

# “MEEKNESS”

## The Eighth Characteristic of “the Fruit of the Spirit”

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"The fruit of the Spirit" is the produce the Spirit yields in the heart of men. By the Spirit's influence through the Spirit inspired word, man is instructed in such characteristics as "love, joy, peace, longsuffering, gentleness, goodness, faith," and meekness (Galatians 5:22-23). In our study, we are concerned with meekness, the eighth characteristic of "the fruit of the Spirit."

Like the other qualities of "the fruit of the Spirit," meekness must not be disregarded as being unimportant. Jesus taught this God admired virtue in the third beatitude of the Sermon on the Mount: "Blessed are the meek: for they shall inherit the earth" (Matthew 5:5). Paul informed the young evangelist Timothy to flee covetousness "and follow after righteousness, godliness, faith, love, patience, meekness" (1 Timothy 6:11). Rather than adorning themselves with fancy hair-do's, gold, and costly attire, Peter instructs ladies to adorn themselves with "the ornament of a meek and quiet spirit" (1 Peter 3:4). Thus, we see the importance of meekness.

What is meekness? Meekness is a virtue describing an inner quality of a person. It is not necessarily an outward quality though such temperaments express themselves by outward actions. Meekness carries with it the idea of self-abasement and is the opposite of self-assertiveness and self-willed. Meekness also implies submission. To be truly meek, one must be submissive. Jesus expressed this thought in John 10:27, "My sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow me." In our culture, meekness is often portrayed as weakness and is sometimes characterized by a person who is unable to help himself. However, Jesus is meek, but as God, He is infinitely powerful. The Greeks considered animals that were tamed as meek. The animals still had all their strength, but being tamed, their strength was under control, disciplined, and gentle.

Meekness is often associated with humility. In fact, they are so closely related only the humble heart can possess meekness. In Jesus' invitation, notice how He joins these two qualities. He said, "Come unto me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you, and learn of me; for I am meek and lowly in heart: and ye shall find rest unto your souls" (Matthew 11:28-29). Because Jesus is meek and lowly in heart, Christian ought to be the same. Thus, these two virtues are again connected in Ephesians 4:2 which says, "With all

lowliness and meekness, with longsuffering, forbearing one another in love." Finally, notice the connection in Colossians 3:12. Paul, writing to the church at Colossae, said, "Put on therefore, as the elect of God, holy and beloved, bowels of mercies, kindness, humbleness of mind, meekness, longsuffering" (Colossians 3:12). Thus, in each of these instances, we see this close alliance between meekness and humility.

Meekness begins with a proper attitude towards self. As we stand in the presence of the almighty God, how do we view ourselves? Are we or, at least, should we be humbled by His greatness? Meekness is void of pride. Because of our sinfulness, we have nothing of which to boast or flaunt. Therefore, James wrote, "But he giveth more grace. Wherefore he saith, God resisteth the proud, but giveth grace unto the humble" (James 4:6).

Meekness continues with a proper attitude towards others. The meek are gentle, mild, and lowly. For this reason, the meek do not demand their own rights. Isn't this what Paul wrote about concerning meats sacrificed to idols and a brother's weak conscience (Romans 14:13-23)? There is nothing intrinsically wrong with eating such meats, but because it may cause a brother to stumble, we ought to refrain. Rather than demanding our rights, in meekness, we abstain. Meekness also is involved in our teaching and encouragement of others. Consider the following passages in this light:

- Galatians 6:1 "Brethren, if a man be overtaken in a fault, ye which are spiritual, restore such an one in the spirit of meekness; considering thyself, lest thou also be tempted."
- 2 Timothy 2:24-25 "And the servant of the Lord must not strive; but be gentle unto all men, apt to teach, patient, In meekness instructing those that oppose themselves; if God peradventure will give them repentance to the acknowledging of the truth."
- 1 Peter 3:15 "But sanctify the Lord God in your hearts: and be ready always to give an answer to every man that asketh you a reason of the hope that is in you with meekness and fear."

Though there are time when it is necessary, none of us like to be severely reprimanded. With all the problems in the church at Corinth, Paul approached them "in love, and in the spirit of meekness" (1 Corinthians 4:21) and "by the meekness and gentleness of Christ" (2 Corinthians 10:1). Let us, therefore, be followers of Paul and humbly seek to instruct and correct one another in the spirit of meekness.

Meekness ultimately culminates in a proper attitude towards God. This is the attitude of Jesus when He declared, "For I came down from heaven, not to do mine own will, but the will of him that sent me" (John 6:38). Also, this attitude is displayed in His prayer on the mount of Olives, "Father, if thou be willing, remove this cup from me: nevertheless not my will, but thine, be done" (Luke 22:42). Today, all of God's will for all mankind is declared in His inspired word — the Bible (2 Timothy 3:16-17; 2 Peter 1:3). How do we approach the Bible? Do we approach it like Jesus approach the will of the Father without dispute, resistance, and murmuring? With these thoughts, consider the exhortation of James, "Wherefore lay apart all filthiness and superfluity of naughtiness, and receive with meekness the engrafted word, which is able to save your souls" (James 1:21).

There are many good examples of meekness within Scripture. In Genesis 13, a dissension arose between Abraham's herdsmen and Lot's. Abraham, however, did not want strife to come between him and his nephew, and in meekness, he gave Lot who was younger the first choice of where to feed his herds and take his family. Abraham did not demand his rights of being the elder, but with meekness and without complaint, allowed Lot to take the better land.

Moses is another powerful example. The first time the word "meek" is used in the Bible concerns this great man of faith. Number 12:3 says, "Now the man Moses was very meek, above all the men which were upon the face of the earth." He was meek because he humbled himself and submitted to the will of God. Even though he saw himself unable to speak, in meekness he obeyed God and lead the children of Israel out of bondage. As the writer of Hebrews records, he saw the wealth of Egypt, and what it meant to be the son of Pharaoh's daughter, yet in meekness he chose the reproach of Christ.

Finally, consider the example of Jeremiah. He spoke the truth as it was a burning fire shut up in his bones (Jeremiah 20:9). Other prophets of his day were speaking smooth things (Jeremiah 30:10), but Jeremiah preached the word of God. He became unpopular, isolated, and suffered because of his stand for the truth. Still, in meekness and submission to God, he kept on preaching and teaching the truth. Yes, he was discouraged, but no, he did not quit but continued to meekly serve God.

One characteristic of "the fruit of the Spirit" is meekness. If someone was describing your characteristics, would they include meekness? All of us can grow in this tremendous virtue. So, let us cultivate a spirit of meekness. "Seek ye the LORD, all ye meek of the earth, which have wrought his judgment; seek righteousness, seek meekness: it may be ye shall be hid in the day of the LORD'S anger" (Zephaniah 2:3).