

# 07

## **Virtues** **Part 2**

*Why does society oppose virtue?*

**GALATIANS 5:22-23**



## ☒ Humility, Meekness, and Gentleness

Have you ever been to one of those Japanese restaurants where the chef prepares the food in front of you on a teppanyaki grill? The chef shows off and entertains you with various antics while preparing your meal. Compare that experience to a meal prepared in a slow cooker. A slow cooker takes hours and hours to prepare a meal. It simply works in the background. But when the slow cooker has been going all day, the delicious smell of dinner permeates the house.

In a way, the virtues of humility, meekness, and gentleness are like that meal prepared in the slow cooker. Some virtues, such as faith and love, get a lot of attention. Humility, meekness, and gentleness, however, support these and other virtues by being “on,” though in the background. These three virtues are godly and should be pursued by all Christians. And they are critical for avoiding one of the oldest and most pervasive of all the vices—pride.

### PROPER DEFINITIONS

Meekness and gentleness flow from humility. **Humility** is a lowly view of one’s own importance, resulting from “a high view of God’s person”<sup>2</sup> and a profound sense of one’s own weakness and sinfulness. **Meekness** is a humble and calm disposition in situations that can lead to pride or anger. **Gentleness** is tender care for others even when they are hard to deal with. Jerry Bridges offers a helpful distinction between meekness and gentleness: “Gentleness is an active trait, describing the manner in which we should treat others. Meekness is a passive trait, describing the proper Christian response when others mistreat us.”<sup>3</sup>

The Bible gives us examples of these three virtues in action. The best example of humility is seen in Christ’s incarnation and crucifixion (Phil. 2:3–8). Meekness takes one’s sober estimation of oneself and applies it with the proper restraints and responses to difficult circumstances. Moses exemplifies this virtue in how he endured with the children of Israel to the brink of the Promised Land (Num. 12:3). The gentleness of Christ is closely related to His humility and meekness (Matt. 11:29; 2 Cor. 10:1) and is seen in His tender care for His people. A proper view of ourselves that leads to a patient and merciful response to sinful, imperfect people allows us to show others the gentleness of Christ.

“Rather than thinking less of yourself, humility leads to thinking less about yourself.” BRIAN ROSNER<sup>1</sup>

## PROPER CONCEPTIONS

One sure way to verify that society at large is standing on its head morally is to notice what it thinks of Christian virtues. According to many non-Christians, if you are humble, you are naïve; if you are meek, you are weak; if you are gentle, you are cowardly. These three virtues are unpopular among some unbelievers because they appear to them to hinder advancement in the face of opposition. Even Christians can be tempted to minimize or avoid these virtues because of society's influence and because they misunderstand what these virtues really are. Humility, meekness, and gentleness don't get in the way of a successful life. But these virtues definitely don't play into the selfish mindset that many people have.

### How do I become great in the eyes of God?

Can Christians also see humility as naïveté, meekness as weakness, and gentleness as cowardice? Unfortunately, yes. Does every achievement and every fashionable outfit or hairstyle need a picture posted to social media? Is there room for humility when you do that? Do you vocally oppose every individual or organization that supports abortion and the LGBTQ agenda? How about your tirades against all those perceived injustices that are your hobbyhorses or soap boxes? Where does meekness fit in? Do you view a gracious, tender heart as contrary to a tough, steely mindset needed for this fallen world? What place does gentleness have in the life of a believer, then?

Consider humility and pride. Whom do you seek recognition from to satisfy your ego? Who must know what you have done and what you possess to give you fulfillment? Receiving due recognition and healthy encouragement is not what we are addressing here. True humility counters any notion of bragging or boasting. A Christian conception of humility considers the fact that believers are sinners saved by grace and anything good about them comes from God's hand (Eph. 2:8–9; James 1:17). Believers should, therefore, constantly point others to God and His goodness rather than themselves.

Does meekness have anything to do with weakness? Not really. The Christian conception of meekness involves a combination of patience and faith. Being hot-headed and getting even with someone flies in the face of true meekness. Meekness sees the believer entrusting the situation and outcome to God while humbly enduring the adverse circumstances (Isa. 11:4; Matt. 21:5; Eph. 4:2). Early church father Chromatius described meekness this way: “The meek are those who are gentle, humble and unassuming, simple in faith and patient in the face of every affront. Imbued with the precepts of the gospel, they imitate the meekness of the Lord, who says, ‘Learn from me, for I am meek and humble of heart.’”<sup>2</sup> Remaining meek in the face of adversity is real strength—a far cry from weakness.

Do you enjoy following the rules and making sure everyone else does too? Do you seek justice at any cost? It is challenging to maintain righteous responses and just reactions to evil done to us or to those we care about. Gentleness shouldn't get in the way of justice and courage. But neither can gentleness be forgotten altogether. The Christian conception of gentleness seeks to bring heart and understanding to the implementation of justice. Gentleness is not cowardly; it does the right thing while tenderly caring for the individuals involved in the situation (Gal. 6:1; 2 Tim. 2:24–25).





## PERVERTING THE VIRTUES

### Pride



If there is one prevalent sin that Christians often fail to identify in their own hearts, it is the vice of pride. **Pride** is an inflated estimation of oneself, which attempts to rob God of His rightful place as sovereign Lord of all. Pride is the nemesis of humility. This can be seen in Scripture's descriptions of the proud being brought low and the humble being raised up (Prov. 29:23; Matt. 23:12; 1 Pet. 5:5–6). God despises the proud (Prov. 6:16–17; Ezek. 28:6–8, 17). It is ironic that pursuing what pride seeks, personal glory and self-exaltation, actually results in the destruction of the proud person (e.g., Nebuchadnezzar [Dan. 4:30–33] and Herod [Acts 12:21–23]). That doesn't always happen in this life. But the vice of pride in unbelievers will surely lead to their eternal demise (Prov. 16:18; 1 John 2:16–17).

Pride fills the void where humility should reside. If autonomy and selfishness rule a person's mind, there is no room left for a humble recognition of frailty and fallibility (Prov. 3:7). The vice of pride cancels any acknowledgement of and submission to God's wisdom, power, and sovereignty.

### Anger



The vice of anger stands opposite the virtue of meekness. **Anger** is intense displeasure arising from strong disagreement with a situation. Moses was meek, but not perfectly so. Look at these passages to see examples of Moses' anger, stirred for the right reasons but poorly expressed: Exodus 2:11–12; 32:19; Numbers 11:10–15; 20:2–12. Just as meekness is closely related to humility, anger can be closely connected to pride, as seen in the history of Haman in the book of Esther (for example, see Esther 3:5). It is too easy to let unimportant things get under our skin, and then we unleash anger. Even short outbursts of anger, if they happen often enough, can point to the vice of anger. Proverbs attributes "great understanding" (Prov. 14:29) to those who know how to control their tempers but calls quickness to anger foolish (Prov. 14:17). James memorably conveys the folly of anger by saying, "The wrath of man worketh not the righteousness of God" (James 1:20). James also relates wisdom to meekness (James 3:13). Meekness measures up to God's righteous standards and is the wiser choice over anger.

### Harshness



Where gentleness should thrive in the heart of a believer, harshness seeks to assert itself. The vice of **harshness** is to be unpleasant, rough, or mean toward someone. Harshness can come across through spoken or written words and nonverbally through looks and body language—and even through silence when gentleness demands verbal communication. In Scripture, the vice of harshness is described by various terms that stand against gentleness—violence, quarrels, strife, brawling (1 Tim. 3:3; 2 Tim. 2:23–24; Titus 3:2). Whereas gentleness is a fruit of the Spirit (Gal. 5:23), harshness is involved in several of the works of the flesh—"hatred, . . . wrath, strife" (Gal. 5:20). Where curt, rude responses take place, the vice of harshness is present. Gentleness encourages, de-escalates, and soothes. Harshness discourages and aggravates, making problems worse.

## PERSONALIZING HUMILITY, MEEKNESS, AND GENTLENESS

All the virtues, but especially these three, are like a cellular network that operates in the background, enabling a device to communicate properly. Just as the network your cell phone uses to communicate with other devices is always active, so must humility, meekness, and gentleness be constantly active in governing your personal interactions. In any conversation, either the virtue of humility is helping the relationship, or the vice of pride is spoiling the relationship. Meekness must counter anger, and gentleness must thrive instead of harshness. Season your success stories with humility. Blend meekness into discussions of frustrating topics. Sprinkle your defense of the truth with gentleness.

God didn't intend humility to be the virtue that squashes all expressions of personal success and accomplishment, but humility will keep such things from being our focus. We all know the individual who wants to give off an appearance of modesty and humility but finds ways to name-drop\* or boast in an indirect, nonchalant way. The fact that you have had a 4.0 all through high school or that your new car is way cooler than all your friends' cars doesn't entitle you to bring those things up at any moment in every context. Humility helps us keep everything in perspective—God is the giver of all good things, and we aren't better than anyone else, especially based on our performances or possessions (Luke 18:10–14; 1 Cor. 4:7). Pride infects all of us with great ease. Be motivated by humility in all your conversations.

Do you have a short fuse? Do you get angry easily about every single thing that goes against what you believe in and support? Many things should make believers angry, in a righteous way: the far-left agenda shaping educational materials, abortion, the normalization of pornography use, rampant fornication among young people, any sort of abuse against the innocent and vulnerable, and many other expressions of evil in the world. Practicing meekness will help you keep your righteous anger from turning into sinful irritableness and brashness. Meekness is also paramount during times when pride attempts to seduce you to accept flattery. When you feel like someone is flattering you with ulterior motives, meekness will help you duck out of the way of that temptation. All believers are commanded to “put on . . . meekness” (Col. 3:12)—in other words, to practice it.

It's not only muscular or passionate individuals who need to practice the virtue of gentleness. Yes, the six-foot-four pediatrician can and should be extremely gentle with the infant patient he is treating. Gentleness presupposes the power to do damage, to be harmful or harsh. But we are all capable of that, at least with our words.

*“Meekness . . . is where humility and self-control meet. It is one of the most attractive and indispensable aspects of truly Christlike character.”*

JOHN MACARTHUR\*

Think of your intellectual, athletic, or spiritual opponents. You might think they have it coming to them! You can be tempted to win at any cost because you have the right knowledge, the better team, or the right interpretation of the Word. Practicing gentleness isn't passivity or compromise. Not harming or embarrassing an opponent unnecessarily, even though it would be easy to do, is practicing gentleness. The apostle Paul makes the point that, when dealing with people who present challenging situations in the church, gentleness must reign (Eph. 4:2; 2 Tim. 2:24–25; Titus 3:2). The truth is, God deals with us with perfect gentleness (Ps. 18:35; 2 Cor. 10:1). The Almighty chooses to deal with His people with gentle tenderness (Isa. 40:10–11). These truths must permeate believers' ethical decision-making processes.

## PRACTICING HUMILITY, MEEKNESS, AND GENTLENESS

Like many of the virtues, it might seem a daunting task to actually develop these three in your life. Do you find it embarrassing if people know that you are weak in certain areas of the Christian life? Don't be afraid that people might find that out. All believers are in the same boat—all need to grow in their relationship with Christ!

The fruit of the Spirit is just that, *fruit* in the singular. The different aspects of that fruit are distinguishable—meekness and gentleness included (Gal. 5:22–23)—but each fruit comes with the rest as believers respond to the work of the Spirit in their lives. Be encouraged that God's work in the hearts of believers is comprehensive and not limited. The fruit of the Spirit is a single unit, and the virtues are interconnected (2 Pet. 1:5–7).

**name-drop:** to introduce names of important or famous people into a conversation, implying a personal connection to them



Do you have a plan to grow in these virtues? When was the last time you specifically prayed to God asking for His help to be less proud and more humble, less angry and more meek, or less harsh and more gentle? Praying to grow in humility, meekness, and gentleness is the right place to start. Praying taps into the Lord's power and cultivates an awareness of your need for these virtues. If you aren't aware of these virtues and their vices, then you won't be thinking of ways to practice the virtues like you should.

Another aspect of a plan to grow in these three virtues is to ask a friend, perhaps an older mentor who knows you well, to assess your humility, meekness, and gentleness. Be honest and then submissive to the report the friend gives about you. You can practice humility by graciously accepting what he or she says and repenting, if necessary, from any traces of pride, anger, and harshness in your life. Thank your friend and ask him or her to keep you accountable in these areas.

We all need God's grace to be humble, practice meekness, and treat others gently. Look to Christ, who is the supreme model of humility, meekness, and gentleness (Matt. 12:20).



### Thinking It Through 7.1

1. Define *humility*.
2. Define *meekness*.
3. Define *gentleness*.
4. How do Christian and non-Christian conceptions of humility, meekness, and gentleness differ?
5. How do the vices of pride, anger, and harshness contrast with humility, meekness, and gentleness, respectively?
6. Give examples of how humility, meekness, and gentleness relate to ethical decision-making and ethical living.
7. What are some actions you can take that can help you grow in humility, meekness, and gentleness?

## 7.2 Kindness and Compassion

You have been told to smile for the camera since you were a child wrinkling your nose in a cheesy grin. Your parents constantly reminded you to say, "Thank you" and "Please." They also taught you not to laugh at someone if they tripped or got hurt. Were all those smiles, words, and acts genuine? If you only look and sound nice at the appointed times, are you truly kind? And can compassion be faked?

True kindness is much more than being nice or polite, and compassion is much more than feeling sorry for someone.

### DEFINING KINDNESS AND COMPASSION

**Kindness** is an internal sentiment, cultivated by the Holy Spirit, that motivates believers to indiscriminately do good to others. **Compassion** is an external manifestation of loving-kindness that sympathetically and indiscriminately meets a need. Whereas kindness is primarily a disposition of one's character, compassion activates that kindness by sympathizing with someone and meeting their need.

Can you identify which central virtue (faith, love, or hope) is most at work behind kindness and compassion? Kindness and compassion are an outflow, a demonstration, of love. Believers can love because of God's love for them (Eph. 2:4–5; 1 John 4:19). It is also the case, then, that believers can show kindness and compassion to others because that is how God has dealt with them (Rom. 2:4; Eph. 4:32). Love always plays a role when kindness and compassion are shown.

### MOTIVATING KINDNESS AND COMPASSION

When discussing ethical difficulties, we should pause to consider why we do what we do. When do you stop to carefully think through decisions? Maybe it's when you stand in front of your closet or dresser deciding what to wear. Maybe it's when you decide what to spend your birthday or Christmas money on. These types of decisions may have ethical ramifications involving any number of virtues, but even then, you probably don't contemplate your motives too extensively. Determining whether the virtues of kindness and compassion are part of your normal, everyday motives as you interact with people is well worth your consideration.

A great scriptural description of these virtues motivating righteous actions is Christ's parable of the Good Samaritan (Luke 10:30–37). Though Jesus used this teaching to make a point about how to love our neighbors, it is clear that neither the priest nor the Levite showed compassion for their fellow Jew. Only the Samaritan, a non-Jew, "had compassion" (Luke 10:33) and "shewed mercy" (Luke 10:37) (which flows from compassion). Do you think we can infer from this text that the priest and Levite were kind men? What kindness did they feel that then translated into helping the man in desperate need? None. A kind heart, a disposition of kindness, leads a person to demonstrate compassion to the needy (Luke 6:45).

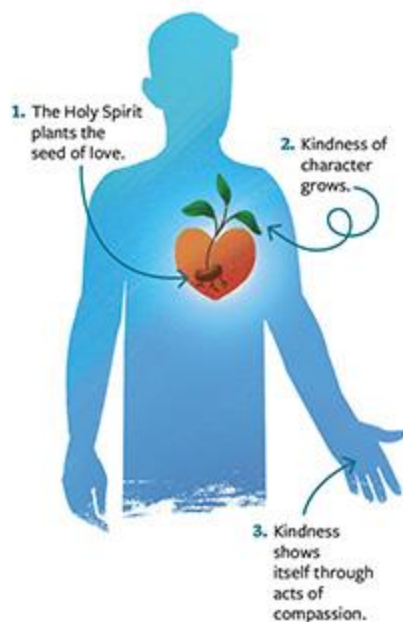
Kindness and compassion treat people with dignity—recognizing the enormous value of humans created in the image of God. Do you refuse to say "Hi," "I'm sorry," or "Thank you" to friends or classmates? Do you hear of physical or spiritual needs of people within your community and immediately shift your thoughts elsewhere? If you help some people out of self-interest and refuse to help others out of prejudice, then you are no different than the partial, indifferent priest and Levite in Christ's parable of the Good Samaritan.

*Brotherly kindness is not limited strictly to physical siblings and spiritual brethren. . . . [The Bible] commands us to show kindness to strangers.*

JOHN MACARTHUR

Christians should be motivated—compelled even—to be aware of situations that require kindness in their area of influence. If a new student joins your class or a new kid moves onto your street, realizing that you need to be kind to him or her should be automatic. As a rule—the golden rule—as well as by conscious choice, Christians should show kindness to others (Matt. 7:12). Christians should be motivated by a desire to live according to the new life they have in Christ and according to the fruit that the Spirit produces in them (2 Cor. 5:17; Gal. 5:22).

Believers should be motivated to demonstrate compassion based on an honest examination of their own need for God's compassion. Where would sinful, rebellious humans be if it weren't for God's merciful and generous compassion (Lam. 3:22–23, 32)? Practical compassion, in which one sympathetically cares for someone in need, is expected of believers (James 1:27). Faithful obedience to the Savior is a strong motivation and should be the primary one.



## THE BIBLE ON FALSEHOOD AND TRUTH

Before considering a few passages in Scripture where deception is employed for a commendable end, we want to look at an overall picture of the Bible's teaching on lying, falsehood, honesty, and truth telling. Doing this will allow us to get a feel for the overall tone and message of the Bible on these subjects. There are dozens of passages that mention the sinfulness and dangers and consequences of lying, deceit, and falsehood. There are also many passages that praise and commend honesty, truth telling, and righteous dealings with others. Below is a mere sampling.

### *Truth and Falsehood Contrasted*

PSALM 119:163

I hate and abhor lying; but thy law do I love.

PROVERBS 11:1

A false balance is abomination to the LORD: but a just weight is his delight.

PROVERBS 14:5

A faithful witness will not lie: but a false witness will utter lies.

EPHESIANS 4:25

Wherefore putting away lying, speak every man truth with his neighbour: for we are members one of another.

EPHESIANS 4:29

Let no corrupt communication proceed out of your mouth, but that which is good to the use of edifying, that it may minister grace unto the hearers.

### *Prohibitions of Falsehood*

EXODUS 20:16

Thou shalt not bear false witness against thy neighbour.

LEVITICUS 19:11-12

Ye shall not steal, neither deal falsely, neither lie one to another. And ye shall not swear by my name falsely, neither shalt thou profane the name of thy God: I am the LORD.

EPHESIANS 4:31

Let all bitterness, and wrath, and anger, and clamour, and evil speaking, be put away from you, with all malice.

COLOSSIANS 3:9-10

Lie not one to another, seeing that ye have put off the old man with his deeds; and have put on the new man, which is renewed in knowledge after the image of him that created him.

### *The Value of Truth*

PSALM 15:1-2

LORD, who shall abide in thy tabernacle? Who shall dwell in thy holy hill? He that walketh uprightly, and worketh righteousness, and speaketh the truth in his heart.

PSALM 19:14

Let the words of my mouth, and the meditation of my heart, be acceptable in thy sight, O LORD, my strength, and my redeemer.

PSALM 120:2

Deliver my soul, O LORD, from lying lips, and from a deceitful tongue.

JOHN 8:31-32

Then said Jesus to those Jews which believed on him, If ye continue in my word, then are ye my disciples indeed; and ye shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free.

### *The Evil of Falsehood*

PROVERBS 6:16-17, 19

These six things doth the LORD hate: yea, seven are an abomination unto him: a proud look, a lying tongue, and hands that shed innocent blood, . . . a false witness that speaketh lies, and he that soweth discord among brethren.

MATTHEW 15:19

For out of the heart proceed evil thoughts, murders, adulteries, fornications, thefts, false witness, blasphemies.

ROMANS 1:25

Who changed the truth of God into a lie, and worshipped and served the creature more than the Creator, who is blessed for ever. Amen.

ROMANS 1:29

Being filled with all unrighteousness, fornication, wickedness, covetousness, maliciousness; full of envy, murder, debate, deceit, malignity; whisperers.

1 JOHN 2:21-22

I have not written unto you because ye know not the truth, but because ye know it, and that no lie is of the truth. Who is a liar but he that denieth that Jesus is the Christ? He is antichrist, that denieth the Father and the Son.



## How will honesty be most challenged in my day-to-day life?

### YOUR HONESTY PUT TO THE TEST

Truth be told, you most likely won't find yourself in a work situation where you are commanded to commit infanticide. Neither will you probably ever need to hide righteous spies from a wicked government that would kill them if they found them. So there can be no case made to justify lying based on the passages examined in the previous section, since the motives, circumstances, and outcomes presented in those passages are entirely distinct from your own. Add to that the fact that the Bible never once explicitly condones lying, even in extreme circumstances. And God's Word is crystal clear on the relationship of truth to God's character and on lying's relation to evil.

The temptation to be dishonest comes at you from every direction. Sharing information known to be false that fits with your personal views is to endorse falsehood. Fact-checking has a legitimate place, especially for Christians who don't want to be dishonest. When your parents ask you whether you've completed *all* your homework and you say yes but you are actually planning to finish your last assignment on the way to school tomorrow, it is still a lie. When you are asked how you did on a test or how many points you scored in the game, and you embellish the answer, that is lying. When you minimally know someone yet you make assumptions about their character and then accuse them of some sort of wrongdoing, you are not only being mean, but you are also engaging in slander. Slander survives on falsehood. And when you peek at the answer sheet while doing your homework, even though your teacher expressly said to use it only *after* you have finished the assignment, you are cheating.

What these examples have in common is that they are normal situations you could easily find yourself in, and the actions in question are all dishonest. They all dishonor God because of the deception and falsehood involved in them. The goal or the reason why dishonesty or falsehood is used does not justify the rejection of the virtue for the acceptance of the vice. These are the everyday kinds of challenges to honesty you are likely to face. But if you ever *do* find yourself in a dire situation where a lie wouldn't cover up someone else's sin nor selfishly benefit you but could potentially save innocent life, pray that God will give you grace to do what is right.

### Thinking It Through 7.4

---

1. Define *honesty*.
2. How does the character of God relate to truth, and how does the character of Satan relate to falsehood?
3. What is the Bible's direct teaching on truth and falsehood?
4. How are we to understand passages in the Bible that seem to approve of deception?
5. In what ways can you apply the biblical teaching about truth and falsehood to difficult ethical choices?

# Review

VIRTUES, PART 2

# 07

## Terms to Remember

- humility
- meekness
- gentleness
- pride
- anger
- harshness
- kindness
- compassion
- cruelty
- indifference
- gratitude
- joy
- peace
- ingratitude
- despair
- worry
- lying
- honesty
- falsehood

## Scripture Memory

Galatians 5:22–23

## Understanding Ethics

1. How do the virtues of humility, meekness, and gentleness relate to ethics?
2. How do the virtues of kindness and compassion relate to ethics?
3. How do the virtues of gratitude, joy, and peace relate to ethics?
4. How does the virtue of honesty relate to ethics?

## Practicing Ethical Decision-Making

5. How do you become great in the eyes of God? Give an example of pursuing humility rather than pride.
6. How should you respond to those who are hurting? Give an example of showing kindness and compassion to someone in need rather than cruelty or indifference.

## Analyzing and Evaluating Ethical Claims

7. How would you respond to those who say that humility, meekness, and gentleness are for the weak?
8. How would you respond to those who say that kindness and compassion require us to accept someone no matter what and that Christians are required to sympathize with anybody's discomfort no matter the nature of it?
9. How would you respond to those who say that joy and peace can't be had if the circumstances are hard and discouraging?
10. Why is a "little white lie" still a lie? Defend your answer.

## Creating My Own Position Statements on Ethics

11. Formulate your own position on whether believers should constantly express gratitude. Then make a list of thirty things you are thankful for.
12. How is deception sometimes distinct from lying? What are the differences between ethical and unethical deception?

