

# Resolving Conflict

## Chapter 2 - Prerequisite Two: Gentleness

**“...<sup>1</sup>walk in a manner worthy of the calling to which you have been called, <sup>2</sup> with all humility and gentleness, with patience, bearing with one another in love,”**  
(Ephesians 4:1–2 ESV)

### 1. Definition

“**Gentleness.** *Prautēs* includes the idea of **gentleness**, but is usually better translated *meekness*...In the New Testament *prautēs* is used to describe three attitudes: submissiveness to the will of God ([Col. 3:12](#)), teachableness ([James 1:21](#)), and consideration of others ([Eph. 4:2](#)). Although He was God, while He lived on earth as the Son of Man, Jesus was "gentle [*prautēs*] and humble in heart" ([Matt. 11:29](#); cf. [21:5](#); [2 Cor. 10:1](#)). Like their Lord, believers are to actively pursue meekness and gentleness ([1 Tim. 6:11](#)) and to wear them like a garment ([Col. 3:12](#)).”<sup>1</sup>

“As an expression of the fruit of the Spirit, gentleness is strength under control, power harnessed in loving service and respectful actions.”<sup>2</sup>

“Apart from the sin of selfishness, sinful anger is probably the most prevalent sin in all life.”<sup>3</sup>

#### A. **“Gentleness is the ability to distinguish between righteous anger and sinful anger.”**

1. What is the difference between sinful anger and righteous anger? (cf. Eph. 4:26, 31)
2. What steps can you take to ensure that righteous anger does not become sinful? (Eph. 4:26)
3. How does sinful anger (a lack of gentleness) complicate the conflict resolution process? What does it reveal about your heart in the matter? (cf. James 4:1-4)

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<sup>1</sup>John F. MacArthur, Jr., *MacArthur New Testament Commentary: Galatians* (The Moody Bible Institute, © 2015 WORDsearch), 179.

<sup>2</sup>Timothy George, *Galatians*, ed. E. Ray Clendenen and David S. Dockery, vol. 30 of The New American Commentary. Accordance electronic ed. (Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 1994), 404.

<sup>3</sup>Lou Priolo, *Conflict Resolution* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R Publishing, 2016), 36.

- B. **“Gentleness is refusing to allow any desire to become so deep-rooted that it produces anger (either in an attempt to obtain it or as a result of not being able to obtain it).”**

### Idolatry Defined

“The best evidence that a Christian desires (loves) something more than he desires (loves) God is his willingness to sin against God *in order to acquire that desire or because he cannot acquire it.*”<sup>4</sup>

4. Why are heart idols so deceptive and hard to see sometimes?

“Sinful anger is like a built-in smoke detector. It lets us know that we are coveting something to the point of idolatry.”<sup>5</sup>

### Helpful Questions to Ask Yourself in the Midst of Conflict

- What is it that I want that my opponent is not giving me?
  - Is what I want something that God also wants?
5. What are some things parents want when they are sinfully angry and lack gentleness with their children? What about when children respond in anger toward their parents or siblings?
6. What are some common things a husband wants when he is sinfully angry and lacks gentleness with his wife? What about the wife when she is angry?
7. What are some things people want when they are sinfully angry with co-workers or bosses at work?

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<sup>4</sup> Priolo, 39.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid., 39.

**C. “Gentleness is knowing how to harness righteous anger so that it may be used to destroy only those things that God would approve being destroyed.”**

8. What are some different ways we can express sinful anger?

“The expression of sinful anger is probably the greatest obstacle to resolving conflicts quickly.”<sup>6</sup>

“When you blow up, you are miscommunicating. When you clam up, you are not communicating.”<sup>7</sup>

9. What kind of thoughts and actions would be produced when we properly focus righteous anger?

**D. “Gentleness involves knowing how to think during times of provocation.”**

10. How can you prepare your heart for gentleness before conflict arises?

“Another mental weapon that gentle people have at their disposal is the ability to interrogate themselves about their provocations. That ‘humble’ element of the Greek word for ‘gentleness’ is willing to consider its own contribution to (culpability in) the conflict.”<sup>8</sup>

11. What are some helpful scriptures and truths to remind yourself that will help you be gentle in the midst of conflict? (e.g. Matt. 7:1-5; 18:23-35; 2 Tim. 2:24-25; Eph. 5:5, Col. 3:5)

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<sup>6</sup> Priolo, 41.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid., 42.

<sup>8</sup> Priolo, 44.

E. **“Gentleness is knowing how to command not only your thoughts, but also your tongue, countenance, and body language during times of provocation.”**

12. Imagine that that a manager asks his assistant if she has read the report that he left on her desk this morning. She responds saying, “of course.” How can tone reveal the heart of the employee? What about the teenager who responds “sure” to his mother when she asks if he wants to make some extra money working on a household project?

**“...sweetness of speech increases persuasiveness.”** (Proverbs 16:21 ESV, cf. 18:23; Col. 4:6)

**“Gracious words are like a honeycomb, sweetness to the soul and health to the body.”**  
(Proverbs 16:24 ESV)

13. In addition to tone of voice, what are some other non-verbal ways we can communicate that we need to guard (Gen. 4:6-7; Job 6:28; Matt. 8:3)?

F. **“Gentleness is remaining quiet when angry in order to ponder an appropriate response.”**

“A gentle person slows down when he becomes angry in order to be certain that his brain is engaged before he opens his mouth. He realizes that until he gains composure, it will hurt his argument (and accelerate the conflict) should he open his mouth.”<sup>9</sup>

**“The heart of the righteous ponders how to answer, but the mouth of the wicked pours out evil things.”** (Proverbs 15:28 ESV)

**“When words are many, transgression is not lacking, but whoever restrains his lips is prudent.”**  
(Proverbs 10:19 ESV)

**“Whoever is slow to anger has great understanding, but he who has a hasty temper exalts folly.”**  
(Proverbs 14:29 ESV)

**“Good sense makes one slow to anger, and it is his glory to overlook an offense.”**  
(Proverbs 19:11 ESV)

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<sup>9</sup> Ibid., 48.

***“24 And the Lord’s servant must not be quarrelsome but kind to everyone, able to teach, patiently enduring evil, 25 correcting his opponents with gentleness. God may perhaps grant them repentance leading to a knowledge of the truth, 26 and they may come to their senses and escape from the snare of the devil, after being captured by him to do his will.”***

(2 Timothy 2:24–26 ESV)

14. What is the promise of 2 Timothy 2:25 that helps someone be gentle in the face of opposition?

**G. “Gentleness is forgiving your offender quickly, thus not allowing yourself to meditate on and muse over the provocation.”**

15. How did/does Jesus display perfect gentleness in the following passages?

***“28 Come to me, all who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. 29 Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. 30 For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light.”*** (Matthew 11:28–30 ESV)

***“a bruised reed he will not break, and a smoldering wick he will not quench,”***  
(Matthew 12:20 ESV; quoting Is. 42:1-3)

***“19 For this is a gracious thing, when, mindful of God, one endures sorrows while suffering unjustly. 20 For what credit is it if, when you sin and are beaten for it, you endure? But if when you do good and suffer for it you endure, this is a gracious thing in the sight of God. 21 For to this you have been called, because Christ also suffered for you, leaving you an example, so that you might follow in his steps. 22 He committed no sin, neither was deceit found in his mouth. 23 When he was reviled, he did not revile in return; when he suffered, he did not threaten, but continued entrusting himself to him who judges justly.”***

(1 Peter 2:19–23 ESV)

16. Was Jesus lacking gentleness when overturning the tables and whipping people? (cf. Matt. 21:12-13; Jn. 2:14-17)

### **Scenarios**

Greg and Abby Johnson love serving in the church by teaching kids Sunday school, teaching Kids Worship, and helping at the Wednesday night Adventure Club program. When the nation’s struggle with COVID-19 virus took off in 2020, they were more than happy to cover for the people who chose to remain home out of caution.

But as 2021 rolled around, even though they loved serving, they were wanting a break, but there were not enough people to volunteer and spread the load. Greg and Abby were tempted to become bitter toward those who were staying home until the vaccine was ready because it caused more work for the rest of the church. One day, Greg in anger said to Abby and said, “I sure hope the people staying at home appreciate how we are keeping the church going until they come back! If it weren’t for us, there wouldn’t be anything for the kids!” Though Abby was tempted to feel the same way, she knew that wasn’t the right response and she wanted to help her husband avoid bitterness.

1. What would be a gentle way for Abby to respond to her husband?
2. What are some ways that Abby could have sinfully responded to her husband instead?
3. What was at the root of Greg’s anger?
4. What kind of conflicts might arise between Greg and the cautious church members when they returned to the church?
5. What Biblical passages and truths would help Greg if he were to meditate on them?

Chuck and Nita have been staying home and haven’t been at the church in-person since March 2020. Like the rest of the nation, they didn’t know how bad the virus was going to be and they had some pre-existing health conditions that made them more vulnerable to the virus’ effects. As the summer came to an end, they were still concerned about contracting the virus and the local mandates had not been lifted yet. Their church was not mandating mask wearing and they were disappointed that their fellow church members weren’t willing to all dawn masks. Nita said to Chuck, “I would love to be there, but the leaders won’t require masks and people care more about their freedoms than they do us!”

1. Nita’s angry comments were the symptom of a deeper problem that had been left to fester. What do her comments reveal about her heart?
2. What kind of conflicts might arise between Nita with other church members upon her return?
3. How could her husband gently counsel her?
4. What Biblical truths and scriptures would help her cultivate a spirit of gentleness?