

The Gentleness of Christ and the Humiliation of the Cross

Galatians 5:22; Matthew 27:35-44

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To speak about the gentleness/kindness to those who run and operate a successful business is to receive a blank stare or an incredulous expression (at least from a worldly perspective). For the grace of gentleness and running a business just don't fit together from a worldview that does not have Jesus Christ and His revelation as the center of that worldview. How can one be gentle and yet make a profit or be successful in this world? It's the tough, harsh approach that alone motivates people to meet deadlines. It's the leader that is willing at times to compromise biblical principles that alone can succeed in a world that does not play by the same biblical principles and rules. The motto of this world is, "To be successful in this world you have play by the rules of the world."

Dear ones, even if (hypothetically) the Christian never meets the financial success in this world that the non-Christian meets, that is no reason to forsake or minimize the gentleness/kindness that characterized the life of Jesus Christ. Are we Christians or not? Do we only bear that fruit of the Spirit that will win the approval of the world? God forbid! As Christians, we have the DNA of Jesus Christ implanted in us, and one of those godly, divine qualities is that of gentleness/kindness. The greatest leader that ever lived was the most gentle/kind leader that ever lived. Good leadership and the gentleness/kindness of Christ are not contradictory, but are complementary.

Beloved, the fruit of gentleness/kindness will only grow in our lives toward our family members, toward our co-workers, toward our neighbors, and toward our brothers and sisters in Christ as we behold by

faith and live out the gospel displayed in the gentleness/kindness of Jesus Christ as he was humiliated upon the cross in order that sinners who trust in Him might be rescued from sin (its guilt, punishment, and power) and exalted to the status of heirs of God and joint-heirs with Jesus Christ (Titus 3:4-7).

Dear ones, if anyone knew what it was to demonstrate gentleness and kindness as He suffered the humiliation of mockery, lies, and unjust criticism, it was the Lord Jesus Christ as He hung upon that cursed cross. The world may teach that showing gentleness/kindness when humiliation is heaped upon you is a sign of weakness and powerlessness, but our text demonstrates the error of such a worldly view: (1) The Lord Jesus Demonstrated His Gentleness/Kindness as He Suffered the Humiliation of Nakedness (Matthew 27:35-36); (2) The Lord Jesus Demonstrated His Gentleness/Kindness as He Suffered the Humiliation of Being Numbered with Criminals (Matthew 27:37-38); and (3) The Lord Jesus Demonstrated His Gentleness/Kindness as He Suffered the Humiliation of Further Mockery (Matthew 27:39-44).

I. The Lord Jesus Demonstrated His Gentleness/Kindness as He Suffered the Humiliation of Nakedness (Matthew 27:35-36).

A. As our text begins today, the Lord Jesus has now been led to Golgotha (the place of the skull) outside of Jerusalem to be crucified. Once having arrived, our blessed Savior is cruelly nailed to the cross and lifted up from the earth for all to behold, to scorn, and to ridicule. It was now the third hour (9 a.m.) according to Mark 15:25 (the parallel passage).

B. Every aspect of Roman crucifixion was intended to dehumanize a man. Those being crucified ordinarily suffered the indignity of being

stripped of all their clothing. Not only was it a curse to hang upon a cross, but it was also a public humiliation as well. To be publicly exposed before men, women, and children in such a manner was to endure one of the most extreme humiliations among Israelites (2 Samuel 10:4-5). The Scripture does not explicitly use the word “naked” in regard to Christ’s condition, but the text would imply either a partial or a complete nakedness. For we find in Matthew 27:35 that the four Roman soldiers specifically responsible for Christ’s crucifixion took the garments (in the plural) that Christ was wearing and divided them among themselves (John 19:23-24). Now the Lord Jesus would likely have had at least the following pieces of clothing: a pair of sandals, an inner cloak, an outer cloak, and a belt/girdle. This would have left him with only a loin cloth (if even He had that).

C. The soldiers then cast lots (in fulfillment of Psalm 22:18) to determine who would get the various pieces of Christ’s clothing.

1. What a scene this was indeed! The sinless Son of God suffered in extreme misery and agony for sinners (sinners like those men who played games under the shadow of the cross). They had so little interest in the suffering of Christ. They blocked out His suffering by making His execution into some kind of a game. These executioners had become so calloused to the suffering of the sinless Son of God that they entertained themselves while Christ groaned in pain and was humiliated by His nakedness. Yet the Lord Jesus became naked that in gentleness/kindness sinners who trust alone in Christ alone might be clothed with the garments of His righteousness. Dear ones, we were those soldiers who lived for our own pleasure in the shadow of the cross. We cared not for His suffering, or for our shameful reproach of stripping Christ of His glory. But He loved us with an everlasting love and in spite of our bringing shame upon His holy name and person, He showed us His gentleness/kindness, and gave us eyes to see our own nakedness and

shame and to see that Christ became naked that we might be clothed with His glorious righteousness.

2. Do you understand that your sin has made you naked and infinitely shameful before a holy God? Do you acknowledge that you are without any righteousness or goodness with which to clothe yourselves? Instead of being ashamed of your sin, do you glory in that for which you ought to be ashamed? If so you are glorying in your nakedness. You may falsely assume that you're own works of righteousness and obedience are a sufficient robe with which to clothe yourself before a holy God and that your own goodness is a beautiful garment in the sight of God. But you have deceived yourselves just as the emperor (in that notable fable) was deceived when he was told that he was clothed in the most beautiful royal garments ever made when all alone he was walking about in the shame of his own nakedness.

3. Listen to the invitation of the Lord Jesus as He addresses all those who hear His voice even those who are members of His Church in Revelation 3:15-18. Dear ones, now that we have been clothed with the perfect obedience of Christ, let us not live for our own pleasure treating the clothing (or righteousness of Christ) as if it were a game. For we act like those soldiers, dear ones, when we can lie, deceive, steal, boast, and lust (or sin in any other way we choose without shame), playing our games in the shadow of Christ's suffering for sin. How seriously do you take your sin? Come to Him today with your nakedness and shame and He will clothe you. He asks for no qualifications to come. The only qualification is that you confess and acknowledge your nakedness and trust that He alone can clothe you. The Lord Jesus suffered the humiliation of nakedness in order to show you the blessedness of His gentleness/kindness in clothing you in His glorious righteousness.

II. The Lord Jesus Demonstrated His Gentleness/Kindness as He

Suffered the Humiliation of Being Numbered with Criminals (Matthew 27:37-38).

A. A further indignity which Christ suffered as He hung upon that cursed cross was to be accounted a common criminal with the alleged crime for which He was crucified hanging above Him which said, “This is Jesus the King of the Jews” (Matthew 27:37). Christ was condemned and Christ suffered as the Messiah, the Anointed One of God. He was not a mere man suffering for His own sin, but was the King of Israel suffering for the sins of all who will look by faith alone to Him. Even in Christ’s death man could not remove the glory of Christ from His suffering for sinners.

B. The Word of God tells us in Matthew 27:38 that Christ was numbered with transgressors (with criminals). This was in fulfillment of Isaiah’s prophecy (Isaiah 53:7). He was placed in the center as if He was the chief of all sinners (and in a sense, He was—as He suffered for the sins of all sinners chosen in Christ Jesus before the world began). It is most likely the case that Barabbas (the murdering insurrectionist) was intended by Pilate to occupy that middle position between his two accomplices in murder and robbery (as the chief sinner). But Christ voluntarily took the place of the chief of sinners and was accounted to be the vilest criminal in order that He might rescue those who are deemed to be even the chief of sinners (1 Timothy 1:15).

1. It was no accident that Jesus was numbered with criminals, for He was ordained from all eternity to be the Savior of sinners (He was the Lamb slain from the foundation of the world, Revelation 13:8). Dear ones, if we who are corrupt sinners would find it shameful and repugnant to be stripped of all our clothing, dehumanized before men, women, and children, and classified with the worst of criminals (for no crime which we had committed), can we even begin to

imagine the degree of humiliation which Christ suffered who was forever pure and holy and had never thought even once that which was sinful, let alone spoken or done that which was sinful. To go from His heavenly throne of glory in order to be stripped naked, crucified and accounted the chief of sinners was an inexpressible humiliation. But He suffered that humiliation and indignity that you, the real criminal and the real transgressor, might be lavished with His gentleness/kindness by forgiving those of you who trust alone in Christ alone now and for all eternity every sin which brings true shame and eternal condemnation to men.

2. You might understand to some degree this humiliation of Christ if you have been falsely accused of some sin, of some immoral behavior, or of some wicked error. What horror for one who is innocent to have his/her reputation tarnished by being publicly treated and identified with those who grope around at night to perform their wicked acts that they be not seen doing so in the light of day. How easy is it to be gentle/kind to those who drag your name and reputation through the mud?

3. Dear ones, the Lord Jesus suffered this indignity of being numbered among the worst of criminals and transgressors so that you who trust alone in Christ alone might be numbered among His own adopted brethren (and made the heirs of God and joint heirs with Christ). If He has condescended in such gentleness/kindness to suffer such shame for you, dear Christian, can any shameful sin that you have committed against Him or against your neighbor not be forgiven? Dear child of God, His shame in being numbered among the worst of sinners is the guarantee of the removal of the shame of your sin and forgiveness in Christ now and for all eternity. Therefore, walk not in that shame any longer. Walk in the glorious position and rank of children of the living God.

III. The Lord Jesus Demonstrated His Gentleness/Kindness as He

Suffered the Humiliation of Further Mockery (Matthew 27:39-44).

A. Christ had previously been mocked by the Roman soldiers (Matthew 27:31), but now the King of kings is mocked and insulted by those who passed by (Matthew 27:39-40), by the chief priests (Matthew 27:41-43), and even by the two criminals who were crucified on each side of Christ (Matthew 27:44). Let us look at the words spoken by these who ridiculed and criticized the Lord.

B. Those passing by looked upon Christ as an imposter whom they thought had claimed to destroy the temple in Jerusalem and in three days miraculously to raise it up again (which He did not claim at all, but rather spoke of the temple of His body according to John 2:19). Here were people who no doubt had either witnessed or heard of the many miracles of Christ, and they conveniently misinterpreted His words and selectively forgot His actual miracles.

C. Then there were the members of the Jewish Sanhedrin, who gloating in their supposed victory, also mocked the Lord Jesus by recounting how Christ had miraculously rescued others from all types of infirmities and now could not rescue Himself from the cross. What is telling about the words of these religious leaders is that they do not say that Christ CLAIMED to save (or heal) others from their afflictions, but rather that He did save (or heal) others from their afflictions. These men knew and could not deny the miracles which Christ had performed, and yet due to the hardness of their hearts would not see the miracles of the Lord Jesus as confirming His deity or the gospel He preached.

1. Every man who refuses to come to Christ will misinterpret Christ's claims, ignore Christ's claims, or attribute Christ's claims to some other cause. But the reality of Christ and His claims cannot forever go unheeded. For every man will on that final judgment day be forced to

acknowledge Christ and His claims to be true. How foolish for men to deny and reject now what they must confess on that final day to be true (and suffer the eternal consequences for their rejection).

2. These mockers challenge Christ to come down from the cross and if He should do so, they say they will believe in Him. The Jewish leaders had heard and seen Christ perform many miracles during His ministry and that was not sufficient for them to believe in Him. The Jewish leaders had most recently witnessed the power of Christ to knock over 600 Romans soldiers in the Garden of Gethsemane (yet in gentleness not destroy them) and to heal the ear of the servant (in kindness) which Peter had cut off and that was not enough for them to believe in Him. They would also come to know and to realize that Christ had been raised from the dead when the Romans soldiers reported to them what had happened at the tomb where Christ was buried, and yet even the knowledge of Christ's resurrection did not bring these men to a saving faith in Jesus Christ. They have no intention to believe in Christ, even if He did come down from the cross. For their hearts are blinded by self-deception and unbelief. Dear ones, had Christ come down from that cross, it would have meant our destruction. The fact that He remained upon that cross and suffered the humiliation of that mockery brings the gentleness and kindness of God's salvation to all who will come to Him in faith.

a. As sinners, we think we are so intellectually honest in evaluating facts. But this is one of the greatest delusions under which we sinners suffer. For apart from the grace of God, we cannot see the facts concerning Christ clearly and come to Him in faith. Those atheists who taunt and challenge God to appear before them or to move some object (and then they will believe) are very much like these who taunted Christ to come down from the cross.

b. Dear ones, if the testimony of inspired Scripture is not a sufficient testimony to lead one to faith in Jesus Christ, no miracle will

change one's mind (Luke 16:29-31). If you are waiting for some miracle to happen in order for you to receive the truth of Christ, you will never believe (or if you are waiting for some miracle to occur before you put away some sin from you). The problem is not that you do not know the truth of Christ to be true in your heart of hearts. The problem is that you don't want to receive it and embrace it because Christ will bring changes into your life that you do not really want. The problem is that you still want to be the lord of your own life and to enjoy the very sinful pleasures that will destroy you. That is the real problem.

3. We join in with those mocking Christ when we act as though His death and resurrection are not powerful enough to overcome the lusts of the flesh, the pride of life, our anger, our bitterness, our fears, or our worldliness. In effect, we act as there was nothing miraculous in Christ's dying to deliver us from the power of sin in our lives. In fact, there is nothing more powerful than the death and resurrection of Christ to crucify that besetting sin in your life and mine.

4. Dear ones, we cannot make excuses for not bearing the fruit of gentleness/kindness when we are humiliated by others, for it was out of Christ's humiliation that the greatest demonstration of gentleness and kindness was displayed. Does Christ know what it is to stand all alone and to be stripped of dignity, shamed, accounted a criminal, mocked and taunted by others? More than we will ever know. Listen to the words of Hebrew 12:1-3. He suffered all these things for His people in order that you who trust alone in Christ alone might receive the full benefit of His undeserved gentleness and kindness now and for all eternity. Yes, we will suffer humiliation, shame, and mockery for Christ and His truth, but we will never suffer alone (Acts 5:41). Jesus did not flee from the shame of identifying with us as sinners, but how often do we flee from identifying with Him and His Cause because we are ashamed to take stand with Him and His faithful witnesses throughout history. Beloved, this is precisely how we are to take up our cross and follow Christ. Only as we live out the

gentleness/kindness of Christ in the midst of suffering shame from others will we grow in the fruit of the Spirit of gentleness.

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