

THE FRUIT OF THE SPIRIT IS ... GENTLENESS

Selected Scriptures

Introduction:

[From Illy]... MEEK--NOT WEAK

J. Upton Dickson was a fun-loving fellow who was writing a book years ago entitled *Cower Power*. He also founded a group for submissive people. It was called DOORMATS. That stands for "Dependent Organization Of Really Meek And Timid Souls—if there are no objections." Their motto was: "The meek shall inherit the earth—if that's okay with everybody." Their symbol was the yellow traffic light.

Mr. Dickson sounds like he'd be a lot of fun. What is disturbing about all of this, though, is that many people assume that the ridiculous ideas behind DOORMATS and *Cower Power* represent the quality of meekness that is talked about in the Bible.

Today we come to the eighth quality listed in the fruit of the Spirit. Most of today's translations use the word gentleness. However the word that is used is translated consistently in the KJV as meekness. It is the same root found in Matt. 5:5, where it is translated almost universally as meek – "Blessed are the meek, for they shall inherit the earth."

So how do we really define this word? The Greek dictionary I have uses three terms—mild, gentle, meek. The root word is defined as "mildness of disposition, gentleness of spirit, meekness." Most current translations have chosen to use the term gentleness, but any of these terms express the thought that is contained in this word.

The problem is that many people have misconstrued the idea of gentleness or meekness. It has often been equated with weakness. Many see meekness as simply surrendering all control and becoming a "doormat" – as shown in the illustration I shared a moment ago. Yet in Scripture, meekness is seen as strength, it is the way to victory. As Jesus said in Matt. 5:5, victory is for the meek. They will inherit the earth. (I will be using the words meekness and gentleness interchangeably this morning.)

This morning I would like to look at meekness from several perspectives, and then look at how we can be meek and gentle believers.

Humility before God.

Gentleness or meekness speaks to the idea of being humble before God. A meek person is a humble person – the opposite of being proud and arrogant. It is a quality that places the emphasis on the inner spirit, an attitude that follows closely the idea of being poor in spirit.

I believe that we have a classic example in the two thieves who were crucified alongside Jesus. (Luke 23:39-43) One of them had a meek and quiet spirit. The other had a proud, loud, arrogant spirit (re-view briefly the conversation). In the end it was the one who was humble, the one who recognized his spiritual poverty and submitted meekly to the Lord, who found himself in paradise with Jesus.

A second example – Jesus Christ himself, when he was in the garden of Gethsemane. (Luke 22:39-43) He was humble and submissive. He did not resist or dispute the Father's will, but meekly and humbly submitted himself to what he knew was ahead.

Meekness is about humility, particularly in our response to God. As we exhibit humility before God, we can experience His strength and feel the work of grace and mercy in our own lives. This in turn leads us to be merciful and gracious in our dealings with others.

That leads us to the next idea...

Gentleness in our relationship to other people.

Meekness is more than just humility before God. There is also a horizontal aspect to meekness. It affects our dealings with those around us. Jesus gave us many instructions for Christian living with respect to our relationships to others.

Think of Jesus Christ, when he was before Pilate and the chief priests. (Matt. 27:11-14, 27-31) He was quiet, gentle, unwilling to accuse or even to defend himself against their immoral and unjust accusations.

Another example is King David. (Ps. 37) *Read selected verses.* David lived by this principle. Remember when he was running from King Saul – his willingness to be gentle and not retaliate when Saul tried over and over to take his life. Even when he had ample opportunity to take Saul's

life and put an end to his own “life on the run” he was gentle and respectful of Saul’s position of kingship.

In these examples we also see a third idea that I believe is definitive of meekness or gentleness. That is...

Controlled strength, power under control.

Many people think of meekness as weakness, but nothing could be farther from the truth. It takes more strength to take abuse without retaliating, than it does to strike back at our enemies. Meekness is truly controlled strength.

Think of Jesus, when he was before Pilate. He had all the power of heaven and earth in himself, but he did not use it to lash out or to destroy. Yet there were times when he did use his power to demonstrate his righteousness and his anger – when he cleared the temple of merchants and moneychangers.

Think of Moses – he is known as the meekest man in the Bible. Yet when necessary, he used his power and strength to do what needed to be done.

Meekness is not being weak or unwilling to stand up for ourselves. Meekness is humility before God, and gentleness in our relationships with others. It is controlled strength, knowing when to use the power that God gives us for his purposes.

The Source of Meekness

So the question is: how can we be meek, mild and gentle in a dog-eat-dog world, where everyone is climbing over one another, trying to get one up on others? How can we develop that meek and quiet, controlled spirit within? The truth is, we can’t. It is contrary to human nature. It is natural to respond to evil with evil. Yet that is really weakness, just giving in to our own natural desires and will. So how can we respond God’s way. The only way is by yielding to the Spirit of God. Gal. 5:22-23 – the fruit of the Spirit – meekness (gentleness). It is only through the working of the HS that we can have this quality in our lives.

*Matt. 11:28-30 – “Come to me, all who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me, for I am **gentle** and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light.”*

Meekness, gentleness is the basis of Jesus calling us to himself to find rest for our souls.

The Bible says many other things about meekness. It is one of the foremost Christian qualities mentioned in the Scriptures.

*Gal. 6:1 – “Brothers, if anyone is caught in any transgression, you who are spiritual should restore him in a spirit of **gentleness**. Keep watch on yourself, lest you too be tempted.”*

We are to be meek in our dealings with a wayward believer, recognizing our own weakness.

*2Tim 2:24-25 – “And the Lord’s servant must not be quarrelsome but kind to everyone, able to teach, patiently enduring evil, correcting his opponents with **gentleness**.”*

Meekness is what God desires for his children. He desires that we would display to the world the attitude that Jesus had – a meek and quiet spirit, unruffled, willing to suffer, if need be, when we are wrongly treated. But the only way to have that quality in our life is through the work of the Holy Spirit in us. It is His fruit...

The Reward of Meekness

I want to look at one other aspect of this idea of meekness this morning. What is the reward of a meek and gentle attitude and life?

Jesus said in Matt. 5 – “Blessed are the meek, for they shall inherit the earth.” What does it mean to inherit the earth, and why would we want it anyway? Refer back to Psalm 37 – this is where this statement originally comes from. There is the promise of a possession, an inheritance. Let me read you a brief quote from Matthew Henry:

*“Meekness, however ridiculed and run down, has a real tendency to promote our health, wealth, comfort, and safety, even in this world. *The meek* and quiet are observed to live the most easy lives, compared with the forward and turbulent.”*

I have a feeling that it is not so much that we will have more of this earth or what it offers, but rather that the meek will be better suited to experience and enjoy the things that life in this world has to offer.

Then, along with that, is the assurance of the inheritance that Christ has promised to his children—that is, heaven itself – the new heaven and the new earth.

Conclusion

Let me try to wrap this up by reading the words of Peter in 1 Peter 2:19-23 – *turn and read*. Jesus is the perfect example of meekness – having the strength to not retaliate but to leave everything in the hands of God who will ultimately mete out justice in his own time.

Quote from Online Bible Greek dictionary – description of meekness:

“Meekness toward God is that disposition of spirit in which we accept His dealings with us as good, and therefore without disputing or resisting. In the OT, the meek are those wholly relying on God rather than their own strength to defend them against injustice. Thus, meekness toward evil people means knowing God is permitting the injuries they inflict, that He is using them to purify His elect, and that He will deliver His elect in His time. Gentleness or meekness is the opposite of self-assertiveness and self-interest. It stems from trust in God’s goodness and control over the situation. The gentle person is not occupied with self at all. This is a work of the Holy Spirit, not of the human will.” (Ga 5:23)