

MEEKNESS, NOT WEAKNESS
(Matthew 5:5)

The third Beatitude that Jesus mentions in the opening to the Sermon on the Mount is meekness, as He said, “Blessed are the meek, for they shall inherit the earth” (Mt.5:5). In teaching my students, when I come to this Beatitude, I tell them that they are not going to like it as it cuts across our grain more so than any of the others. Even the word itself reeks of negative connotations. For the most part we consider meekness synonymous with weakness. It conjures up images of those who are like door mats in that they are too timid to confront anyone or stand up for themselves in any way, so everyone just walks all over them. Unfortunately the Greek word used here does not translate well into English. We don’t really have a word that encompasses all that the Greek word means, therefore the closest we come is meek or gentle. The essence of the Greek word used is being mild. What comes to mind for most of us then is the idea of being mild-mannered, the very word used to describe Superman’s alter-ego Clark Kent. Sure Clark Kent was a nice enough guy, but he certainly was not the kind of man that garnered the respect of others, men or women, let alone having the stuff heroes are made of. Generations of little boys have not spent hours pretending to be or longing to grow up to be Clark Kent. So, in using the idea of being mild, what is Jesus calling kingdom citizens to be? A bunch of Clark Kents? Not very appealing is it? Yet sadly that is how many people view Christians. Why is that? Why do they see us as timid pushovers? The answer lies in the full concept of the Greek word Jesus uses. Though the essence may be the idea of being mild, the larger concept of the word is being able to find the middle ground between *overreacting* in a situation and *not reacting* at all. Meekness is not so much about overreacting in anger or not reacting out of indifference, but about *responding rightly*. It is an attitude of heart and mind that chooses not to *react*, but rather to *respond* according to the truths and principles of God’s Word to people and life’s situations and circumstances. Personal experience has taught us the difference between someone reacting to us and someone responding to us. Which of us doesn’t prefer the latter?! Reacting is a knee-jerk type of reciprocation in that there is no thought involved, it is just an emotion-driven reflex directed at the person or situation. Responding is about taking that same emotion and prayerfully sifting it through God’s truth and principles in order to respond in the right way, at the right time, and for the right reason or motive. Obviously *this* idea of meekness is not about being too afraid or weak to confront others or tackle a situation, as it takes far more strength and power to control oneself so as to respond rightly than it does to just fly off the handle. Thus in calling us to be meek, Jesus is instructing us to take the power we have to react to people and situations by demanding our way, by retaliating, by manipulating them for our benefit, or by justifying ourselves, and put it under His control so as to respond as He would in any given situation or circumstance. This is why many conclude that Christians are weak because we choose to put everything in the hands of Jesus. Rather than taking matters into our own hands, we let Him guide us in how to respond in a godly manner in order to work things out as He sees fit, in a way that brings about healing and resolution as opposed to unforgiveness and dissolution. After all, He alone knows more and has the true power to bring about His perfect will in any matter.

As powerful as Jesus is though, He is also the meekest man who ever lived and if you've ever studied His life, you would never call Him meek or mild-mannered in the same way you would Clark Kent. Jesus is not timid, indecisive, cowardly, or weak in any way. When facing His arch-enemy, Satan, though physically weakened from fasting for 40 days, Jesus boldly stood up to him as he tried to defeat Him by tempting Him to sin. Throughout His public ministry Jesus constantly defended God and His Word when challenged by the self-righteous religious leaders of the day. When being physically brutalized and mocked at His various trials, Jesus never once tried to justify Himself, or threaten any retaliation. Lastly, when facing the excruciating pain of His scourging and crucifixion, Jesus never used the power at His disposal as the Son of God to free Himself and rain down on them the destruction they so justly deserved, rather He asked God to forgive them instead (Lk.23:34). Jesus' *response* to all He suffered at the hands of His own creation clearly demonstrates that even though He had the power and the right to justify Himself, to demand His way, to influence events, and to retaliate He chose not to. Instead, in meekness, He put His power as the Son of God under His Father's control so as to fulfill His will rather than His own (Mt.26:39; Phil.2:5-8). In doing so Jesus shows us that meekness is not about being powerful or even right, but about being righteous, meaning desiring to be right with God first and foremost.

So what enabled Jesus to submit to all the injustice, the unfairness, and the cruelty when He, as God, had all the power that created the universe at His disposal? When the crowds stood at the foot of His cross mocking Him and challenging Him to prove He was the Son of God by coming down off the cross, why didn't He? There was no power on earth that could keep Him nailed to that cross, that could hold Him there! So what held Jesus on that cross? The obvious answer is His love for us; but as part of all the God-ordained complexities of what held Jesus to that cross, another was His meekness. The crowds believed His weakness got Him crucified, but in reality it was His meekness, for without that, He never would have submitted to His Father's will and come to earth as a man knowing what would happen. Again we see Jesus showing us that meekness is not about living our lives as we see fit, but about surrendering our lives to our Creator so as to live them as He directs, as He wills (I Pet.2:21-23).

As stated before, the essence of meekness is being mild. Now you can see why I tell my students they are going to hate this Beatitude as it runs counter to their human nature and the individualistic, independent, macho American culture in which they live and have assimilated. Yet for a kingdom citizen being meek is not optional; it is required. If God's goal is to make you into the image of Christ, and He is meek, so then you too are to become meek. So what is the key to becoming meek? How do you go against all that is human, all that is considered culturally normal and right? The key to meekness is this: coming to a right perspective of who God is and thus who you are. It may sound simple enough, but as you well know, becoming humbled is never easy! Why is humbleness a prerequisite to meekness? Because only by recognizing who God is, all that He is, all that He's capable of, and all that He promises, can you ever really know who you are and how you fit into this universe of His making. In coming to know your Creator, you come to know yourself, your place, along with your purpose. Seeing yourself in relation to God is incredibly humbling, but at the same time incredibly *liberating*! For only by knowing whose you are, who you are, and why you're here can you ever become meek as only then will you let go of trying to control everything and *rest* in God's promises and plans

for you. No longer do you have to work day in and day out using all the power and resources at your disposal and all your energy to prove your worth, to climb the social-economic ladder, to fight for your 'fair share' of all that the world offers, and to manipulate people and circumstances to fulfill your goals and dreams so as to be happy. That is the essence of life for most people. No wonder there is so much *stress* and so little true *rest*! Does it describe you? Is it making you weary? I once came upon an epitaph written on an overpass that summed this lifestyle up perfectly; it said, "Work, Buy, Consume, Die." How sad is that! Yet for far too many that is what their life is all about; working long hours so as to be able to buy all the latest toys and fashions, to consume every new food or fad, to indulge themselves in whatever pleasure it takes to be happy before their time runs out. Can it be that is all life is about? Do you truly believe that is all you were created for? If so, then the only winners in life are those with the power and resources to manipulate it, therefore seemingly having a better life than those without them. That would mean that God creates *a lot* of losers! That would mean that Jesus is a loser! Thankfully that is not the essence of life or what you were created for! God has created you with far too much value to limit His purposes for you to a mere earthly life span. He has *eternal* plans for you, this is just the preparation phase! Thus by coming to a proper perspective of who you are in relation to God and His universe, you begin to realize that the truth of the matter is that you have no real power or resources that can accomplish anything of lasting value, that can make you somebody in God's eyes, or that can truly make you happy. The smart thing to do then would be to quit struggling and surrender your life to someone with real power and resources to actually give your life true worth and meaning. As the martyred missionary Jim Eliot once said, "He is no fool who gives what he cannot keep to gain what he cannot lose." Of course, that means putting your life *completely* in God's hands, being *totally* surrendered to His will for your life.

This brings up my last point about what it takes to be meek and that is *trust*. There is no way anyone would completely surrender her life to another unless she trusted that person without reservation. Do you trust God that way? Obviously Jesus does as He proved by willingly coming and fulfilling God's plan of salvation for mankind. Therefore Jesus was able to endure and persevere through all that He was subjected to at the hands of His own creation. He knew the eternal perspective; He knew that no matter how physically painful or emotionally agonizing life can be at times, there can be joy and peace in the midst of it all as you trust God to see you through it and to give it meaning like He did with Jesus (Heb.12:2). You've got to know God to trust Him, and to know Him you have to spend time with Him in conversation through the reading and instruction of His Word and prayer. However, just as important is that you also come to believe Him, to take Him at His Word. You can know a lot about God and still not believe Him to the point of trusting Him with your *whole* life. It is imperative that you come to realize that God loves you unconditionally and is for you! He promises to provide for your every need, to protect you from the enemy of your soul, to walk with you daily through the ups and downs of life, to give meaning to your life (including your suffering), to restore you from the emotional debilitation of sin, to give you an abundant life, to never leave or forsake you, and many other promised blessings. How could you not trust your life to someone who loves you like that? How could you not trust someone who proved his love by *dying* for you?! Who else can you find that would do this for you? Your soul-mate?

Yourself? Not likely on either account. The divorce rate makes the first option unlikely and you know the old adage about our being our own worst enemy. You can choose to entrust your life to another person or trust no one but yourself, but either way your life will never be all that it could be under God's guidance and control. It is the same with horses. Wild horses have a lot of power and strength, but are unable to use them productively. Yet the power and strength of a tamed and trained horse is amazingly productive. Think of all the ways they have benefited mankind! So, too, a life not surrendered to God cannot produce anything of real value in the eternal scheme of things. However, a life lived in meekness, *completely surrendered* to God and *totally trusting* Him will be highly productive, benefiting others both now and in eternity.

The final question I'd like to address about meekness is why God requires it of His followers, to those who belong to His kingdom. Simply put, this godly character quality is the gateway to experiencing real progress and growth in your Christian life. Why? Well, there are several reasons. One being that you are called to live a life that is pleasing to God (Col.1:10) and you will never be able to accomplish that if you are constantly reacting to people and circumstances rather than responding rightly. Being reactive to all that life throws at you reveals weakness as it says that you are afraid, exposing your vulnerability, your feeling out of control. However, when you respond rightly to the things life throws your way it reveals strength; a strength born of the confidence that God is in control and that He will work all things for good (Rom.8:28). Thus meekness is the opposite of anger, impatience, a critical spirit, irritation, being demanding, and bullying others through verbal or physical abuse. These reactions are Satan's will for your life, and reflect a heart that is still not quite believing God and His ability to take care of you, causing you to still try to take care of yourself. Therefore by living in a reactive mode you play right into the hands of Satan as you are reflecting him more than God in that, like him, you too are taking your life into your own hands and not trusting God to do right by you. This leads to the another reason why God calls you to be meek; so that you can correctly reflect the God whom you love and serve. It is necessary to be an effective witness for Christ, thereby showing others that He is real and that He makes a positive difference in your life (I Pet.3:15). The fact that meekness is so unnatural to mankind makes your being meek a *true miracle* of God, therefore concrete evidence of His transforming power in your life. Thus how well you practice meekness is a good standard by which to measure how much you are really believing and trusting God for your life and your future, or how much you are still in the driver's seat. Lastly, God wants you to be meek so that you can be open to His resources by finally coming to the place where you are trusting God for everything, that you are no longer laying claim to, demanding, or trusting in any of the world's resources to meet your true needs. Those who don't recognize that the treasures and pleasures of this world are only temporary, therefore only able to provide fleeting happiness or fulfillment, are forced by a continual gnawing discontent and boredom to work harder, to constantly seek after new and better things and experiences, and demand and consume more and more of the empty resources of this world. Thus the author's inspiration of the aforementioned epitaph describing modern day life. However, God's resources, such as His presence, His love, His fellowship, His Word, etc., are eternal and thus provide everlasting blessing, never leaving you discontent, empty, joyless, or bored.

Hopefully by now you are convinced that the characteristic of meekness does not equate to weakness. After teaching this to my women's Bible study, one of the ladies, seeking to put what she had learned into practice, wrote to me and said, "If you think being meek is being weak, trying being meek for a week!" Meekness does not come naturally. It is born out of the two previous Beatitudes, being poor in spirit and mourn. It follows them in sequence because they are prerequisites to being meek. Why? Well, poor in spirit is the realization that there is no good thing in you apart from Christ and so to be in heaven with God you need to realize that and ask Christ into your life. Mourn follows for when you realize how truly sinful you are, how deadly your sin has been to God, others, and yourself, then you will deeply mourn over it. This will lead you to do all that is in your power to make it right with those you've sinned against, and finally start forsaking your sins. Now you are in a frame of heart and mind to be meek. Since you have already come to terms with the fact that there is no good thing in you to commend you to God, why would you react defensively to someone who points out a character flaw? Since you've have already recognized how sinful you can be, then why would you react in self-righteous anger to someone accusing you of wrongdoing? If you have already come to terms with the fact that when left to your own thoughts and devises, your life will never measure up to God's requirements for spending eternity in heaven, then why would you not surrender it to God? After all, you've got nothing to lose, but everything to gain. Thus meekness is the natural outcome of the Beatitudes poor in spirit and mourn as they open your heart to seeing its desperate need of a savior, of the Lord Jesus. At that point it is just a matter of taking Him at His Word and responding to His amazing love by giving all of yourself to Him, daily trusting Him to take care of you. By giving Christ control, it frees you up to live the life God has planned for you; to meekly rest in His love, His provision, His working on your behalf, and His protection of your reputation. No longer will you be living in anxiety and fear of what may befall you or suffer from what others may think or say about you as God is your advocate and will take care of you. No longer will you be *reacting badly* when things don't go your way, or when people wrong you or let you down, as He will show you how to *rightly respond* to each and every person, situation, and circumstance; to do all that is within your means to make things right in a way that makes your life blessed and reflects gloriously on your Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ (Rom.12:18).

Modern human philosophies teach that the strong survive and inherit the earth, so everyone is flexing their muscles trying to get as much of the world as they can. Yet Jesus said that the meek will inherit the earth. Frankly, having lived on this earth for five decades, with each passing day I'm more ready to go home to be with Jesus. This is not my home; I don't want to inherit it, I look forward to leaving it! So why does Jesus give this as the reward for being meek? Some reward! The earth that Jesus promises to the meek is not this fallen sinful earth that we live in now, but the *new earth* and *new heaven* He promised in Revelation 21:1-2; an earth that is far better than the one before the fall of man. Now that's an amazing inheritance! That I look forward to each and every day. I can't wait! How about you? Will you choose to live in meekness so as to inherit that earth or continue to be self-asserting and demanding and only inherit dirt?

Prayer:

Lord God forgive my foolish short-sightedness in thinking that my life is mine to do with as I please, when in fact my life belongs to You, my Creator and my Saviour. Help me understand what it means to be meek as this seems so foreign to me. Please show me the areas of my life that I have yet to yield control of to You. Father reveal Yourself to me that I will trust You enough to meekly rest in Your love, Your faithfulness, and Your sovereignty. I desire to live my life with an eternal perspective; to savor each day You give me, yet with a view of how each is being used by You for a far greater and higher good than what I can see or fully understand this side of heaven. I want to choose to live in meekness, to surrender my life to You completely so that it might make a difference, an eternal difference by blessing both You and others. Thank-You Father for loving me and choosing me, thereby giving me the opportunity to have my life fulfill its highest calling and purpose through the privilege of serving You. Please help me be meek that I may respond rightly to all that comes my way so that my life truly reflects that it is being lived for You and not just for myself. Amen

Follow Up:

One of God's purposes for calling citizens of His kingdom to be meek is for the sake of harmony. God's kingdom, unlike human kingdoms, is one of harmony. Apart from being meek you can never experience real harmony because when you aren't living as God designed then you are not only functioning against how you were designed to function, but also against God and His universe. As long as you are still wrestling with God as to who will be in control of your life, then your life will be out of control, out of harmony. If it seems that you're always weary, or that everyone is against you, or that nothing is going your way, or that life is just too hard, think about it! Your life will always be hard, it will oftentimes feel like a nightmare roller coaster ride that you can't get off, especially when it comes to relationships, because that is the consequence of being reactive rather than responsive. However, when you finally realize beyond a shadow of a doubt that God loves you and is for you, then you will come to see that all that He allows into your life has been filtered through His love, therefore there is no need to argue with Him or to resist His will, but to accept it as good despite how it appears or what you feel (James 1:17). In doing so you will find yourself living in harmony not only with God, but with others as you no longer are angrily venting or blaming someone else for the hard things in your life. This is meekness and in time you will find your life becoming more even, your relationships more harmonious, and the hard things working out for good. That is why meekness is so essential to experiencing progress in your relationship with Christ. Without meekness your life will always be off kilter as it is out of harmony, out of step with your Creator. This causes you to continually experience failure in your walk of faith thus always feeling defeated as a Christian.

Challenge:

One of the most difficult aspects of meekness is determining how to respond in each given situation. Obviously the Word of God is our guidebook along with the affirming

peace of the Holy Spirit. Another is the example of Jesus Himself. As already stated, in meekness Jesus did not fight against all that was done to Him as part of God's plan for the salvation of mankind. Jesus never asserted Himself for His sake, for His relief. However, when it came to God's reputation being slandered or His truth being compromised, Jesus stood up against those doing so. For instance we see this clearly in the two times He cleansed the temple of those who were taking advantage of the required worship of God by overcharging worshipers for sacrificial animals and having inflated currency exchange rates (Jn.2:13-16; Mt.21:12-13). On both occasions, filled with righteous anger, Jesus let it be known that what they were doing was sacrilegious, was anathema to God. How this could be considered a meek response was because it wasn't about Him, but about God and upholding His reputation, truth, and righteousness. Being meek does not mean that Christians don't stand up for or fight against anything. As God's ambassadors here on earth, we are to represent Him and His cause to others. By being meek about the things that only benefit ourselves we reflect God's perspective, that it's not all about us. But we also need to correctly reflect God's perspective on sin and unrighteousness of any sort by boldly speaking the truth in love and doing all we can within biblical guidelines to right injustices, to curb the tide of sin, and to uphold His standards of truth and righteousness. A key element then in determining when to accept or when to take a stand is our *motivation*. We are not to let sin go unchallenged, to let it ride roughshod over us, but at the same time we need to be sure our motivation to stand against it is for God alone and in no way compromised by selfish motives (Phil.2:3). Knowing how to respond rightly in any situation is a matter of combining biblical truth and prayer, then having the confirming peace of God's Spirit. The closer we walk with God, the easier it becomes to discern this.

For Further Study:

Proverbs 15:1; 16:18, 24, 32; 19:11; 20:3, 22; 24:29; 29:23; Matthew 5:38-48; Romans 12:9-21; 14:19; I Corinthians 4:11-13; Galatians 6:9-10; Philippians 2:3-16; 4:11-13; I Timothy 6:17; James 1:19-21; 3:8, 13-18; I Peter 2:21-24; 3:8-9

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