

THE GOSPEL MESSAGE

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Not Violent or Quarrelsome

Charles Fry

By and large, the world isn't sold on gentleness as a great quality to aspire to, although almost everyone appreciates being treated gently by others, especially by people who have power over us, including our parents in childhood and various governing authorities or bosses we may deal with in adult life. Even so, the world generally pursues getting the upper hand and gaining advantages over others, by whatever means, rather than nurturing gentleness toward all, and especially toward the weak.

Christians are directed to practice gentleness to the point of building a reputation, *"let your gentleness be evident to all"* (**Philippians 4:5**). The Bible sets a high priority on building the skill of being tender and compassionate as we interact with other people. The Lord expects his people to practice gentleness so consistently as to be known for it.

When Paul, Silas, and Timothy wrote to the young Thessalonian church, they described their own behavior there as *"gentle among you, like a nursing mother taking care of her own children"* (**1 Thessalonians 2:7**). That's a high standard of willful humility for Christians to pursue. Working at being gentle among the fledgling Christians, the preachers had demonstrated a pattern to be imitated by other believers in every community. Christians must intentionally and persistently be gentle.

Jesus described himself as *"gentle and humble in heart"* when he invited the weary and burdened, all of us, to follow him (**Matthew 11:28-30**). Had he not chosen to be gentle and humble, it would have been impossible for him to work with the flailing sinners in that generation or this. Intentional gentleness, consideration, and understanding of the failures of everyone around him, with patience and extreme kindness motivated by love, enabled him to work with flawed humans like us and create a kingdom for the meek and the weak.

Gentleness is a defining characteristic of *"the fruit of the Spirit"* in **Galatians 5:22-23**. To live by the Spirit and walk with the Spirit is to practice gentleness in our relationships. Walking in a way that is worthy of the call of Jesus (**Matthew 11:28-30**) calls for Christians to be full of humility, thinking well of others compared to ourselves, and full of gentleness,

treating others kindly, with tenderness, and being patient even when others are not (**Ephesians 4:1-2**).

Potential Christian leaders are required to have a pattern of gentle conduct before they can be considered for ordination to the office of bishop/elder (**1 Timothy 3:3**). When Paul contrasted "gentle" with "not violent" and "not quarrelsome," he gave us perspective on what gentleness is in practice. Being inclined toward using force or being belligerent, whether physical or verbal conflict, is the opposite of being gentle and inconsistent with walking worthy of Christ and producing the fruit of the Spirit.

When Paul told Timothy to *"fight the good fight of the faith"* in **1 Timothy 6:12**, it was immediately after telling the younger preacher to *"pursue righteousness, godliness, faith, love, endurance, and gentleness."* Since the next phrase after *"pursue... gentleness"* is *"fight the good fight of the faith,"* we have to understand that this fight has nothing to do with violence or quarreling and everything to do with self-control and kindness in the face of opposition and foolishness. In the same vein, Paul later wrote to Timothy that the Lord's servant,

must not be quarrelsome but must be kind to everyone, able to teach, not resentful. Opponents must be gently instructed, in the hope that God will grant them repentance leading them to a knowledge of the truth (**2 Timothy 2:24-25**).

Gentle instruction of opponents is the methodology for fighting the good fight of the faith. Titus was likewise reminded by Paul that Christians are to be,

subject to rulers and authorities, to be obedient, to be ready to do whatever is good, to slander no one, to be peaceable and considerate, and always to be gentle toward everyone (**Titus 3:1-2**).

Christians are to apply these life principles, Paul said, to governing authorities and everyone. Be gentle in word and deed (which is neither quarrelsome nor violent) toward everyone.

In contrast to the "wisdom" of the world around us, which is self-serving and envious (**James 3:14-16**), the wisdom that comes from God is *"first pure, then peaceable, gentle, open to reason, full of mercy and good fruits, impartial and sincere"* (**James 3:17**). God promises to give us wisdom if we lack it and ask for it in faith (**James 1:5-6**), so if being peaceable and gentle and

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reasonable is difficult, a prayer of faith seeking divine wisdom would be an appropriate recourse assuming we desire a harvest of righteousness.

Peter also wrote of the gentleness Christians are to cultivate for dealing with unbelievers, even hostile unbelievers, when he taught that reverence for Christ includes,

always being prepared to make a defense to anyone who asks you for a reason for the hope that is in you; yet do it with gentleness and respect, having a good conscience, so that, when you are slandered, those who revile your good behavior in Christ may be put to shame (1 Peter 3:15-16).

The hostility of the world isn't to be met evil for evil, insult for insult, anger for anger, but rather to be overcome with a thoughtful answer about faith in Jesus and a gentle demeanor that deflects slander.

Gentleness is necessary for the effective persuasion of unbelievers and keeping a clear conscience before God. Gentleness is a necessary attribute of Christian conduct, required of leaders in the Lord's church. Gentleness is a facet of divine wisdom, demonstrated by Jesus Christ and his apostles, achievable by all Christians in conjunction with walking in the Spirit and praying in faith.

Let your gentleness be evident to all.

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Slow to Speak

Blake Stanley

During a recent reading through Proverbs, there were a few verses that stood out to me:

- *"In a multitude of words, sin is not lacking, but he who restrains his lips is wise" (10:19).*
- *"A soft answer turns away wrath, but a harsh word stirs up anger. The tongue of the wise uses knowledge rightly, but the mouth of the fool pours forth foolishness" (15:1-2).*
- *"The heart of the righteous studies how to answer" (15:28).*
- *"He who is slow to anger is better than the mighty. And he who rules the spirit than he who takes the city" (16:32).*
- *"He who answers a matter before he hears it, it is folly and shame to him" (18:13).*

- *"Do you see a man hasty in his words? There is more help for a fool than for him" (29:20).*
- *"A fool vents his feelings. But a wise man holds them back" (29:11).*

In these verses, we see warnings about speaking too much, speaking too quickly, speaking harshly, venting our feelings, getting angry, and giving opinions without understanding a matter or having all the information.

Have you seen any of this behavior in the world lately? I'm sure you have. It seems all around us people are speaking compulsively, without regard to how their words might be received, freely venting their feelings, seeking outrage in every place, and giving opinions on matters about which they have given very little thought. People are not reasonable. They are not rational. They are not calm. They are more concerned about agendas and narratives than hearing the truth.

While we can observe all these behaviors in the world around us, these verses in Proverbs also reveal to us where we may be at fault, and they call us to something better:

- Restraint with our words.
- Soft answers.
- Study and thoughtfulness.
- Listening before speaking.
- Ruling our spirit to hold back our feelings, particularly our anger.

Exhibiting this behavior can be challenging when the world continually behaves brashly. So much of what we are exposed to in the news, social media, and everyday interactions with the world pushes us to conform to their behavior.

The news, generally speaking, actively tries to manufacture anger. Like any business, they have a product to sell, and that product is us, the viewers. The more we watch, the more ads they can sell. They've figured out the best way to keep someone's attention is to get them angry. So they manufacture outrage to keep us listening.

Social media platforms, whether intentionally or just by their nature, discourage real thought and real conversation and encourage a quick response and fighting for the last word. A person can share a poorly-thought-out position without fear of having to engage in a conversation. Most of the back and forth is done in writing, a medium that is difficult to engage in an argumentative conversation without it escalating. The kind of soft answer, self-controlled, well-thought-out manner God desires us to communicate with can go very quickly.

It is also hard to respond in a godly manner when the world is attacking us so harshly. When the world criticizes

Christianity or anything for that matter, it is rarely done softly. The criticism almost always carries with it an antagonistic tone. Personal attacks are often levied. When someone is attacking you and your beliefs, or the people you love, it is really difficult to respond appropriately.

These are just a few examples of how we are pushed to engage with the world in the same manner the world engages with one another. But we can't conform to the mold. For one, it's not how God wants us to behave. And secondly, we have to look at what the result is if we adopt this behavior. What would happen if we did? What would happen if we behaved this same way towards the world? What kind of message do we send to the world about God and Christ when our words match their tones? What happens when we fire off a quick response without any real thought? What happens if we begin to treat information the same way the world does? What would happen if we were dismissive of others? Unwilling to listen, unwilling to hear them out. What is the result? I would say nothing that furthers the gospel. We may even close down people's willingness to listen to the gospel.

Just as dangerous as that, what happens if this behavior seeps into our behavior towards one another? If we allow this kind of behavior into our lives and our congregation? Easily angered and frustrated with one another, assuming the worst in people, and speaking harshly when there is disagreement. This will not demonstrate the love we are to have for one another, and it will have disastrous results. If this is how we deal with conflict and contrary points of view with the world, it will end up in our congregations.

We must be mindful that our demeanor in our dealings with others does not degrade as it has in the world. For as the Lord tells us in **James 1:19-20**, "*Know this, my beloved brothers: let every person be quick to hear, slow to speak, slow to anger; for the anger of man does not produce the righteousness of God.*"

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Looking Back and Looking Ahead

Wade Stanley

At the close of 2021, your editor and publisher concluded their tenth year in these roles. February 2022 is our one hundred and twenty-second issue. We have published 200-300 articles, rejoiced with those who rejoice, and wept with those who weep. Speaking on behalf of your publisher, it has been a real joy to serve you these past ten years.

This paper could not be published without a deep bench of contributors who have written articles of the highest quality. I am always amazed when two men, living thousands of miles apart, who have not talked to one another in years, write two articles for the same issue that complement one another perfectly. Though I cannot be absolutely certain, I suspect the Holy Spirit is working among us as Scripture suggests. Thank you, my brothers, for making my job as editor incredibly easy and this burden much, much lighter.

Very few are aware of this, but *The Gospel Message* has been insolvent for a number of years. When Tom handed the paper off to Doug and I, he wanted to be sure this publication remained a "break-even" endeavor. We shared his desire and have conducted the paper's business accordingly. However, over the last ten years, costs have gone up across the board. Despite rising costs, we chose to keep the subscription price at \$7 per year. We have been able to do so because many of you send Doug \$10 or \$20 or \$100 with explicit instructions to "keep the change." Though the yearly subscription fees do not cover the costs of publication, your generosity has helped us keep this a "break-even" effort. Lord willing, with your help, we intend to keep the subscription price at \$7 per year for the foreseeable future.

In disclosing the above, Doug and I share a concern that some of you might feel compelled to contribute more to the paper. To be clear, we are not soliciting donations. Rather, we feel a responsibility, as stewards of this ongoing work, to be transparent about the status of *The Gospel Message*. In addition, we feel it is necessary to share the paper's status to help you better understand the reasons behind our future plans. So, please read on.

How we communicate with one another has changed dramatically the past ten years. As communication technology has evolved, Doug and I have held ongoing conversations about the future of the paper. We know that a sizable portion of our subscribers want — and will always want — to open their mailbox once a month to find a printed copy of *The Gospel Message*. However, we also recognize that some subscribers would be open to receiving a digital copy of *The Gospel Message* each month.

Consequently, later this year, we will offer a digital option. Subscribers will be able sign up through *The Gospel Message* website to receive an email edition of *The Gospel Message* every month. As more people shift from physical delivery to email delivery, our costs for printing and shipping each physical copy will increase. To help balance the goals of maintaining the current rate for mail subscription and keeping *The Gospel Message* close to solvent while avoiding personal profit, we will be charging a very small subscription fee to



Please check your expiration date!

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those who opt for email delivery.

We will keep you informed as these plans unfold. If you have any questions or concerns, please feel free to contact me at the information below.

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Blessed Are the Dead

Clifford E. Funk, 77, of Topeka, KS, passed away December 7, 2021. Cliff was born October 6, 1944, in Montana Mines, WV. He served in the U.S. Navy for over 27 years. Cliff married Diana Ruth Brandt who survives him. Cliff was a member of the **California Acres Church of Christ, Topeka, KS.**

Kenneth L. "Kenny" DeLong, 74, of Topeka, KS, passed away December 18, 2021. Kenny was a member of the **California Acres Church of Christ, Topeka, KS.**

Loretta J. Rhoads, 90, of Kirksville passed away January 3, 2022. The daughter of **Carl and Ora (Elam) Cook**, she was born April 5, 1931, in Ethel, Missouri. On May 12, 1955, in New Cambria, Missouri she was united in marriage to **Joseph Rhoads** who preceded her in death. She was a member of the **Kirksville, MO Church of Christ** and several Bible groups.

Thomas Eugene Brady, 76, entered Paradise January 5. Tom was born January 28, 1945, to **Dale and Audrey Brady**. Tom married the love of his life, **Lois Friedrichsen**, on May 22, 1965. Their union was blessed with three children: **Jason (Theresa) Brady, Julene (Scott) Pappan, and Allison (Kelly) George**, 12 grandchildren, and 11 great grandchildren. He is also survived by his brother Steve (Nancy) Brady. Brother Tom was a faithful member of the **Church of Christ in Pleasant Hill, IA**. He will be long remembered for his inspiring faithfulness and resilience he showed during the difficult last years of his life.

A good name is better than precious ointment, And the day of death than the day of one's birth; Better to go to the house of mourning Than to go to the house of feasting, For that is the end of all men; And the living will take it to heart. Sorrow is better than laughter, For by a sad countenance the heart is made better (Ecclesiastes 7:1-3).

Special Meetings

Please make plans to join the **Section Church of Christ** (Osage City, KS) for a **Spring Meeting** on March 19-20, 2022, Lord willing. The theme of the meeting will be "Leadership."

2022 Meetings

March 19-20.....Section Church of Christ (Osage City, KS)
July 4-8.....Midwest Bible Campout, Eminence, MO
July 24-29.....Excelsior Springs, MO

The Gospel Message

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