

The Fruit of Meekness is not Weakness

Galatians 5:23; Matthew 5:5

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The stereotype that the world has of a meek person is one who is weak, passive, unassuming, and afraid to take a stand. The world could not be more wrong. Two principle characters found in the pages of Scripture (who we will be considering more closely in future sermons) clearly demonstrate such stereotypes to be completely untrue of one who is truly meek: Moses (Numbers 12:3) and Jesus Christ (Matthew 11:28-29).

Moses may have had his reservations about being the chosen one to go before Pharaoh as God's mouthpiece, but Moses went because he was sent by the Lord. Moses stood courageously before the mightiest king in the world at that time and led millions of God's people out of bondage in Egypt in one of the greatest feats of leadership in human history. Yes, Moses was meek, but Moses was not weak. The Lord Jesus Christ was the Almighty in human flesh, healing the deaf, the lame, the blind, raising the dead, multiplying bread and fish to feed thousands, silencing the violence of the wind and waves, chasing merchants out of the temple twice, causing hundreds of Roman soldiers to fall backwards at His mere words when they came to take him captive, and fearlessly defending the truth against the religious leaders of the time and silencing them time and time again. Yes, the Lord Jesus Christ was meek, but He was not weak.

Upon considering what Scripture reveals concerning these examples of meekness, let none of us entertain the false idea that meekness is weakness. To the contrary, meekness is subduing one's passion and power not to destroy others, but rather using one's passion and power to glorify God and to benefit others.

We continue this Lord's Day to consider the fruit of the Spirit found in Galatians 5:22-23 and come now to the fruit of meekness. Let us consider the following two questions: (1) What is the Fruit of Meekness? (2) What is the Reward of Meekness?

I. What is the Fruit of Meekness ("Blessed are the meek" Matthew 5:5a)?

A. I have chosen to define and apply the fruit of meekness within the context of Christ's Sermon on the Mount where "the meek" are blessed in the Third Beatitude of the Lord.

1. This sermon of the Lord Jesus begins with blessings pronounced upon believers who demonstrate their faith in the Lord not by a mere outward form of righteousness (as was true of the scribes and Pharisees of the Jews), but rather demonstrate their faith in the Lord by inward spiritual graces and fruits that are revealed in their character and life. These spiritual fruits of life in Christ are not given as conditions to coming to Christ by faith alone, but rather are listed as the fruit manifested and growing (to varying degrees) in the life of every one who has come to Christ by faith alone.

2. Martin Luther stated in his exposition of the Sermon on the Mount (*Commentary on the Sermon on the Mount*, p. 291):

Christ is saying nothing in this Sermon about how we become Christians, but only about the works and fruit that no one can do unless he already is a Christian and in a state of grace.

3. Like the fruit of the Spirit in Galatians 5:22-23, the beatitudes in Matthew 5 are the DNA and life of Jesus Christ supernaturally wrought in the heart of every child of God at his/her regeneration. This is the inheritance of every believer redeemed by Christ and ratified by the blood of Christ. These are not

natural personality traits, but are supernatural character traits freely given by the Spirit that reveal our family identity—that we are the children of God and are being conformed to the image of Jesus Christ (who is the standard and epitome of meekness, 2 Corinthians 10:1). Therefore, as Christians we do not seek to obtain these graces and fruits (as if we did not possess them), but rather to grow these graces and fruits by the grace and power of the Holy Spirit through faith in Christ and obedience to His commands.

4. What is more antithetical to the spirit of the world than these beatitudes of Christ (or the fruit of the Spirit)? The world (and that worldly spirit that has invaded the Church of Christ) blesses the successful, the powerful, the wealthy, the educated, the gifted, the assertive, and the attractive person. However, the Lord blesses the poor in spirit, the meek, the merciful, and those who are persecuted for the sake of His righteousness and truth.

B. What then is the fruit of meekness in Galatians 5:23 and who are the meek in Matthew 5:5?

1. The Hebrew word used in the Old Testament for meekness (*anawah*) has in its root meaning that of affliction or oppression. Thus, one who is meek has that meekness forged upon the anvil of affliction, trial, persecution, and suffering to some extent or another. Meekness is not the fruit of a pain-free, comfortable life that is exempt from all hardship, but rather meekness grows like a tree firmly rooted in Christ in the midst of the strong winds and storms of life (turn with me to Psalm 37:11—this is David’s testimony and we find it in the context of the assault and lies of enemies—note verses 1,7,9,10,12,14). So we see that the very lexical derivation of this word demonstrates that this fruit of meekness is not weakness. It is grown out of heartache, pain, and the fiery furnaces God brings into our lives because He is conforming us to the image of Christ.

2. The Greek word used in the New Testament for meekness (*praotes*) was actually used by the ancient Greeks to describe a wild and powerful animal (like a horse) that was trained to harness that strength in order to submit to and serve its master. Therefore, putting together both the Old Testament derivation and the New Testament derivation of meekness, we could describe meekness to be a bridled strength in humble service to Christ and to others, grown and ripened by God-ordained hardships and afflictions in our lives.

C. There are four basic characteristics of meekness that will help us better understand this fruit of the Spirit and promote its growth in our lives.

1. **Meekness is characterized by humility** (lowliness of mind), not by pride, self-centeredness, or boasting in ourselves (meekness is not characterized by loving and pursuing one’s own glory, but rather the glory of God).

a. Dear ones, it is firmly etched into our very nature to proudly resist the Lord, His authority, and His will for our lives. By nature we are rebels who cherish and guard our own autonomy and independence (as sacred idols). But when the grace of God effectually works in our hearts to draw us unto Christ, to enlighten our minds to behold His glory, His beauty, His love, His holiness, the work of Jesus Christ upon the cross, and to grant us faith to receive with empty hands Christ’s death and resurrection as our death to sin and our resurrection to new life, we am brought ever so low before the Lord to confess Him as our Savior and Master. We no longer wickedly understand ourselves to be the lord and master of our life. We cast such tokens of idolatry before the Lord, and humbly bow the knee to Christ as Lord of all (Lord of all that we are, possess, or ever hope to be). That is evidence of the fruit of meekness.

(1) There is nothing over which He is not Lord (whether family, job, education, accomplishments, dreams/ambitions, fears, worries, idols of the heart, eyes, ears, or hands). Meekness is humbly bowing before Him who created us, provides for us, and has saved us (1 Corinthians 6:19-20).

(2) There is no meekness in the heart of one who has no desire to submit to

the lordship of Jesus Christ. Regardless of the struggles that we might have in warring against the idols in our lives that would usurp Christ's rightful place in our lives, the struggle and the battle in not surrendering and throwing up our hands to these idols (though we fail and fall and repent and arise again) is yet evidence of our submission to Christ's lordship (otherwise we would simply surrender to our idols without further battle within us). It is not the lack of total victory over the idols in our lives that disproves Christ's lordship, but rather the lack of any fighting these idols in the power of Christ's death and resurrection that disproves Christ's lordship in our lives. The words of Samuel Rutherford are very much to the same effect (*Letters of Samuel Rutherford*, "Letter CCIII", p. 401):

But the thing that we mistake is the want of victory. We hold that to be the mark of one that hath no grace. Nay, say I, the want of fighting were a mark of no grace; but I shall not say the want of victory is such a mark.

b. It is our pride and self-centeredness, dear ones, that continues the battle to please ourselves, to glorify ourselves, to boast of our accomplishments before God and man. That idol of pride must be cut down as Gideon laid the axe to altar of Baal (Luke 9:23; Romans 12:1-2). There is no meekness where there is no humility. There is no humility where there is no submission to Christ. There is no submission to Christ where there is no warring against or crucifying self and the idols in our lives. We all have these idols in our lives to varying degrees (what a joy heaven will be where all idols will be forever thrown down), but are we conforming ourselves to the idols of this world or are we casting them down daily and dying daily to them? Dear ones, the fruit of meekness is characterized by humility.

2. **Meekness is characterized by gentleness** (tenderness), not by harshness, severity, or abuse (meekness is not characterized by loving and pursuing power so as to rule over others).

a. When our hearts are humbled before the Lord and when we are taking ourselves to the cross to put the idols which we cherish and love more than Christ to death, the Lord also begins to take away from us those ever-so-rough edges of harshness and rudeness, anger and vindictiveness by replacing these with a gentleness and tenderness toward others. Instead of viewing others as means to our own ends and to our own satisfaction to please ourselves, we begin to see ourselves as servants to love and help one another.

b. Where the gentleness of meekness is absent, the idol in one's life will be power and control over others. And if they do not serve us as we think they should, we will show them our harsh side, our angry side, and our abusive side. Christians are neither called to serve themselves nor to view others as if others existed to serve us, but rather we are called to serve and lay down our lives for Christ (as He did for us) and to grow in meekness through the gentleness and tenderness of serving one another (in being teachable, easily entreated, not defensive, and even in the way we seek to restore brothers and sisters when they fall, Galatians 6:1). The fruit of meekness is characterized by gentleness.

3. **Meekness is characterized by contentment** (satisfaction), not by covetousness, self-centered ambition, or worldliness (meekness is not characterized by loving or pursuing riches).

a. It is not because everything is going our way that we as Christians have contentment, but rather because we know that our Heavenly Father slumbers not, nor takes His eye off of us at any time. He is with us and will never leave us nor forsake us (Hebrews 13:5). There is contentment in Christ because everything in our life has meaning and purpose for our Lord sovereignly works all things out for the good of those who love Him and are called according to His purpose (Romans 8:28). There may certainly be those who intend our harm, who despise us, who malign us. There may be afflictions, trials, temptations that knock us off our feet like a hurricane. But, dear ones, our contentment does not depend upon how we are treated or what we experience, but rather depends upon the Lord who withheld not even His only begotten Son from us, but freely gave Him up to bear the wrath of God for our sins. In light of that greatest

demonstration of love and care for us, how shall He not freely give us everything we need in this life (Romans 8:32)?

b. The enemy of contentment in your life and mine is the idol of covetousness in craving what we do not have and like the children of Israel in the wilderness complaining how good others have it, while you go without your desires. Instead of our hearts being led to such discontentment, a meek heart rejoices in the gifts and graces of others, and a meek heart rejoices in the blessings God has granted freely of His goodness to us (which we in no wise deserve in the least). A meek heart is a thankful heart for all that we have in Christ.

c. The enemy of contentment in your life and mine is the idol of worldliness in looking to the world for our contentment rather than looking to Christ. Everything in this world that sparkles and glows is fading away. That is because this world is passing away and the lusts thereof. Being conformed to this world (its standards, its pleasures, its promises of fun and excitement, its lusts of sex) can never satisfy, because they are temporary. The tighter you cling to these things, the more they slip through your fingers (like dry sand that is tightly squeezed). The tighter you squeeze this world, the more you will fear losing what has become your purpose and reason for living. Only Christ can never be taken away, dear ones (Philippians 1:21). Dear ones, the fruit of meekness is characterized by contentment.

4. **Meekness is characterized by courage** (meekness fears God), not by cowardliness, passivity, or weakness (meekness is not characterized by loving or pursuing the easy way out or the compromised way out).

a. The fruit of meekness is not characterized by fearing to take a stand for or defend the truth and righteousness of Jesus Christ when called to do so before others (Proverbs 28:1). The courage of biblical meekness is not so much an absence of fear, but is rather fearing God more than you fear anyone or anything. It is a biblical fear of God, wherein the Christian sees God as so great, so mighty, so sovereign and stands in awe of such an infinitely great King that everyone and everything else that might be feared is like a drop in the bucket in comparison to the strength of the ocean. Scientists estimate that the observable universe is approximately 93 billion light years in diameter (http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Observable_universe), and yet our infinite Creator not only created it all by the word of His power, and sustains it all by that same word (Hebrews 1:3), but He also fills it all with His presence (omnipresence), and yet even that vast universe cannot contain Him (the divine attribute of immensity, 1 Kings 8:27).

b. There is an inscription in Westminster Abbey for a certain Lord Lawrence with these words, "He feared man so little because he feared God so much." That is the essence of the courage of meekness.

c. Whether it is in the workplace, whether it is in the classroom, whether it is in the home, whether it is in the church, whether it is in the courthouse, or whether it is on the battlefield, the fear of the Lord is that which drives the meek to stand courageously—nothing can harm him until it is the time determined by His sovereign Father who set His love upon us from eternity, redeemed and saved us in time, and shall call us to his heavenly home not a second too soon or too late. It is because we have forgotten the fear of the one true living God of the Bible that the fear of man chases us while we are awake and even while we sleep (Hebrews 13:6). The fruit of meekness is characterized by courage.

II. **What is the Reward of Meekness ("For they shall inherit the earth" Matthew 5:5b)?**

A. The Lord Jesus having pronounced His benediction of blessing upon the meek, He now promises them a gracious and free reward ("For they shall inherit the earth"). This is very similar to the promise of reward that Paul issues by the Holy Spirit in 1 Timothy 4:8: "For bodily exercise profiteth little: but godliness is profitable unto all things, having promise of the life that now is, and of that which is to come." The reward

promised to us as Christians who are growing in the fruit of meekness is not simply heavenly blessings, but is as well earthly blessings (though earthly blessings should always point us to the greater and more blessed reward of heavenly blessings). Here the Lord Jesus and Paul remind us of the reward of earthly blessings promised to the meek (they shall inherit the earth). It is important that we understand that both the Old Covenant and the New Covenant promised spiritual blessings and material blessings—heavenly blessings and earthly blessings. What is the earthly reward that Jesus here promises to the meek?

1. The meek enjoy the earthly blessings that they have (whether great or small). “But this is not the whole earth.” That is true, but my Heavenly Father owns it all, and has bequeathed it to Christ as the heir of all things. I am an heir of God, and a joint-heir with Jesus Christ (Romans 8:17; 1 Corinthians 3:21-22).

2. The meek shall inherit the earth during the millennium when Jesus reigns from heaven over this earth in righteousness and peace, when Satan is bound so as not to deceive the nations during that period of time, and when the Gentile nations of the world will come into the Visible Church and Israel will be converted and restored unto the Lord. At that future time, the wicked will be subdued and the meek will rule the earth by the power and might of the Lord Jesus Christ.

3. The promise of an earthly inheritance to Abraham, to Israel, and to the meek in the millennium, ultimately points to the New Heavens and the New Earth—an inheritance that shall never pass away (Hebrews 11:13-16).

B. I will close by considering the word Jesus chose in order to convey the idea of the reward being given to the meek.

1. The Lord did not promise, “for they shall **conquer** the earth”; or “for they shall **earn** the earth”; or “for they shall **win** the earth”, but “for they shall **inherit** the earth”. The reason this word (“inherit”) is used is to make ever so clear that the reward to the meek here upon the earth or in heaven is never due to our power, our gifts, our righteousness, our obedience, or because we deserve such a reward in any way. It is a reward that is entirely of God’s free and undeserved grace and mercy through the act of God in adopting us as His own dear children, and Jesus Christ freely securing that inheritance through His death and resurrection.

2. The reward is through inheritance. That is grace, not works. It is His worthiness, not our worthiness. Let us therefore cast all the crowns of this life and the life to come before His throne of grace. Let us join our voices with the saints in heaven in declaring, “Worthy is the Lamb that was slain to receive power, and riches, and wisdom, and strength, and honour, and glory, and blessing” (Revelation 5:12).

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