

Pursue Meekness and Gentleness

1 Timothy 6:11 and Ephesians 4:2

Introduction What do you think of when someone is described as being meek? Do you recall the old commercials for the Mr. Atlas muscle building courses showing a 90 pound weakling at the beach? He's laying on a towel with his girlfriend as the bully runs by and kicks sand in their faces. His girlfriend squeals and expects her boyfriend to do something about it. All he can do is brush off the sand and cower as the bully laughs at him and makes fun of him. Or do you picture a person in the twilight years of their life who doesn't have the energy or the ability to do much in the way of physical labor or physical activity? Maybe you picture someone who has had a difficult life and goes around with their head hung down and walking with their shoulders rounded and stooped as if the weight of the world were on their shoulders?

What does come to your mind with the word meekness? In this day in which we live, I would be willing to wager that it is not a positive image. My guess is that it is not a very favorable image at all. In fact, the common assumption is that when a man is meek it is because he cannot make it by himself.

Is that what the Scriptures are commanding us to pursue? There are many who describe Christians as losers. Are we to pursue being losers? I remember, very vividly, one of my fellow students in Bible college describing his observation of Christians by commenting, "Why are there so many Christians that are losers? Is that all that God saves are losers?" I was tempted to ask him about him and me. What does that make us, but I decided that I would let that pass.

What Meekness and Gentleness in the Scriptures are NOT

Well, by this time, you should be thinking that there must be another way of looking at meekness and gentleness. And you are thinking correctly. First, let's look at what the Scriptures do not describe as meekness and gentleness.

Meekness is not weakness, mildness, lacking courage, cowardly, or having very little interest in life.

The Scriptures do not use the terms meek or meekness to indicate weakness, or lacking courage, or mildness, or having very little interest in life. There are two examples to which we can turn — Moses and Jesus.

Come with me in your Bibles to Numbers 12:3. God makes this observation about Moses, "Now the man Moses was very meek, more than all people who were on the face of the earth." When we look at the life of Moses, we do not see someone who was weak, or cowardly, or lacking courage. Moses was a man who was used by God to stand before Pharaoh and challenge him to let the people go. Meekness cannot mean weakness or cowardly.

Turn to Matthew 11:29. What we have is one of the few times that Jesus describes Himself, He says that He is “gentle and lowly in heart”. I don’t believe anyone would describe Jesus as One who was weak or cowardly or didn’t have an interest in life. He withstood the Pharisees to their faces. He faced the Jews and Romans as they mocked Him, beat Him, and crucified Him. It took great courage to remain quiet and not to beg for mercy. A meek person is not someone who is weak, cowardly, or without an interest in life.

Meekness is not self-assertiveness or self-interest.

We need to be careful, as we look at these two words, that we are not guilty of falling down the other side of the mountain and think that meekness is being self-assertive or making sure that your self-interests are being served. We could be tempted to say that since weakness and cowardice are not a part of being meek and gentle, then it must be the opposite – being concerned about me, but doing it in a gentle or non-offensive way.

There are those who are making an outward appearance of being meek and gentle. They are really only serving themselves and their interests and are trying to get their agendas accepted by doing it in a way that would not offend them. They have found that trying to be nice and manipulating people is a way for them to get what they want.

Again, as we look at Moses and Jesus, we would be hard pressed to find that either one of them was trying to get their own agendas and self-interests accepted by others through assertiveness or manipulation. That is so foreign to what Christ was doing that it is offensive to even consider that as a definition of pursuing meekness and gentleness. In John 8:29 Jesus said, “And he who sent me is with me. He has not left me alone, for I always do the things that are pleasing to him.” This is not what the Scriptures mean when they command us to pursue meekness and gentleness – to be self-assertive or pursue self-interests..

What Meekness and Gentleness in the Scriptures ARE

There is the third way, that is, the Scriptural way of meekness and gentleness. It is not falling down either side of the mountain. It is maintaining the third way that is along the top. And that is what we want to examine.

Meekness or gentleness is a fruit of the Spirit; and the exercise of it is first and chiefly towards God.

First of all, gentleness is mentioned in Galatians 5 as a fruit of the Spirit. Gentleness is usually associated with actions. Trench says in his Greek lexicon, that gentleness expresses an active dealing with others. Gentleness is the word appropriate for actions.

On the other hand, meekness is usually associated with the heart. It refers to our attitudes and desires. Meekness is what Moses learned. Meekness is not something that is part of our nature. Meekness is that humble strength that belongs to the man who has learned to submit to difficult experiences and difficult people, knowing that in everything, God is working for that man’s good and for God’s own glory. I will comment more on meekness later.

Meekness is also exercised toward men, even of evil men

When we learn meekness toward others we do so out of a sense that people, even evil people, with the insults and injuries which they may inflict, are permitted and employed by God for the chastening and purifying of His elect. Meekness describes a condition of mind and heart. When we look at people in meekness, we do so because we believe that God is using these people for our good and for His glory and we want Him to be at work in our lives.

So in summary, meekness believes the truth that God is providentially in control of all things and the meek person willingly submits to God's providential care.

Gentleness comes from a heart of meekness. It is the way that we respond and act toward God and others, even when the situation doesn't seem fair or what we deserve.

How Should We Pursue Meekness and Gentleness?

Meekness and gentleness have nothing to do with us. It's not about us. It's about God and His glory. It seems that God has to break our pride and destroy our sense of self-sufficiency. He has to humble us under His mighty hand. He has to send trials. He has to reveal our sinful hearts to us. He has to reveal our own ambitions that we have hidden in our hearts. He has to drive out our self-reliance and self-sufficiency and patiently work to change us. God develops meekness of character in us for His glory and for our good. But it takes power to be meek and gentle.

It must be clearly understood that the meekness and gentleness manifested by the Lord and commended to the believer is the fruit of power.

Meekness and gentleness can be imitated by almost anyone. It is especially easy to imitate being gentle when things are going the way we believe they should. It is easy to be meek when we get what we think we deserve. But what happens to this gentleness and meekness when we don't get what we think we deserve, and especially when we get what we don't deserve. Then where is that gentleness and meekness? It is exposed for the counterfeit that it is.

The Lord was meek because He had the infinite resources of God at His command. We can be meek because we have the resource of the Holy Spirit living within us. As a fruit of the Spirit, gentleness is something that He produces and makes to grow as we submit to God's loving care for us. He is at work in our lives on a moment by moment basis producing a meek spirit.

Yet, it is only as God changes us and we work at change that we can have meekness and gentleness. This is not something that is a let go and let God do. God commands us to pursue gentleness and meekness. It is our responsibility to pursue. As we pursue, He gives the power to change.

We are to be meek in our attitudes, thoughts, and desires

As I mentioned earlier, meekness has to do with our hearts. It is an attitude of mind that causes us to look at life as Christ did.

We are to be meek toward God

The meek person accepts God's dealings with him as good, and therefore, accepts them without disputing or resisting. Meekness is closely linked with the word humility. It is only the humble, meek heart which does not fight against God and more or less struggle and contend with Him. The meek man is the one who has stood before God's judgment and given up all of his "rights". He has learned to submit himself to God because of his gratitude for God's grace in his own life. He has learned to have a meek spirit toward God.

When we have this meekness, we will not question God's working in our lives. When something happens that does not fit our definition of a good life, we pause and thank God that He knows what is best. He knows what will work for my good and His glory. As such, there is joy and thankfulness for everything that happens moment by moment.

How are you responding to God's working in your life? Are you using these opportunities to go in meekness? Are you continually looking at your heart and seeing what rebellion and questions are lurking there? Are you believing that God is an all-wise, all-good, and all-sovereign God? Or are you questioning God's goodness? Are you fighting against His work in your life because He isn't making life go the way you think it should? Meekness is learned as we trust God for Who He is.

We are to be meek toward others

In our dealings with others, we are to have a meek attitude. We should be believing in God's care for us and realizing that people can only say things, or do things to us, or think things about us as God grants them permission to. When we have meekness, we will believe the best about others and give them the benefit of the doubt. We will not be hasty to assign motives that put the other person in a bad light. We will reserve judgment until we have all of the facts. One of the words that is used in Scripture for meekness is a legal term having to do with reasonableness. It expresses that considerateness that looks humanely and reasonably at the facts of a case. Are you meek in your attitudes toward others?

We are to be meek when God uses His Word to work in our lives. Our attitude of being under the providential care of God should extend to receiving His instruction with humility and trust. The meekness we pursue helps us to put away wickedness and sinful rebellion in our lives.

Several of the passages that mention meekness have to do with confronting error in those who are hostile to the Gospel. The person who is responding to that hostile person is to be meek, just as Christ was meek. His attitude toward that person is one of meekness which keeps him from thinking too highly of himself and remembering the

pit from which he was rescued. This meekness may lead to them repenting and turning to the truth.

In Galatians 6, a spirit of meekness is required when a person is dealing with another who has been caught in sin. A meek spirit is one that is not proud when he helps the other person. Meekness keeps them from being harsh and haughty as they deal with the sin. It keeps them from thinking that they are above sin and above needing help from others.

Meekness is also to characterize a wife who is married to an unbeliever. She is to have the attitude that God is providentially acting in her life for God's glory and her good. Her meekness will show in her thoughts concerning her husband.

We are to be gentle in our manner of living

Not only are we to be meek in our attitudes, but we are to be gentle in our manner of life. Gentleness has to do with our behavior and actions. A meekness of heart produces a gentleness of behavior.

Gentleness is expressed to others as we respond from a heart of meekness. It is possible to behave in gentleness, and imitate this way of life, but it is something that will not hold up under the pressures and temptations of life. Gentleness that is produced by a meek heart will continue to grow and improve and God grants opportunities for its use.

The Christian wife is to respond in gentleness to her husband. The Scriptures describe that gentle and quiet spirit as something that adorns her with imperishable beauty. How many marriages would be God-honoring if the wife would see God working in her life developing meekness through that husband that God gave her?

We are also to be gentle in order to help other believers grow in their Christian walk. In 1 Thessalonians 2:6-7, Paul says that he was gentle to those believers for their benefit. The word that is used has reference to a nurse with trying children, or a teacher with unmanageable or obstinate students, or of parents toward their children. How many believers are in your life that are life trying children, unmanageable or obstinate students? What you think about them and how you behave toward them speaks volumes about your meekness and gentleness.

1 Peter 2:18 helps us to remember that we are to be gentle to our employers, even those who are unfair and unkind. When you are by-passed for that raise; when someone else gets the credit for your work; when your boss picks on you for no apparent reason, what is going through your minds and how is that affecting your responses to them?

I think you are getting the picture. Meekness and gentleness can be counterfeited, but not successfully 100% of the time. I guarantee you that God will allow something into your life in order to expose your hypocritical heart.

Let me summarize this study:

Conclusion

- We are to continually pursue meekness and gentleness. This is God's command.
- We develop meekness as God works in our lives by bringing trials and blessings into our lives. What we think and do about these trials and blessings will have a great deal to do with our pursuing and growing in meekness and gentleness.
- Meekness has to do with the attitudes and beliefs of our hearts. It is a humble and strong belief that God is working all things out for our good and His glory. The more we fight these lessons, the longer it will take to grow in meekness and gentleness. The more we argue with God and question His goodness, the more difficult it is to pursue meekness and gentleness.
- Gentleness has to do with the outward behavior that flows from a meek heart. We can counterfeit gentleness from a heart that is not meek, but only for a period of time and during times of less pressure or blessing. God will eventually expose us for what we really believe and want in due time.
- Pray diligently for the faith and trust that we need in order to grow in meekness and gentleness.