

Gentleness: a sign of real strength.

I was considering the instruction in the Bible to 'let your gentleness be evident to all'. I thought of the prophet Elijah's encounter with God, when God was not in the shattering wind, earthquake or fire. See 1 Kings 19:9-18.

And after the fire came a gentle whisper [still small voice]. When Elijah heard it, he pulled his cloak over his face and went out and stood at the mouth of the cave.

Gentleness is often considered a female, motherly type of characteristic and therefore not associated with strength. The King James Version of the Bible translates the word for 'gentle' into 'meek' or 'mild'; hence the words in a hymn "gentle Jesus, meek and mild". But meekness is not weakness. Meekness is having the power, authority or strength but choosing not to use it. Jesus, King of Kings, chose meekness or gentleness when he rode into Jerusalem:

Say to the Daughter of Zion, "See your king comes to you, gentle and riding on a donkey, on a colt, the foal of a donkey." Matthew 21:5

Jesus was quoting the prophetic words in Zechariah 9:9. The Israelites were looking for a king who would rescue them by force from Roman domination. God sent a different king, who came humbly on a donkey instead of a proud white Arab horse. This character of Jesus comes out time and again, not least when his disciple Peter cut off the ear of one of those coming to arrest Jesus. What did Jesus do? Healed his ear! That is power and authority displayed in gentleness or meekness. It was not weakness and the power of God was present at that time:

"When Jesus said, "I am he," they [a detachment of soldiers and some officials from the chief priests and Pharisees, armed with weapons] drew back and fell to the ground. John 18:3 and 6.

Then the men stepped forward, seized Jesus and arrested him. When Jesus' followers saw what was going to happen, they said, "Lord, should we strike them with our swords?" With that, one of Jesus' companions, Peter, reached for his sword, drew it out and struck the servant of the high priest, called Malchus, cutting off his right ear. Jesus commanded, "No more of this! Put your sword back in its place. Shall I not drink the cup the Father has given me?" And he touched the man's ear and healed him. Jesus said to Peter, "Do you not think I cannot call on my Father, and he will at once put at my disposal more than twelve legions of angels? But how then would the Scriptures be fulfilled that say it must happen in this way." [an amalgamation of Matthew 26:50-54, Luke 22:49-51, John 18:10-11.]

That is gentleness, meekness or mildness.

Jesus said, "Come to me...for I am gentle and humble in heart and you will find rest for your souls." Matthew 11:28-29

We are taught to display the same character:

Rejoice in the Lord always. I will say it again: Rejoice! Let your gentleness be evident to all. The Lord is near. Philippians 4:4-5

A gentle word turns away wrath. Proverbs 15:1

I found this to work in real life when I was a school teacher and a colleague handed me the phone. He warned me that the caller, who was ringing to complain about the way we treated her son, had a reputation for anger and confrontation. When I spoke, I greeted her and asked how I could help her. She talked quietly and amicably whilst I listened and at the end of the call she thanked me for all that we were doing for her son! My colleague was amazed.

Paul wrote:

Be completely humble and gentle [meek]. Ephesians 4:2
...the unfading beauty of a gentle [meek and quiet] spirit. 1 Peter 3:4
Now the overseer must be...gentle [patient]. 1 Timothy 3:2-3
As apostles of Christ...we were gentle among you, like a mother caring for her little children. 1 Thessalonians 2:6-7

Gentleness is fruit of the Spirit:

The fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control. Galatians 5:22-23

So when Paul writes 'let your gentleness be evident to all', he is telling us to let the fruit of the Spirit be evident to people around us as the Spirit works in us. He instructs us to let [allow, permit, remove every obstacle or blockage] our gentleness be evident. That part is our responsibility. Gentleness is not limited to one gender; it is a sign of real strength.