

Blessed Are the Meek

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Introduction.

- A. As we've discussed before, many of the Beatitudes fit poorly into our normal way of thinking, but perhaps the strangest of them all is found in Matthew 5:5. Meekness is definitely not something the world around us favors. In fact, if I had to pick the great icon of meekness in American culture, I'd pick George McFly from "Back to the Future." For those of you who haven't seen the movie, McFly is the quintessential geek, constantly used and humiliated by the bully Biff, who sneers, "You're so gullible, McFly!" He just takes all the abuse that comes his way with a cringe and a scared smile, and more than anybody else, he shows us what we think of meekness. We feel sorry for George McFly, but we don't want to be like him.
- B. It's with cultural baggage like this that we come to the Bible, where Jesus tells us that the meek are blessed. Really, as we fight to put this idea to practice in our lives, we're wrestling with two separate problems. The first is that the Biblical idea Jesus is trying to get across is only roughly translated by the word "meek". Just as is true with the Scriptural concept of the heart, there isn't a good English equivalent for the Greek word here.
- C. The second problem, though, even once we sort through the translation difficulties and get our minds around Biblical meekness, is that Biblical meekness isn't necessarily something we want to have. Human beings love to stand up for themselves, to insist on their rights and their way of doing things. This is especially true in a society that is as individualistic and egocentric as ours is. What we need to understand, though, is that this bare-knuckled way of interacting with others is both ungodly and unwise. Only meekness and gentleness can bring us closer to each other and to God. With this in mind, let's explore "Blessed are the meek."

I. What Is Meekness?

- A. As we consider this text, the first thing we need to do is rid ourselves of the George McFly take on meekness, and ask "What is meekness" from a Biblical perspective. We can start to get our first glimmers of this as we look at the foremost Biblical example of meekness, our Lord Himself. See what He says about His own meekness in Matthew 11:28-30. Notice what meekness appears to be doing here. Jesus is inviting all these oppressed people to come to Him, and because of His meekness of heart, they will receive rest.
- B. Why would that be? Why would it be Jesus' meekness, of all things, that would cause him to remove the burdens of the heavily laden? Why would His meekness lead Him to put an easy yoke on us instead of a hard yoke? To answer that, we need to look at the rulers of Jesus' day who WEREN'T meek. The Romans weren't meek. They taxed the Jews until they groaned to support the Roman government. The Pharisees weren't meek. They imposed impossible spiritual burdens on the people for the sake of their own power and prestige. Jesus, by contrast, did none of those things. He had the power to be more heavy-handed than the Romans and the Pharisees ever were, but He chose not to be. He sought leadership for the sake of the led, not to get some benefit for Himself. It's in that lack of self-will that we find the meekness of Jesus.
- C. We see this idea brought into even sharper focus in James 3:13-14. James here is contrasting the way the wicked does things, versus the way the Christian does things. The Christian's meekness of wisdom produces good conduct, but the wicked's envy and self-seeking produce boasting and lying. So, then, the opposite of meekness is envy and self-seeking. It all boils down to a question of where we put our trust. If we put our trust in ourselves, we inevitably become self-seekers. We are obsessed with our image and our status. We constantly go around with a chip on our shoulders, waiting for someone else to come along and knock it off.
- D. By contrast, if we put our trust in God rather than ourselves, that is what leads us to become meek. We know what we have in our relationship with Him, and we also know that our own efforts can't add anything to the value that He has already placed on us. Nobody can do anything to diminish that value, so we see no need to protect it. Let people insult us, oppose us, or oppress us. Those aren't even things we need to dignify with a response. The storm can roar as fiercely as it wants outside, but it can't touch us if our hearts are full of God inside. It's that unshakable peace, that unbreakable calm, that is the essence of Biblical meekness. It might look weak to people on the outside, but it's really the product of more strength than they can imagine.

II. Applying Meekness.

- A. Now that we have the concept down, we can look at several passages that tell us how to apply meekness. The first of these is 1 Peter 3:3-4. Note that the word that is usually translated "gentle" here is actually the same Greek word as "meek," so this passage is actually an instruction to the Christian woman to adorn herself with a meek and quiet spirit. I think it's fascinating how precisely the Scripture speaks here, because when a daughter of the King has learned this meekness of spirit, it IS an adornment. That unflappability, that unshakeability, is so obvious in women who have learned to practice it. Judging from the passages we've looked at already, here's the way this is supposed to work. The meek woman looks unshakable because she

is. She's able to put all the crises that come her way in perspective. Whether it's her kids getting in trouble at school, her husband acting like a jerk, or crunch time at work, she doesn't have to respond with panic and fury. She knows that none of those little things can reach her because of the one big thing that is right in her life. Her life might look out of control, but she knows it's in the hands of the One who IS in control.

- B. Likewise, all Christians, whether male or female, should be meek when explaining and defending their faith to others. Look at Peter's thoughts on this in 1 Peter 3:15. This is certainly an area in which meekness is in short supply. As the saying goes, in polite conversation, never bring up politics or religion, because both topics are likely to turn the conversation IMpolite. That's not the way we should be. Very often, when people respond with anger in political and religious discussions, it's driven by insecurity. They feel like they are being threatened and diminished by challenges to their beliefs. Brethren, as practitioners of New Testament Christianity, we have nothing to fear from challenge. Our faith is logical and makes sense. If we are dealing with someone who is honestly seeking, our belief system, simply and meekly presented, is likely to persuade them to join us. If not, if we are dealing with an enemy of Christ, even then, we have nothing to fear. He can insult and insinuate, but nothing He says can change the truth of our relationship with God unless we let it.
- C. Within the church, meekness is also of tremendous importance in discussing Scripture with people who disagree with us. Paul asks us to consider this in 2 Timothy 2:24-25. Here, it's the word "humility" that is the same Greek word as "meekness." Sadly, this meekness is often in the shortest supply when it is needed most. Just like we will say horrible things to our family members that we would never say to anyone else, so too we often reserve our strongest, harshest language for brothers and sisters in Christ with whom we disagree. We are so determined to prove that we're right, so bent on cramming our way down their throats, that we forget that they too are people for whom Jesus died. Brethren, that is an attitude that the Lord hates.
- D. Instead, when we encounter disagreement in the church, we need to ditch the debate mentality. The point is not to show how knowledgeable and godly we are; it's to help an erring child of God get to heaven. They, not we ourselves, should be our focus. It takes a rare Christian indeed to listen to us when we've gotten up on our moral high horse, but when we come to them gently, kindly, making it clear that our only desire is to help them, that's when they're most likely to pay attention. Meekness is essential for resolving disagreement.
- E. Finally, one last area where the word urges us to be meek is in restoring Christians who have fallen away. We see Paul's thoughts on this subject in Galatians 6:1. Once again, we have that same Greek word masquerading as a different English word, this time "gentleness." This is especially important because the temptation to be self-seeking when dealing with the brother who has stumbled is so subtle. Simply because we make some kind of outreach effort does not mean we're doing it with the right heart. Instead, many Christians go to the brother in sin with the object of "getting him told". We want to make sure that he knows just how wretched he is, and just how badly he needs to come crawling back to be associated with all us righteous Christians again. We're actually using his wickedness to prove to him just how good we are.
- F. Instead, we need to come to brethren who have strayed as fellow sinners. We need to make it clear that we don't believe that we're any better than they are, because on our own merits, we aren't. We need to make our appeal because we want them to come back, not because we want to hammer them for being wicked. Love, rather than condescension and sarcasm, needs to be our most obvious attribute. That's what being meek is.

III. Inheriting the Earth.

- A. This takes us, then, to the last part of the Beatitude, where Christ reveals that the meek will inherit the earth. This is an idea that is open to much confusion. Along these lines, I can't help but remember the character Mordred from the musical "Camelot," who sneeringly insists that, "It's not the earth the meek inherit; it's the dirt!" How can it possibly be true that the meek will inherit the earth when in earthly terms, it's the un-meek who seem to get ahead? First, we need to recognize that in saying that, Jesus is actually quoting from Psalm 37:8-11. In old covenant terms, it was the Israelites who were meek who could expect to retain their portion of Canaan, because God worked out His justice in that time in very earthly and obvious ways. Today, though, if we are meek under the new covenant, we shouldn't expect to inherit the same old physical earth that was a reward under the old covenant. Instead, the earth which we should look to inherit is the one described in 2 Peter 3, where Peter tells us that we look for a new heavens and a new earth, in which righteousness dwells. The old earth and all of its possessions are going to be burned up. Why would we possibly seek an inheritance in that? Instead, with our meekness we look to inherit an eternal possession in heaven.
- B. In a very symmetrical way, the meek will receive this eternal possession through the blessing of the very God in whom they trust. Look at Zephaniah 3:11-12. This passage describes the way that the Lord has always operated against the proud and in favor of the meek and lowly. Remember how we discussed earlier that the meek was able to be meek, and not get involved in ego games, because of his reliance on his relationship with God? This is where that relationship bears fruit. God despises the proud, and they cannot hope to stand before His wrath. However, the meek who trust in Him can expect to receive an eternal salvation. Sooner or later, the self-seeking will vanish away and be seen no more, but the meek will inherit the earth.

Conclusion. If you wish to seek an eternal inheritance through meekly submitting to God, begin tonight.