Gentleness and Self Control – Tending the Garden of God

1. We are going to spend some time starting next week looking at the weeds that threaten our garden. We will stress, more than once, that all sins are rooted in selfishness. So it seems ironic to now tell you that you need to focus on…you. I'll explain.

2. One of Satan's greatest tricks to play on us is to dress up weeds as if they were flowers beloved by God. That is how we end up with so many weeds in our gardens; we did not intend to let weeds loose in our flower bed but we were fooled.

3. Several of the sins of the flesh or the fruits of the flesh have to do with judging, division, arguments…and we see all of that in most Christian communities. We see territorial fights, fights over doctrine, and more all dressed up as religious duty before our God.

4. More on that next week. For the present, we need to return to the inside of our heads and think about how much time we spend on self control and how much time we spend wishing others were controlled or trying to control others?

5. Matthew 7:3-5. In his first public sermon (as far as we know), Jesus takes some time to talk about this very important matter of self-control vs. the desire to control others. Controlling others makes us feel important. That's why governments and bureaucrats do it, for what purpose would they serve otherwise? (at customs…they need to validate their existence, same with IRS. The lady who took a few psychology courses and "know what you're thinking."

6. The desire to control others is a constant onslaught of weeds in our gardens. We wish we could give traffic tickets to those who annoy or frighten us. We create websites or email chains to attack those who think in ways that bother us – in religion or politics. And social media morphed from being a "hang out and hook up" app (Facebook) to…well…

7. There are several causes for this delusion, this idea that God wants little helpers, little watchdogs, geese honking in His fields. One of the greatest causes is a truth that is so hard to grasp, it is best phrased in

the form of a question: “Who gave you the idea that what you believe about God is more important than how you live for Him?”

8. We could adjust this question a dozen or so ways and make it specific to a situation. “Who told you that if someone online says something you disagree with, that you are free from the command of Jesus in Matthew 7 about judging with a plank in your eye?”

9. “Who told you that you are not under obligation to love people who annoy you or who have hurt you – in your family, neighborhood, or in the larger Christian world?” Sure, the “love” here doesn’t mean that you have to have an active relationship with them, but it DOES require that you tend your garden and quit worrying about theirs.

10. Jesus tells the men gathered round to stone a woman caught in adultery that the one without sin should cast the first stone. In Matthew 25, he speaks of the things each person did, not how great they were at making other people do them.

11. 2 Timothy 2:4. So…are we good soldiers? Or are we all for supporting governments, lobbying to get our people in who will then have the power of tanks, taxes, and licensing laws to bend our neighbors to our will?

12. And here is where we might want to look at another word in Galatians 5, the one that comes just before “self-control.”

13. Gentleness. This one is harder than it looks. First, we have to abandon the idea that God wants us to be warriors against others. We have to pull back and check our garden and quit peeking over the fence at the gardens of others.

14. Next, we need to be available to help others when they need and want help. We do not rush in. Instead, we show by our lives who we are. We are salt and light, there if they need it. (1st Peter 2:11,12)

15. Isaiah prophesied about Jesus this way: Isaiah 42:1-3. It is not through force – physical or the force of argument – that we will bring justice and peace; it is through faithfulness. Not force, but faithfulness.

16. Let us ponder this: without the gentleness of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit, we would all be doomed. Each of them is called gentle in scripture. Paul will repeatedly call for believers to live lives in pursuit of gentleness.

17. As I close, let me also ask you to consider this: be gentle with yourself. We all fall. We all will struggle our entire lives with this or that sin, fault, or failing. Be Peter, and return. Don't be Judas and give up. God is being gentle with you. Be like Him and be gentle with yourself.

18. This doesn't mean that we ignore our sins or become casual about them. It means that we do not let them defeat us as we pull the weeds and tend the garden in our heart.