a sudden you're transformed into someone who's gentle because this is a product of self-humiliation; this is a product of self-emptying. This is the product of a broken will.

Again, it doesn't mean weak; it doesn't mean impotent; it doesn't mean cowardly. What it means is that your powers, which are formidable in Christ, are under the control of the will of God and the Holy Spirit. Proverbs says, in Proverbs 25:28, "Like a city that is broken into and without a wall is a man without restraint over his spirit." On the other hand, Proverbs 16:32 says, "He who is slow to anger is better than the mighty, and he who rules his own spirit, than he who captures a city."

Gentleness means you have self-control. There is a meekness, there is a gentleness; and let me see if I can't define it in some specific ways by giving you some specific illustrations—the best one.

Jesus said, Matthew 11:29, "Come to Me and learn of Me, for I am"—what?—"meek and lowly. I am gentle and lowly." So if you're looking for an illustration of what gentleness and lowliness looks like, look no further than Jesus. Was He weak? Was He cowardly? Was He short on convictions? No. But the apostle Paul says in 2 Corinthians 10:1 that we need to follow the meekness of Christ—the meekness, the gentleness of Christ.

How is it that we can even look at Jesus in that way? After all, He blasted the Temple system twice, once at the beginning of His ministry and once at the end. He condemned the hypocrites, the leaders of Israel; He unleashed judgment on their heads. There's no cowardly Christ; that is inconceivable. He stood fearlessly before a crowd that wanted to stone Him and disappeared. And then He took whips to clean out the Temple when His Father's house had been defiled. Yet the Bible says He was meek; He's the model of meekness, total selflessness. How is this possible: to be both meek and such a force against evil? And the answer is this: that Jesus never wielded His power to defend Himself. He never wielded His power to defend Himself. He wielded His power to defend His Father, His Father's reputation, and His Father's house: "You have taken My Father's house, which is a house of prayer, and you've turned it into a den of thieves."



When you think about the incarnation of Christ, I know you understand that He became a man, became truly man; you see much of the human part of it in His living, of course. But I think we tend to overlook the unique characteristic of gentleness that is, on the one hand, fiercely defensive of God and not of one's self. For Him, His Father mattered, His Father mattered. For Him, Isaiah 53, "He was oppressed and afflicted, yet He did not open"—what?—"His mouth." He didn't open His mouth. He was like a sheep, dumb before its shearers. He had power, but He never used it for Himself. You don't find that. He was always humbling Himself, taking on the burdens, taking the hostility, the hatred, and eager and fiercely loyal to His Father. And He is our model of what meekness looks like: You defend God, you defend His kingdom, you defend His truth; you don't defend yourself. That's the power that's under control.

You know, as a person who knows the Word of God, you've got a lot of power. You can wield your knowledge of Scripture with some serious force; so can I. You can use the sword of the Spirit to cut and slice and dice; and that's what it does. And you can use it to defend yourself, and you can become a cutting, domineering, overbearing, self-defensive person. And if it's all about you, then you haven't understood the basics of the Christian life: meekness. I will rise to the battle to defend the Lord, to defend Christ, to defend the Holy Spirit, to defend the Scripture. I don't wield powers to defend myself against someone who accuses me falsely, persecutes me.

Meekness is that power under control, used only at the right time and the right occasion, for the right length at the right cause. An illustration of it, back in 1 Samuel 24. Saul is hunting David; he's got a few thousand men, he's trying to get to David so he can eliminate him because he's a threat to his throne. They're down by Engedi, which is the spring of goats down by the Dead Sea, and David and his men are in a cave. And Saul and his men come by, and it says in 1 Samuel 24 that Saul came in the cave to relieve himself—the very cave where David and his men were hiding. The men immediately thought, "This is it. With the stroke of a blade, Saul is dead and David is free from his would-be murderer."

David could have killed Saul there, taken the throne that really belonged to him. And they urged David to do it—but he wouldn't do it. He just cut off a piece of Saul's robe and kept that piece. He had the power to take a life. He had maybe the right to take a life because he was God's choice king. But that power was under control, and the controlling element was the will of God, the will of God. He followed Saul out of the cave, showed him the piece, and told him, "I wouldn't touch the Lord's anointed."

With all the power that a believer has—the power of the truth and the power of the Spirit—we don't want to wield it as if it's ours, for the defense of ourselves. Remember what Paul said: "Power is perfected in"—what?—"in weakness." So I would rather have persecutions and suffering. You don't want to defend yourself, because when you're in difficult times, that's when God does His best work in shaping you.

Second Samuel 16, David's son Absalom took over the kingdom and forced his father to flee into the wilderness. One of Saul's men, Shimei, cursed David. And so David's people said, "Let me take his head off!" And David said, "Let him alone." He had the power, he had the opportunity; but he wouldn't take vengeance because, as I read in Romans, "Vengeance is Mine," says the Lord.

Saul could have and would have killed David if the tables had been turned, but David wouldn't take Saul. He had the power, but it was under control, and it was never used for him. And Jesus had the

power. He said this: "If I ask My Father, He would send twelve legions of angels to deliver Me, and you couldn't do anything." But He didn't because in the will of God, suffering was the divine purpose.

In Numbers 12, verse 3, it says about Moses, “The man Moses was very meek, above all the men who were on the face of the earth.” Do you think of Moses as meek, gentle, more so than anybody in the earth? He was fearless, he was bold, he was courageous, he was powerful, he was strong, he was confrontive. He stood toe-to-toe with Pharaoh and said, “Let my people go.” He came down from the mountain, smashed the tablets of stone in fury over idolatry and caused a slaughter of the idolaters right in the camp of Israel. Moses was a force for the defense of God. But on his own, you remember in Exodus 3, he says, “You don’t want me; I-I-I-I-I-I-I-I-I-I stutter.” But what he did have was the rod of God.

So this is a virtue that goes right along with humility. Where, as believers, we're not into defending ourselves because if we are all busy defending ourselves, there can't be unity because we don't look on the things of others, we're too absorbed in our own issues. Follow the pattern of Christ.

Do you experience that kind of control? Is your anger controlled? Is your self-defense common, or do you save your anger for holy things, righteous indignation? Are you honored only when God is dishonored, His Word is dishonored? Do you always seek to make peace, no trouble, no gossip, just forgiveness, restoration? Do you respond to the Word humbly, meekly? Do you receive intrusion and instruction and love the people who disagree with you? This is power under control. And the final question is, “Do you rise to the defense of your Savior and your God and His truth?” Because that’s when you should express that power.

John Bunyan put it simply. He said, “He that is already down need fear no fall.” A meek person is not proud of themselves, nothing of which to boast, demands nothing, is not self-protective, self-defensive, self-pitying. It is to be finished with yourself altogether. And that’s the twin of humility.

Sums it up when you read how our Lord responded to His mistreatment. 1 Peter 2:21, “For you have been called for this purpose, since Christ also suffered for you, leaving you an example for you to follow in His steps.” Now look, Christ died as a substitution, but He also died as an example. And what does that mean? “Follow in His steps, who committed no sin, nor was any deceit found in His mouth”—so He didn’t deserve the mistreatment that He got. But “while being reviled, He didn’t revile in return; while suffering, He uttered no threats, but kept entrusting Himself to Him who judges righteously.”

Jesus set the example: You don't retaliate; you suffer righteously, and you leave the vengeance to God. This is the kind of humility and gentleness that leads to true unity in the church. Never think you should get your way; you should always want to get God's way.

Father, we thank You for Your truth and Your Word. And even though this is a simple concept on the one hand, it's elusive because we still have the raging of remaining sin within us. So we ask that You would grant us the humility and gentleness that is the fruit of the Spirit.

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