

Meekness . . . Synonym for Moses

Selected Scriptures

Introduction

There is a passage in scripture that we overlooked in our study of Moses before we entered the study of the Ten Commandments. It is a message that I did not think I would have a chance to deliver, but I will today.

I will never forget an event that occurred when I was fifteen or sixteen years of age. I was on a downtown street with my father, in Norfolk, Virginia. We were passing out invitations to the servicemen's center. In that day, servicemen wore their blues and their whites and their hats, and we would pass out invitations to the center to those in uniform. Of course, even then, the streets were not a very safe place.

I will never forget walking up to a particular gentleman and, although he was not wearing a uniform, extending an invitation to him anyway. I was standing in the background and my father handed the invitation to him to come to the servicemen's center. In a quickness that was so quick it took me by surprise, the man took his hand and slapped my father as hard as he could. I was taken aback and watched, ready to say, of course, "Hey, you can deck this guy, Dad. Take it to him. Teach him a lesson. Put him on the pavement."

However, I will never forget standing there, and in the briefness of just a second or two, I began to watch my father because he was not responding. The fellow was just looking at my father, waiting to see what he would do. My father looked at him, and in a very quiet tone said, "Do you feel better now?"

I will *never* forget that as long as I live. That is the most tremendous illustration of what I want to look at today. It is the quality that should be in all of our lives as we mature in the Holy Spirit. It is called meekness.

Now in the scripture, there are only two men who are called meek. One is Moses and the other is Jesus Christ. When you see that description in the scriptures, it is so rare that it waves a flag and calls out, "Stop right here and find out what's happening."

Why is this quality so rare? In fact, what is this quality that we are to have in our lives?

A Biblical Perspective on Meekness

Before we get to Moses' story, let us take a moment to look at the biblical perspective on this characteristic called meekness.

Meekness is a fruit of the Spirit

1. First, meekness is a fruit of the Spirit.

We have a lot of scripture to look at, so follow along as quickly as you can.

- Turn to Galatians, chapter 5.

Look at verses 22 through 23a, which gives us the first clue as to what meekness is. By the way, "the fruit of the Spirit" is the quality of those who are submitted to the Spirit of God.

But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness . . .

The Greek word for "gentleness," which may be "meekness" in your translation, is "prautes". In other words, we discover, from the outset of our study today, that meekness is a fruit of the Spirit.

Meekness cannot be engineered by the flesh; it cannot be made up. Meekness can only come to the individual who has yielded to the Spirit of God in his life.

It is interesting that in our culture today, we hear of people who are supposedly meek who may not know Jesus Christ. Mahatma Gandhi is an illustration of someone who was supposedly a very meek man. Or, perhaps you have heard or read of the Tibetan monk, who obviously does not know Christ, who won, in recent years, the Nobel Peace Prize. His name is Dalai Lama. Perhaps you have seen him on the news. He is being touted as a very meek and gentle man.

However, I propose to you today, that meekness cannot come to someone who does not know Jesus Christ. There may be some similar characteristic,

some gentleness, but there will ultimately, be some ulterior motive, either consciously or unconsciously.

Perhaps an individual does this and it is their way of proving, by way of innate pride, that they are better than another. Perhaps it is a way of salvation, as in the life of this monk, who is supposedly the reincarnated Buddha himself. But it is the individual who knows Christ, who is submitted to the Spirit of God, who can actually have this fruit of meekness.

- Turn to Colossians, chapter 3.

Look at verses 12 and 13, which make this fact even clearer. Paul is referring to believers in this passage.

So, as those who have been chosen of God, holy and beloved, put on a heart of compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness [meekness] and patience; bearing with one another, and forgiving each other, whoever has a complaint against anyone; just as the Lord forgave you, so also should you.

The words “put on,” literally mean “to clothe yourself”. This is not a gift. There are gifts of the Spirit – the gift of administration, the gift of teaching, the gift of mercy, the gift of hospitality. He is not talking about gifts disposed by the Holy Spirit at conversion. He is talking about fruit, which means that this is something that must be developed. There is the clothing; there is the discipline; there is the activity. I want this in my life, and when I yield to the Spirit of God, it can be a garment that clothes my character, my attitude. So meekness is not a gift, it is a habit.

Meekness is a virtue

2. Now, I want you to notice, meekness is not only a fruit of the Spirit, but it is also a virtue.
- Turn to the book of Psalms, chapter 25.

We read in verse 9 that meekness is a virtuous thing to have.

He [God] leads the humble [meek] in justice, and He teaches the humble [meek] His way.

In this verse, we are told that God leads the humble or the meek. The words “humble” and “meek” are the same word in the Septuagint, or the Greek translation of the Old Testament.

Note that God teaches the humble or meek His way. So, the qualification for entering the classroom

to be taught by the Holy Spirit is what? Meekness. It is a virtue.

- Look at one more passage – I Peter, chapter 3.

Verse 4, says,

. . . let it be the hidden person of the heart, with the imperishable quality of a gentle [meek] and quiet spirit, which is precious in the sight of God.

Note that last phrase. In fact, you should underline that in your Bible. Imagine having a quality about our lives that God considers precious.

Definition of meekness

What then, could be the definition of meekness from these passages? I have given it to you. We could define it this way:

Meekness is a gentle disposition resulting from submission to the Holy Spirit.

Biblical Illustrations of Meekness

Now with that in mind, let us take a look at the illustrations of meekness that we have in scripture.

Moses

1. We will find the first illustration in Numbers, chapter 12. This is an incredible passage of scripture that reveals why Moses was considered meek.

We will be able to draw some clues as a result of this passage in Numbers. These verses involve Moses’ sister and brother, Miriam and Aaron.

We will begin with verses 1 and 2 of chapter 12.

Then Miriam and Aaron spoke against Moses because of the Cushite woman whom he had married (for he had married a Cushite woman);

and they said, “Has the Lord indeed spoken only through Moses? Has He not spoken through us as well?” And the Lord heard it.

You should circle the word “only” in that verse, as that is the problem, not the Cushite woman. Continue to verses 4 through 11.

Suddenly the Lord said to Moses and Aaron and to Miriam, “You three come out

to the tent of meeting.” So the three of them came out.

Then the Lord came down in a pillar of cloud and stood at the doorway of the tent, and He called Aaron and Miriam. When they had both come forward,

He said, “Hear now My words: if there is a prophet among you, I, the Lord, shall make Myself known to him in a vision. I shall speak with him in a dream.

“Not so, with My servant Moses, he is faithful in all My household;

“with him I speak mouth to mouth [face to face], even openly, and not in dark sayings, and he beholds the form of the Lord. Why then were you not afraid to speak against My servant, against Moses?”

So the anger of the Lord burned against them and He departed.

But when the cloud had withdrawn from over the tent, behold, Miriam was leprous, as white as snow. As Aaron turned toward Miriam, behold, she was leprous.

Then Aaron said to Moses, “Oh, my lord, I beg you, do not account this sin to us, in which we have acted foolishly and in which we have sinned.”

Now if I were Moses, at this point, I would pause and then say, “On your knees. You have spoken against me and I have never tried to vindicate or to defend or to answer back.”

Those qualities, by the way, are the three qualities of a meek person. He is a person who does not vindicate himself; does not defend himself; does not reject his opponent, as we will see in a minute.

Moses does something that is almost too incredible to believe. Continue to verse 13.

And Moses cried out to the Lord, saying, “O God, heal her, I pray!”

It is interesting that in this scene, as we observe it, Moses does not say, “Lick my feet and kiss my hand and do obeisance. God has spoken for me.”

No. Moses does none of that when he has a great opportunity to reject his opponents who had spoken out against him because they wanted more authority and power. Moses never vindicates, never defends. And now, at the end, he does not seek revenge.

How could Moses respond this way? Let us go back to verse 3.

(Now the man Moses was very humble [meek], more than any man who was on the face of the earth.)

Notice that that verse is in parentheses. It is there as an aside. It helps us to understand how Moses can respond in a way that we find almost too incredible to believe – never vindicating; never defending.

Jesus

2. There is another illustration of meekness. Let us look at Matthew, chapter 11, to see that Jesus is also meek.

Look at verses 25 through 27 of Matthew, chapter 11.

At that time Jesus answered and said, “I praise You, Father, Lord of heaven and earth, that You have hidden these things from the wise and intelligent and have revealed them to infants.

“Yes, Father, for this way was well-pleasing in Your sight.

“All things have been handed over to Me by My Father; and no one knows the Son except the Father; nor does anyone know the Father except the Son, and anyone to whom the Son wills to reveal Him.”

Now that is surely a foundation for someone to be filled with pride. Yet, Jesus Christ, who obviously was more meek than even Moses, then said these words to the nation Israel, in verse 28.

“Come to Me, all who are weary and heavy-laden, and I will give you rest.”

We should stop at this point because we cannot appreciate His words unless we better understand this passage. The two words you should underline are “weary” and “heavy-laden”.

The word “weary” conveys the idea of someone working to the point of utter exhaustion. It is used figuratively. Jesus is speaking of the nation that is collectively, trying, by the rules and regulations of the Pharisees and the scribes, to somehow please God. They are working hard and they are weary; they are utterly exhausted because they do not sense that they are pleasing Him. And they are not.

The word “heavy-laden” speaks of one who has a burden dumped on them. Jesus is speaking of the burden of *all* of the regulations on the nation. They had one for every day of the year. They would mark how far you could walk on the Sabbath, which was only so many feet. You could not look into a mirror. You could not cook. You could do *all* of these regulations and *all* of them had become a pursuit of God’s acceptance and righteousness. But it was not working, so they were burdened and heavy-laden and weary.

So Jesus says,

“Come to Me, all who are weary and heavy-laden, and I will give you rest.”

He was speaking of spiritual rest.

Then, in verse 29, Jesus says,

“Take My yoke upon you and learn from Me, for I am gentle [meek] and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls.”

The yoke would be that which was part of the harness to direct an animal. That animal would be under the authority of the one holding the reigns. In the same way, that individual would be under the sway of its Master.

The word “learn” is the same word from which we get the word “disciple”. Jesus is saying, “Become My disciple; learn from Me.”

Then Jesus says, “I am gentle and humble in heart,” or “I am meek.”

Continue to verse 30.

“For My yoke is easy and My burden is light.”

In other words, “My teaching is not burdened with legalism; it is not filled with laws that you must follow to obtain acceptance; it is easy and My burden is light.”

So, from these two illustrations, we learn that the meek individual does not defend himself; does not vindicate his character; does not reject his opponent. The meek individual is compassionate, patient, strong, and, as someone defined, under control.

Biblical Tests for Meekness

Now let us get as practical as we possibly can and trace this word “meekness” through several passages of scripture. From the examples in scripture, we can create several questions. We will then take a biblical test for meekness to see how well we do.

How do I respond to opposition?

1. The first question is, “How do I respond to opposition?”

Turn to II Timothy, chapter 2. Let us look at verses 22 through 25.

Now flee from youthful lusts and pursue righteousness, faith, love and peace, with those who call on the Lord from a pure heart.

But refuse foolish and ignorant speculations, knowing that they produce quarrels.

The Lord’s bond-servant must not be quarrelsome, but be kind to all, able to teach, patient when wronged,

with gentleness [meekness] correcting those who are in opposition, if perhaps God may grant them repentance leading to the knowledge of the truth,

When someone is in opposition to us – probably someone who denies Jesus Christ, but perhaps even someone who has a different point of view – how do we respond? Do we start a quarrel? Are we ripe for the soapbox debate? *Or*, do we, with meekness, share with them our point of view?

How do I respond to people that I disagree with? That is a test of meekness because I think all of us have a tendency to dig in, especially as this passage indicates.

Do you notice that the one who is meek is literally, the one who is right? Look at verse 25 again.

With gentleness [meekness] correcting those who are in opposition, if perhaps God may grant them repentance leading to the knowledge of the truth,

You are right! They are wrong! That is a great opportunity to really take it to them. But, this is asking us, “Do you respond in gentle patience to those who oppose you?”

How do I respond to an unbelieving spouse?

2. The second question is, “How do I respond to an unbelieving spouse?”

Turn to I Peter, chapter 3, and look at verses 1 and 2.

In the same way, you wives, be submissive to your own husbands so that even if any of them are disobedient to the word, they may be won [to Christ is implied] without a word by the behavior of their wives, as they observe your chaste and respectful behavior.

Underline the powerful thought “without a word”.

Evidently, in this early church, there were many women who were following Jesus Christ; who were more responsive to the claims of Christ. And apparently, there were many husbands who had not yet followed Him. As a result, they were having tremendous friction and difficulty at home. So, Peter provides, in effect, a formula; a way; a pattern of life to win them to Christ.

Obviously this is not a hundred percent of the answer because God’s sovereignty is involved and it is not ultimately, the responsibility of the wife. But, he is saying, “Wives, if you want to win your husbands to Christ, here is the way, ‘Let them . . .’”

. . . observe your chaste and respectful behavior.

Continue to verse 3.

Your adornment must not be merely external – braiding the hair, and wearing gold jewelry, or putting on dresses;

In other words, “Wives, do not try to impress your husbands physically – with the way you look – you will not win them to Christ that way.”

Look at verse 4.

but let it be the hidden person of the heart, with the imperishable quality of a gentle [meek] and quiet spirit, which is precious in the sight of God.

In other words, “You’re not going to win your husband necessarily, by never missing a service in church. You’re not going to impress your husband, or win him to Christ, by becoming involved in all kinds of church activities. You’re not going to win him to Christ by putting notes in his sock drawer; like, ‘God loves sinners.’ You will win him to Christ, or you will impress on him what he is missing, by showing him your meek spirit.”

All of the guys say, “Amen. Sock it to the wives.”

However, look at the next question that is for all of us.

How do I respond to unbelievers in general?

3. The third question is, “How do I respond to unbelievers in general?”

Look further in I Peter, chapter 3, at verses 10 through 15.

For, the one who desires life, to love and see good days, must keep his tongue from evil and his lips from speaking deceit.

He must turn away from evil and do good; he must seek peace and pursue it.

For the eyes of the Lord are toward the righteous, and His ears attend to their prayer, but the face of the Lord is against those who do evil.

Who is there to harm you if you prove zealous for what is good?

But even if you should suffer for the sake of righteousness, you are blessed. And do not fear their intimidation, and do not be troubled,

but sanctify Christ as Lord in your hearts, always being ready to make a defense to everyone who asks you to give an account for the hope that is in you, . . .

That is great. If anyone comes along and asks you why you believe in Jesus Christ, whip that portable soapbox out and preach three points to him; get red in the face and dig in. Oh, but the last phrase of verse 15 tells us to do it with,

. . . gentleness and reverence;

That does not sound much like a sermon to me. Yet, when those that would oppose you; those that would afflict you; those that would persecute you ask you for an answer and give you just the slightest crack in the door, take it and drive it home.

This passage says, “Respond in such a way that you are indeed, speaking the truth and giving them the answer, but let it be with a meek spirit.”

Your response should not be, “Oh, have I got the answer for your life. We can straighten the mess out, if you’ll just listen.”

No. Respond with meekness; gentleness.

How do I respond when confronted by the truth?

4. The fourth question is, “How do I respond when confronted by the truth?”

Turn to James, chapter 1, and look at verses 19 through 21. This gives us another quality of meekness.

This you know, my beloved brethren. But everyone be quick to hear, slow to speak and slow to anger; for the anger of man does not achieve the righteousness of God. Therefore, putting aside all filthiness and all that remains of wickedness, in humility [meekness] receive the word implanted, which is able to save your souls.

How do you and I respond when confronted by the truth of scripture? Continue to verses 22 through 24.

But prove yourselves doers of the word, and not merely hearers who delude themselves. For if anyone is a hearer of the word and not a doer, he is like a man who looks at his natural face in a mirror; for once he has looked at himself and gone away, he has immediately forgotten what kind of person he was.

This is speaking to the believer. It is saying, “When you come to scripture, how do you respond when you are confronted with truth?”

He is suggesting that we are to respond in humility or, as this Greek word “*prautes*” means, “in meekness”. In other words, “in meekness we receive the truth”.

So it is not just how we respond to people that we know are wrong, but how do we respond when we know *we* are wrong? Ouch!

We can say then, teachability is a symptom of meekness.

How do I respond in different situations

5. Fifthly, and this has three points, “How do I respond in different situations?”

Let me give three situations in which to ask that question of yourself.

When a brother falls into sin

- The first situation is when a brother falls into sin, so the question is, “How do I respond when a brother falls into sin?”

Turn to Galatians, chapter 6, verse 1. This is talking about a brother or sister who is caught in sin; there is a scandal breaking out and they have gotten

caught. Are we to just straighten them out? Verse 1a says,

Brethren, even if anyone is caught in any trespass, you who are spiritual, restore such a one in a spirit of gentleness [meekness] . . .

We are, if we go back to our definition, to restore this person with a patient, gentle disposition.

We are not to say, “I can’t believe you did that! How will your family be affected? Don’t you know that you are veering off the path? I’m going to pray that God will get a hold of your life, lest He destroy your flesh, so that you may be saved, yet as by fire.”

This verse is saying to bind up that brokenness. It uses the medical term “restore,” meaning to do this as patiently as a doctor binds a broken limb – in meekness.

Why should we be so meek about this? Note the last part of verse 1,

. . . each one looking to yourself, so that you too will not be tempted.

We get obnoxious when someone falls into sin and cluck our tongue and say, “Yes, I suspected. I knew if you got behind the closed doors over there, you’d find something.”

When we respond in that way, we are not revealing the true spirit of meekness. We have forgotten that we are made of flesh too.

So how do we respond to a brother or a sister when they fall into sin? It should be in meekness.

When I meet with the church family

- Secondly, “How do I respond when I meet with the church family?”

Ephesians, chapter 4, verses 1 through 3. This is talking to the church – exhorting them toward unity.

Therefore I, the prisoner of the Lord, implore you to walk in a manner worthy of the calling with which you have been called, with all humility and gentleness [meekness], with patience, showing tolerance for one another in love, being diligent to preserve the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace.

There could be the implication, and we find this in other passages, that there was trouble in the church. These verses are begging them – even though there is a faction that knows they are right and there may be one that knows they are wrong, or perhaps there are

disagreements or differences of opinion – when you meet together as a body, something that should be clothing your meeting and enveloping your structure is the attitude of meekness. There should be patience toward the person next to you, the person behind you, and the person in front of you.

In other words, “I beg you, for the sake of unity, let your church – and let our church – be an illustration of everything else that follows in this chapter.”

Continue to verses 4 through 6a,

There is one body and one Spirit . . . one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father . . .

This is saying, “I want your fellowship to be *one*; to be unified because it illustrates all this other stuff.”

When we meet as a church body, there is the potential for disagreement. As a church grows and adds more family members, it is like a family – when there is only you and your spouse, there is only one person to argue with; when you have a child, there are two to argue with; two children make three to argue with; the more children you have, the more opportunities there are to get into some big “hoe-downs”.

So, as a church grows and more people from various backgrounds with varying opinions about a variety of things come into the fellowship, how do we respond? It should be with a patient disposition toward others in the fellowship of the church.

When I rub shoulders with an antagonistic world

- Thirdly, “How do I respond when I rub shoulders with an antagonistic world?”

Turn to the book of Titus, chapter 3, verses 1 and 2. This is a reminder to believers.

Remind them to be subject to the rulers, to authorities, to be obedient, to be ready for every good deed, to malign no one, to be peaceable, gentle [meek], showing every consideration for all men.

Now who is this saying we are to respond in this way to? To believers? No. To an antagonistic world.

There comes, in your life and in mine, the attitude that we would like to take other people by the throat. I would sometimes like to take this country by the throat; to grab the Supreme Court by the nape of the

neck; to shake crooked politicians and those in the political arena who bring to vote issues that hurt the family. People who reject Jesus Christ and make life difficult make me mad. Yet when the blood boils, when it is time to respond or there is an opportunity for them to see something in us that responds to the character of Jesus Christ, do you know what they are going to see? An attitude of patience; meekness.

I can imagine, in this early church when people were being thrown to the lions, this would have been startling. Yet, as we face persecution; as we face opposition; as we see this country going “down the tubes” and it makes us hurt and it angers us, still this world has to see in us something that is striking. We are given what it is in verse 2,

. . . peaceable, gentle [meek], showing every consideration for all men.

Ladies and gentlemen, meekness, in other words, should characterize our lives as we respond to anyone and to every situation.

A Biblical Promise for the Meek

I love the promise in Matthew, chapter 5. Look at verse 5.

If you do not think being meek is worth it; if you do not think your rights are being responded to; if you ever wonder if things will be better; if you ever wonder when justice will reign, there is a day.

Blessed are the gentle [meek or “praus” in the Greek], for they shall inherit the earth.

Isn’t it interesting that it is the meek person that seems to be the doormat for the world? Yet, Jesus Christ in giving this promise, although He could have said any number of things that we will have, says, “You’re going to get the earth. One day, you’ll have this planet. You will rule and justice will reign. And God will co-reign, as it were, with you.”

It is worth it! Let us do our best to bring people to Jesus Christ. And as we witness to them and share truth with them, let us remember that we are to be gentle, patient, and compassionate. Even though we hate their sin, we love them.

I hesitate to share this illustration with you, but it is an experience that has marked me. I will first give a disclaimer: I have opened my mouth more often than I should and I have remained silent more often than I should. This particular experience, however, was an evidence of the grace of God that I have never forgotten.

I will take you to Detroit, where Marsha and I were living in a duplex. It was just on the outskirts of downtown Detroit, across from the Fisher Body plant – beautiful section of town. We were renting a duplex for a hundred and fifty dollars a month, and this was some years ago, and it was a good deal. We just did not go out at night.

Now, we had someone living above us. It was the mother of the landlord. He and his wife were believers and we went to the same church. I could tell you a lot about this woman that would cause you to feel a great deal of compassion. She was an alcoholic and was a very bitter woman. She had never quite gotten over the fact that her son had been taken away by his wife. We moved in when they moved out, not really realizing all of the implications of what we were getting into.

That woman decided to take vengeance on Marsha and me, for reasons we were not really sure of. She would, at any given time, if I bumped into her on the sidewalk or wherever, literally curse me with all of the expletives. It would never be provoked, you can ask my wife. For a year, I would just walk away. The only time she was nice was when she was under the influence, and then, she would say things and apologize. In the day in and day out routine, she was very bitter.

We shared the same front door and a set of stairs led up to her duplex, while Marsha and I went directly into ours. We remember those stairs. They were made of solid wood and had little metal strips, and they went over our bedroom. This woman would come in at two or three o' clock in the morning and stomp slowly up those stairs, and of course, wake us up. The things she did to her son and daughter-in-law, however, were far worse.

The time came for me to graduate. We were delighted at the thought of leaving Detroit and leaving that house. Until that point, we had never confronted her, we just tried to remain silent. The fuse, however, was wearing awfully thin. Believe me, her face was painted on my wall! Even though I did not respond, I had my speech ready.

Finally, one day, I was walking out through the back door. There was a little porch that led into her part and she was standing on that. I walked out, underneath her porch, headed toward the small garage, and she decided, knowing I was graduating, I guess, that this was it – she was going to take me to the wall. For no reason that I can explain, she just began

cursing me. She started with something like, “You’re not a preacher,” and then she told me what I was. She continued in that manner for several minutes and it was so loud that the neighbor next door came out and stood on her porch and listened. They were sort of buddies. I turned around and said, “Do you know what you are?”

Then my mind was racing and thinking, “What do I say now? I know what I’d like to say!”

The neighbor became real quiet and kind of leaned forward to listen. I think even the birds stopped chirping.

Then, words came to my mind that to this day, I do not know how they ever came out. I said, “Lady, you are a very unhappy woman.”

I then turned around and walked away.

I remember seeing the color drain from her face. She fled inside. The neighbor also went in; disappointed, I think. We never really had any contact with the woman after that.

There is a good ending to this. A couple of months after we had left to go to Dallas, her son called us. He said, “Hey, you won’t believe it. Mom finally came to church with us and she got saved.”

He continued, saying, “I know you’ll appreciate me saying this, so I’ll tell you, I’m looking for some more tenants.”

I said, “Oh brother, let me warn them.”

He said, “No, I was kidding. I wanted you to know, she said she wanted somebody like you and Marsha.”

That has marked me.

I find myself in situations now, and so do you, when the fuse is so short and it would be wonderful to just let them have it. I think it is in that situation that we reveal a quality that is unmistakably divine. It is the fruit of the Spirit of God, as we yield to Him. It is meekness – a patient disposition to those we know.