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# Meekness: Power Under Control in a World that Prizes Power out of Control

*By Devon Berry*

**Introduction** We are continuing this evening in the Extreme Parent Transformation series during our annual Family Enrichment Conference. This morning Pastor Russ spoke to the biblical view of violence, how it effects us, our culture, and how God responds to it. This evening we are going to further expand upon this theme by not only examining the influence of media violence on youth culture today but also considering the biblical response to this phenomena.

I want to start this evening by giving you a quick run down of what is “popular” in youth culture today, especially in the areas of movies, video games, and music. Let me read to you a description of a recent DVD release:

Movies: *Man on Fire*: A man whose ideals have been shattered for the last time is out for violent justice in this thriller. Creasy (Denzel Washington) is a former United State intelligence agent-turned-mercenary who has seen too much of the violence and corruption in the world and has become jaded and withdrawn. Creasy is hired to act as a bodyguard for Lupita (nicknamed "Pita", played by (Dakota Fanning), a ten-year-old girl whose wealthy family (a Mexican father and American mother) currently lives in Mexico City, where kidnapping has become a near epidemic. While watching over Pita, Creasy becomes fond of the girl, and finds himself regaining some of his faith in humanity. But things take an ugly turn when Pita is abducted by gunmen who shoot Creasy and leave him to die in the streets. Enraged beyond reason, Creasy recovers and sets out to find the men responsible for kidnapping Pita, no matter who he has to kill along the way...And kill he does, complete with cutting off body parts and stuffing body cavities with explosives. In the end, however, and interestingly, he gives his life for another effectively functioning as a savior figure.

Video Games:

Russ covered this area thoroughly this morning. He spoke extensively about Grand Theft Auto. This was the second highest selling game this past fall (2.05 mill). It was second only to Halo 2. On the slide you can see the stated goal of this game and some of its newest features.

Music – To be honest, the lyrics of what is top 20 in the US today would make even the most brazen of us blush. Although the lyrics tend to focus on sex and sexuality, there is a certain sense of violence about them as they forcefully strip away any sacredness associated with intimacy and any dignity associated with the female body...making it that much easier to see sex as an activity done to an object.

Welcome to youth culture. And this is just the tip of the iceberg. We could spend weeks looking more closely at what is actually being consumed by the typical youth in the US.

Many of us would be amazed. Many of your children would not...If we think of the above media creations as examples of what youth are being exposed to, a good follow-up question might be, "How much of this type of media are youth in the US being exposed to today? How much of this type of media are the youth of ccym being exposed to today? And, does it really matter? Does what is viewed on the screen really have the ability to alter the hearts, minds, and behavior of our children?"

## Media Consumption in the US

On average, kids spend about 20 or more hours each week watching TV

Average child will see 8,000 murders before finishing grade school or approximately 10,000 rapes, assaults, and murders each year.

79% of children play computer or video games on a regular basis

Children between ages of 7 and 17 play video games for an average of 8 hours/week

In 2000, 70% of the 118 video games rated "M" (mature) for violence were marketed directly to children below the age of 17. What does "M" mean? "M" means, "[the video game has] content that may be suitable for persons ages 17 and older. Titles in this category may contain mature sexual themes, more intense violence and/or strong language." I venture to guess that some of you are allowing your under 17 children to play games that even the secular media warns against. Why?

## Media Consumption in ccym

N = 21, 50% female, 50% male

52% youth watch 1-2 hours of TV on school days (M-H), 29% watch 2 or more

43% youth watch 2-4 hours of TV on weekends (F-Su), 48% watch 4 or more

57% youth watch 0-2 hours of movies on school days, 43% watch 2 or more

43% youth watch 2-4 hours of movies on weekends, 23% watch 4 or more

76% youth play video games 0-2 hours on school days, 24% play 2 or more

72% youth play video games 0-4 hours on weekends, 28% play 4 or more

Briefly comment

## Is Media Consumption Linked to Violence and Aggression?

APA, AAP, & AMA have all concluded that the scientific evidence shows a cause-effect relationship between television violence and aggression among children and youth.

1. Children imitate the violence they see (see nursery)
2. Watching TV violence leads to more aggressive behavior
3. TV glamorizes violence, makes it appear fun and effective, consistently gives message that violence is normal and "okay." Several multiyear studies have found that exposure to TV violence (even low doses) results in more aggressive

and violent behavior in young adulthood, makes children less sensitive toward the effect of violence on victims and the suffering it causes.

Many/most social scientist assume that violent video games will have an even greater impact. The most recent research shows (Walsh for review of 35 studies):

1. Exposure to violent video games increases physiological arousal (as compared to non-violent video games): HR, B/P, adrenaline, testosterone, particularly for more hostile/aggressive children
2. Exposure to violent video (as compared to non-violent video games) games increases aggressive thoughts (hostile attribution bias)
3. Exposure to violent games (as compared to non-violent video games) increases aggressive emotions (moody and aggressive)
4. Exposure to violent games (as compared to non-violent video games) increases aggressive actions. (See graph, not just hostile children are effected)
5. Exposure to violent games decreases positive prosocial (i.e., helping) actions.

My child doesn't have a hostile personality...(see bar graph at slide).

So we live in a society that consistently exposes us to violent and aggressive scenes. We live in a society that prizes and glamorizes the strong man when he uses his physical strength to overpower and destroy obstacles, people, and institutions. Our heroes are often heroes because they use violence and aggression to solve their problems, to eliminate their hardships, and defuse their trials. And we also live in a day and age where media violence and aggression appear to negatively influence our children's behavior.

So, is controlling your child's level of exposure to violent and aggressive media the whole story? Is it enough to simply not watch TV? Are violent video games really the problem? Or, is our youth culture's preoccupation with violence really evidence of something else? Can it be explained in some other way? We'll return to that question. For now, I want to transition in to discussing meekness. That may seem like a strange direction to take. Think of it this way: If the ungodly are depicted by the media to respond to hardship and difficulty through raw power and control, violence, and aggression; then how, in contrast, do the godly respond to hardship and difficulty?

How does the Scripture depict godly men and women responding in the midst of difficulty and hardship?

## **Meekness versus Violence and Aggression as a Response to Difficulty in Life**

The biblical character quality of meekness is depicted in godly men and women throughout the whole of the Old and New Testaments. A lack of meekness is also depicted throughout Scriptures in both godly and ungodly persons. Often when persons lack meekness they turn to other uses of power to deal with difficulty in their life – but before we go any further in

making that connection, let's discuss meekness by considering its mandate, its meaning, and its models. Turn to Colossians 3...

### Meekness: Its Mandate

Colossians 3:1-2, 5-6, 8-10, 12: Here we see meekness (may be translated as humility or gentleness) as a quality we are commanded to put on – in contrast to those we are to put off. The opening of the chapter lays out the motivation, and the entire passage continually points us to our new life in Christ as the means/power through which this exchange, this change, must occur. Now turn to Galatians 5

Galatians 5:16-25: In many of your translations you will see the word meekness translated as “gentleness” and in other places it is translated as “humility.” It is through these various translations of the same Greek word (*prautes*) that we begin to see some of the core descriptive characteristics of the person who is possessed by meekness, which we'll be discussing in a moment. In this passage we see meekness being depicted as a fruit of the Spirit, even as we see it being commanded in Colossians 3. Similar to Colossians 3 we see the fruits of the Spirit being set over and against the works of the flesh. Note two observations: 1) The Scripture never disconnects the state of our inner man (heart) with how we behave, live, desire, believe, and pursue (vv.19,22). Lives characterized by inward or outward hostility, quarreling, jealousy, outbursts of anger, and rivalries, are lives associated with the flesh. Meekness, humility, and gentleness, alternatively, are associated with the Spirit. 2) Note that in the end analysis, fruit of the flesh versus fruit of the Spirit is not a question of how “holy” an individual can be, but rather of who they belong to. Those who belong to Christ Jesus “have crucified” the sinful nature and therefore live in the Spirit and continually strive to stay in line with the Spirit. Christ's work precedes and empowers our work through the Holy Spirit. So we see that meekness is an outward manifestation of an inward work. That work is Christ's work and is implemented in our lives through the Holy Spirit even as we seek to “keep in step with the Spirit.” We are meek because Christ is meek. True meekness is not learned behavior, it is the fruit of the Holy Spirit.

So meekness is not only commanded of us in Colossians, but is set forth as a fruit of the Spirit in Galatians. And this is just the beginning, there are many other passages that call us to meekness and there are many godly men in Scripture who exercised meekness as an example for us (Ephesians 4:1,2; I Corinthians 6:7; Matthew 11:29, Numbers 12:3, etc.). But what is, exactly, meekness? Would we know it if we saw it?

### Meekness: Its Meaning

We generally think of meek persons in contemporary American society as Webster defines it, “deficient in spirit and courage.” This is unfortunate as the word has come to mean almost the exact opposite of what it meant during the time in which the New Testament was written. When used in during New Testament times, the word meekness was often used by kings to describe them selves in the same context they described themselves as mighty. Now would any king want to be known as deficient in spirit and courage? No. In fact, meekness was used by the Greeks to describe wild animals that had been tamed – such animals had not lost their strength, but had learned to control their de-

structive instincts. It was also used of medicine in that the proper dosage can be helpful, but an overdose can kill. Summed up simply, meekness is not powerlessness, but power under control.

This idea of power under control can be further expanded upon by considering the likely source text for Matthew 5:5 where Christ states, “Blessed are the meek, for they shall inherit the earth.” Turn with me to Psalm 37 and let’s read verses 5 – 11. Let’s note first, v. 11, “But the meek shall inherit the land and delight themselves in abundant peace.” It is almost identical to Matthew 5:5. And then the parallel between verses 9 and 11, in both cases, those who “wait” and those who are “meek” will inherit the land. In verses 5-8 we can note some of the characteristics of the meek:

- (v.5a) They commit their way to the Lord – they admit that they are need of the Lord’s help in their lives
- (v.5b) They trust God. They believe promises, that God will do good unto them regardless of the apparent circumstances or those who oppose them.
- (v.7a) They wait patiently for the Lord. They are still, quiet, and confident that the Lord will be faithful.
- (v.7b – 8) They do not fret, become angry, or wrathful when the wicked prosper.
- Elsewhere, James helps us to see that the meek are teachable (1:19-21), and that meekness is associated with biblical wisdom (James 3:13, 17) in that it is gentle, peaceable, and open to reason.

Through looking more closely at meekness, we can arrive at the following picture of meekness and further understanding of this statement of power under control. Meekness is not passive resignation or reluctant submission – It is the humble refrain from an inordinate exercise of power in one’s life situation because it is recognized that the good, sovereign, and wise God intends me good. The meek quietly, confidently, gently, trust in, and wait upon the Lord in the midst of opposition, trial, and suffering. They are not weak., rather they are strong, because they know their God to be strong. They do not lash out at God or the world, they use power to restrain themselves, and glorify God. They believe His promises and therefore have hope. Godless people cannot afford meekness, they have no hope. They have only themselves.

While these words are helpful, they take on deeper and clearer meaning when they are animated by real persons who are exemplified the quality of meekness.

### **Meekness: Its Models**

Although there are many examples, such as Abraham’s treatment of Lot when dividing the land (Genesis 13), Joseph’s treatment of his brothers when they came to buy grain from him (Genesis 37), and David’s sparing of Saul when he found him asleep and an easy target (I Samuel 26), let’s briefly consider just two individuals who demonstrated meekness, Moses and Christ.

## Moses

Turn to Numbers 12. Numbers 12:3 tells us, “Now the man Moses was very meek, more than all people who were on the face of the earth.” We are told this about Moses in the context of Miriam and Aaron opposing Moses supposedly because he has married a Cushite woman. Moses says not a word in his own defense. He waits patiently on his God. And God comes to his defense by rebuking Miriam and Aaron. Why does the author note that Moses was meek in the midst of this event? Because Moses clearly refrained from anger, from wrath, and patiently waited upon the Lord for vindication. Moses acted as a man who trusts God, a man who believed in God’s intention to good to Him, a man who was willing to maintain control over his power, and therefore he was called meek. (Also keep in mind, Moses then intercedes on Miriam’s behalf).

## Christ

In the life of Christ we see many pictures of a perfect meekness. Paul confirms that Christ was meek in 2 Corinthians (10:1) when he appeals to the Corinthians “by the meekness and gentleness of Christ.” Consider Christ in the garden just shortly before the crucifixion as Judas leads the High Priest and the mob to Jesus. Let’s read Matthew 26:47-54. Here you see perfect meekness contrasted starkly with the absence of meekness. Christ demonstrates power under control while Peter attempts, by his own power, to take matter into his own hands. Peter acts as we often do – the Lord is not moving quick enough, not in the direction we desire, we stop trusting, we stop believing that He is good and sovereign and that His grace is sufficient, and we take matters into our own hand. We exercise our power with godless intent. We are unwilling to do the hard work of remaining patient and still, under his sometimes difficult and trial-some will.

And then there is the perfect act of meekness in Christ’s cross work. Absolute power under absolute control. In humility, Christ suffered silently with the full knowledge that He would prevail. When we need encouragement or guidance in our meekness, Christ’s work on the cross is the touchstone.

Note that in both the cases referenced here, these were not weak or powerless men who did not act powerfully and decisively when it was required of them. Moses leads the Exodus, Christ overturns the tables of the moneychangers in the temple and publicly condemns the Pharisees. However, they were men who: trusted God and His promises, had committed their way to Him with abandon, waited patiently for the Lord, and did not become wrathful or angry when the wicked prospered. They were men with incredible power (in the case of Christ, sovereign power!) – and that power was under control.

So consider for a moment. If the software industry was making a video game about a great leader who was disrespected and challenged by those closest to him, how do you anticipate we would see him respond? Does Master Chief ever give up and simply accept the rule of others over him? If Hollywood made about a movie about a man who was thought to be the coming King who would overthrow the current gov-

ernment and free a people, but instead was falsely accused, betrayed by his own followers, tortured, and then made to suffer a violent death...how would that man be depicted? Would he not, if he was going to go down, at least go down fighting...maybe like Russell Crow in *The Gladiator*? We should face this truth – many in our society, and maybe many of us, would have thought that *The Passion* was a much better movie if Christ would have come off of that cross and made a graphic display of what sovereign vindication looked like.

Does our society prize the responses of Moses and Christ in these situations? NO, most certainly not. Rather, turn to our media to see the type of response that makes us cheer, draws us to the edge of our seat, causes us to exclaim loudly. We love to see the bad guy pummeled, pulverized, destroyed! We rejoice in the reckless exercise of raw power in vindication. We are mesmerized by the hero or heroin who will not accept circumstances they consider difficult or trial-some, who take matters in to their own hands, who ACT instead of waiting. They are godless and hopeless and therefore must rely on their own power. We are not a society familiar with, or eager to be associated with, meekness. Our society consistently feeds on multimedia depictions of people who know nothing of meekness.

## Conclusion

So, what does this mean for the family? Your or your child's relationship to media?

First we must realize that children are foolish, naïve, lack training, can be easily swayed, and are prone to forget and despise instruction (Proverbs 1-9, 22:6,15; 29:15). Second, children are not morally neutral, they are sinners who are tempted by sin. Therefore, lacking discernment and judgment, children are easily drawn to evil. Third, media is not an electronic or digital beam that somehow appears behind multiple screens in our home. Media is a message, created by a person. Media, therefore, competes with the other messages in our lives. Fourth, when our children feast on a steady diet of movies (which often depict violence and aggression as the effectual and heroic response when difficulty comes) and video games (which allow us simply dispense with any sense of meekness and use our "powers" to radically alter our situation through superhuman violence) they will indeed be influenced. They will begin to view difficulty in their lives not as an opportunity to demonstrate a patient trust in a sovereign and good God that results in the restraining of the excessive use of force to alter circumstances to a more preferable state, but rather, as an indicator that aggression and violence is necessary to eliminate hardship. This is power out of control. The messages that we consistently listen to and set before ourselves will train us (I Timothy 4). If this is difficult for you to believe, although this message is clear throughout all of the Old and New Testaments, come with me to nursery some Sunday morning... And also consider the large and growing body of solid research that clearly demonstrates the relationship between viewed violence and child behavior. The secular world would have no problem supporting the statement that what children watch effects how children behave. Fifth, what are your children worshiping? Idolizing? Talking about all the time? Hurrying to do? Upset if their not allowed to do? Is your kid obsessed with media? If so, then beware, for they will come to imitate the thing they love. Sixth, violence and aggression arises not from media. Music, movies, and video games are not the cause of violence and aggression. They are simply the

occasions, the influences, the environmental factors that give voice and expression to real evil and sin existing in every human's heart. Violence and aggression arises from a heart that does not believe and does not bow. The only cure for this is the gospel of Jesus Christ. Burning your son's Xbox is not the solution. Emptying the shelves of the entertainment center of every DVD ever owned will not remedy the root problem. While these steps may be wise and necessary in some cases, it is ultimately only a white-washing of the latrine. What remains inside is still vile.

So how are parents to go about living and parenting in a way that encourages their children toward meekness and discourages their children from aggression and violence?

1. Preach and teach the Gospel to your children!
2. Practice meekness. Although the shaping influence of media is great in your child's life, it is not nearly as great as yours.
3. Not disengagement, but discernment. Media can provide incredible opportunities to for you to aid your youngster in developing discernment. The influence and presence of media will only continue to grow in your son's or daughter's life. Teach them to be wise consumers. How do you reduce the risk presented to children who live in a home with a pool? You teach them to swim. And how are you doing at that? In the ccym survey it was found that 33% of parents are making decisions about media with their children. 38% are making decisions for their children. And 28% are uninvolved. Ccym's On the Media is designed...
4. Be involved. Know what your children are watching. Know what your children are playing. Communicate with your children on these issues. Realize that your message, and the Scripture's message is are competition with the media's message. Keep in mind that your children are not naturally inclined toward good. 33% of the youth reported watching or playing media when away from home that would be unallowable at home.
5. Lastly, wisely and judiciously set limits on your children and their media intake. Particularly as your children are young and lack discernment, set clear guidelines and enforce them. As they age, move into the role of counselor/advisor and use media choices as an opportunity to decipher media messages and heart tendencies. Point them to Christ.

Let's Pray.



Resources.

<http://www.desiringgod.org/library/sermons/86/020986.html> Piper on meekness

<http://www.biblebb.com/files/MAC/sg2200.htm> MacArthur on meekness

<http://bible.crosswalk.com/Dictionaries/BakersEvangelicalDictionary/> Meekness

<http://www.gouranga.com/> Grand Theft Auto (video game)

<http://www.rockstargames.com/sanandreas/> Grand Theft Auto

<http://www.allthelyrics.com/> Music Lyrics

<http://top40-charts.com/> Top 40 music and lyrics

<http://www.tvturnoff.org/images/facts&figs/factsheets/FactsFigs.pdf> TV Turnoff

<http://www.truelies.org/> True Lies (Media watch organization)

<http://www.apa.org/pubinfo/violence.html> APA on violence

<http://culturalpolicy.uchicago.edu/conf2001/papers/walsh.html> Walsh and the National Institute on the Media

<http://www.apa.org/science/psa/sb-anderson.html> APA, Anderson, on violence

<http://www.med.umich.edu/1libr/yourchild/tv.htm> University of Michigan, children and TV violence

<http://www.med.umich.edu/1libr/yourchild/video.htm> University of Michigan, children and video game violence