

Meekness—Strength under Control

Elephants have tremendous strength, they have frequently been used for logging—to carry large logs and even uproot trees. However, these giants are usually gentle, especially when tamed from a young age.

The elephant's trunk in particular is an example of strength coupled with precise control. Its trunk, with more than 40,000 individual muscles, is strong enough to rip branches from trees but sensitive enough to pick up a single blade of grass!

The trained elephant illustrates the great value of having both strength and careful gentleness—unlike the proverbial “bull in a china shop.”

When the apostle Paul lists “meekness” as the eighth attribute among the fruit of the spirit in Galatians 5:23 (King James Version), he uses the Greek noun *praotes* or *prautes*— and “meekness” is the closest translation for the Greek word used here. (Similarly, the closest English translation for the related Greek adjective *praos* or *praus* is “meek.”)

We are to be meek (*yielded, teachable, responsive*) first of all in our relationship with God, and secondly meek (*humble, gentle, respectful*) in our relationships with people. To become this kind of person, God must tame and train us!

The Greek words for “gentleness” and “meekness” are somewhat interwoven in English translations. *Prautes*, the Greek word translated “gentleness” in [Galatians 5:23 \(NIV\)](#), means “to submit one's strength in a posture of meekness.” It is to calmly accept God's judgment regarding a situation, even if that judgment results in personal hardship. It is humility toward God. *Prautes* is translated eight times as “gentleness” and once each as “consideration,” “humility,” and “meekness.” *Epieikeia* is also translated as “gentleness” or “kindness.” It refers to the kindly grace that God exhibits when He helps those who don't deserve it (all of us), bringing to mind Jesus' [parable](#) in [Matthew 18:23-35](#) about the king who forgave a great debt.

The gentleness in the New Testament is closely related to wisdom and spiritual growth. [Galatians 6:1](#); [2 Timothy 2:25](#); and [1 Peter 3:15](#) all use *gentleness* to describe the way we are to correct or teach others. We are to submit our strength, including the strength of our convictions, to God's wisdom. We are to teach only God's point of view, not our own. And we are to accept that God's actions toward ourselves and others are the right actions, even when human wisdom thinks otherwise.

Qualities that relate to meekness and gentleness

As with the fruit of the Spirit, other scriptures also show us how certain virtues go hand in hand. Paul said we are to “walk ... with all lowliness and *gentleness*, with longsuffering, bearing with one another in love” (Ephesians 4:1-2).

He also wrote that we should “put on tender mercies, kindness, humility, *meekness*, longsuffering, bearing with one another, and forgiving one another, if anyone has a complaint against another; even as Christ forgave you, so you also must do” (Colossians 3:12-13).

Meekness includes voluntarily “submitting to one another” (Ephesians 5:21). In a long passage, Peter spoke of the importance of submission of all kinds—Christians toward government (1 Peter 2:13), servants toward masters (1 Peter 2:18), Christ’s example of submitting to His tormentors (1 Peter 2:21-25) and wives toward their husbands (1 Peter 3:1).

Peter also encouraged wives to emphasize inner beauty rather than outer beauty—“the unfading beauty of a *gentle* and quiet spirit, which is of great worth in God’s sight” (1 Peter 3:4, New International Version). Then in 1 Peter 3:7, he exhorted husbands to be *true gentlemen* and to *honor* their wives.

To everyone, Peter wrote, “Always be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks you to give the reason for the hope that you have. But do this with *gentleness* and respect” (1 Peter 3:15, NIV).

Two scriptures use another Greek word that specifically means “gentle.” One says that “a servant of the Lord must not quarrel but be *gentle* [*eepios*] to all, able to teach, patient” (2 Timothy 2:24).

And the other one beautifully shows Paul’s great love for those in the churches he watched over: “But we were *gentle* [*eepios*] among you, just as a nursing mother cherishes her own children. So, affectionately longing for you, we were well pleased to impart to you not only the gospel of God, but also our own lives, because you had become dear to us” (1 Thessalonians 2:7-8).

The world sorely needs this kind of TLC—tender loving care!