

# Mixed Blessings: Being Gentle in a Cruel World

(Compiled by Paul R. Blake)

## Introduction:

A. Illustrations: The Assyrian pyramid of heads on the feast table; Persian soldiers who dashed children against rocks and walls; Nero and Domitian who ordered the wholesale execution of Christians for entertainment purposes; Hitler's SS who exterminated millions of undesirables; liberal American politicians and judges that have made it legal to murder 4400 babies every day in abortion clinics; the American and Japanese public that clamors for movies and video games with ever increasing amounts of violence and gore; leads to the mother that abandons her children to starve in a rat infested slum so she can go out and score drugs; leads to the man who thinks he is the only person with a right to be on the road and puts everyone else in danger; leads to the child who grows up without a moral conscience and kills at the age of 13; leads to the rest of us either living in fear and loathing of the cruel world, or learning to react to cruelty with cruelty of our own.

1. Cruelty can be described as indifference to suffering and even the positive pleasure in inflicting it. Cruel ways of inflicting suffering may involve violence, but violence is not necessary for an act to be cruel. For example, if another person is drowning and begging for help, and another person is able to help, but merely watches with disinterest or amusement, that person is being cruel, not violent.
2. Ian McEwan, the Booker Prize winner in 1998, "Novels are not about 'teaching people how to live' but about showing the possibility of what it is like to be someone else. It is the basis of all sympathy, empathy and compassion. Other people are as alive as you are. Cruelty is the failure to realize that other people are real and really hurt."
3. Cruelty is blindness. "Man's inhumanity to his brother is Our greatest sorrow. There is blindness much worse than loss of physical sight--the blindness of the heart." (Edmund Bergler, 1949)
4. Robert Burns in his poem From Man was made to Mourn: A Dirge, 1785  
'Many and sharp the num'rous ills  
Inwoven with our frame!  
More pointed still we make ourselves  
Regret, remorse, and shame!  
And Man, whose heav'n-erected face  
The smiles of love adorn,  
Man's inhumanity to man  
Makes countless thousands mourn!
5. I Once Blamed God for Everything by Gary R. Falardeau  
I once blamed God for everything  
But now I understand  
The pain and strife that haunts my life  
Is man's inhumanity to man  
Some men reach for power

To hold all others down  
They take their pound of flesh  
For their selfishness  
Then go after another pound  
In the name of love and goodness  
They plow the fertile ground  
Then they sow their seed  
Of hate and greed  
And we must carry the harvest 'round  
I once blamed God for everything  
But now I understand  
The pain and strife that haunts my life  
Is man's inhumanity to man

6. A famous photograph by journalist Kevin Carter which first appeared in The New York Times, March 1993. The child was about a half mile from a United Nations food station for the starving population. After taking the picture, Carter left the child there and without helping the suffering boy to the relief station, went to board a plane for his next photo op, boasting to another reporter about the great picture he had just taken. In 1994, he was awarded the Pulitzer prize for that photo. Four months later, he died a suicide. Cruelty in this world harms the victim and will ultimately destroy the perpetrator.

7. It is a cruel world, a fact we cannot change, wish as hard as we might.
  - a. The only matter over which we have control in this cruel world is how we choose to react to it

B. No one knew undeserved cruelty as well as Jesus Christ

1. Matt. 11:29 - Famous statement of Jesus; it appeals to us because we so long for a place of solace and refuge from cruelty.
2. Has it occurred to you that Jesus said that of Himself out of concern for us, knowing full well that soon He would experience one of the greatest acts of man's inhumanity toward men?

C. Christians are instructed to be gentle and meek even in the face of adversity

1. Gal. 5:22-23; Col. 3:12; Eph. 4:1-2

## **I. ENDING MYTHS ABOUT GENTLENESS AND MEEKNESS**

A. Myth 1: Gentle people are that way because they are weak

1. This idea comes from those who place a premium on displays of physical strength or social power
2. It is believed that because some powerful persons are not gentle, all powerful persons must be so
3. Yet Jesus of Nazareth commanded all power in the universe, and was able to change the weather (Matt. 14:32-34), and He was meek and lowly in heart (Matt. 11:29)

B. Myth 2: Gentle men are wimps and sissies

1. Gentleness seen as a "feminine" virtue
2. Jesus, no doubt a man, at times quite forceful (John 2:15), yet was gentle and compassionate to others

- C. Myth 3: Meekness means that you are a pushover
  - 1. This is based on the misunderstanding of the term in modern society
  - 2. "not easily provoked or irritated; given to forbearance under injuries" (Webster's); In short, "power under control"
  - 3. This is why the meek will "inherit the earth" (Matt. 5:5). They win over not by force or pressure, but by the ability to keep themselves under control even in difficult circumstances

## **II. THE VALUE OF GENTLENESS AND MEEKNESS**

- A. Enables us to work with others
  - 1. Eph. 4:1-2; 1Cor. 4:21; 2Cor. 10:1
  - 2. We appreciate it more when others are gentle with us - Luke 6:31
- B. Facilitates the spread of the truth
  - 1. 2Tim. 2:24-26; 1Peter 3:15-16
- C. Increases our ability to restore erring brethren
  - 1. Gal. 6:1
- D. Makes us more effective in our service to God
  - 1. James 1:21, 3:13, 17; 1Tim. 6:11; 1Tim. 3:3; 1Peter 3:4

## **III. HOW TO BECOME GENTLE AND MEEK**

- A. Control anger - Titus 3:2
  - 1. While we often vent anger, gentle and meek people will not do so destructively
  - 2. They will reflect on their feelings and find ways to resolve differences peaceably
- B. Speaking to others with encouragement - Eph. 4:29
  - 1. Harshness rarely generates lasting motivation
- C. Gentleness and meekness are the natural products of love and humility
  - 1. If we truly love one another, we will be gentle with one another
  - 2. If we are humble, it is easy to be meek

### **Conclusion:**

- A. You cannot end cruelty; it is the illegitimate offspring of the mating of selfishness and stupidity. And this world is well populated with all three.
- B. What you can do is break the cycle of cruelty by refusing to participate in it
  - 1. By refusing to participate in it
  - 2. By refusing to perpetrate it
  - 3. By refusing to be changed by it
  - 4. By refusing to ignore it
- C. The only powerful, effective response to cruelty is not retaliating with more of the same or greater force still, but with steady, unflappable gentleness
  - 1. The meek will inherit the earth; the cruel will only be buried in it.