



## **FRUIT OF THE SPIRIT –GENTLENESS (MEEKNESS)**

Text: Numbers 12:1-9; Psalm 37:1-11; Galatians 5:22&23

By: Rev Dr Leo Douma

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Have you ever heard someone say, 'If you really want to succeed in life, try being meek'? Has anyone given the advice 'If you want to get somewhere in business be gentle? Meekness is not a characteristic that is very 'in' these days. My dictionary defines meekness as '1. Having a patient, gentle disposition. 2. Lacking spirit or backbone; submissive.' No wonder it is not a popular concept. So many of the hero figures in movies these days are 'tough guys'. Our culture says one should be forward, self-assertive, use your power to get what you deserve. So meekness or gentleness is not very popular, even amongst Christians. But part of the problem with the concept is that it is grossly misunderstood. Let me put it this way. I'm sure you have all seen a rodeo where you have the cowboy, the bronco buster, trying to sit on a wild horse for 10 seconds. It's one of the more popular events in a rodeo. Why? Well, because of the power, the brute force and the danger of the horse. A bucking bronco seems very powerful doesn't it? But then, compare that horse with the mounts used in the Olympics for the 3-day endurance event. There a horse has to have the strength, not just to throw a rider in less than 10 seconds, but to carry a rider over rough ground for kilometre after kilometre for 3 days straight. If you think about it the power of these endurance horses has to be far greater than that of the bucking bronco at the rodeo. The difference between the two horses is that one has been tamed. One has learned to have a saddle on it, and allow a rider to sit on it. One has learned to respond to the bit in its mouth and been trained so it's strong enough to survive the rigours of a 3-day event. Why am I telling you this? Well, because the word used in Paul's time for taming and training a horse was '*prautes*'. That is the word we have here that we translate as '*meekness* or *gentleness*'. A horse that is tamed and trained has not lost its strength, rather its power is enhanced and channelled in a usable direction. It has not

become weak, but its strength is controlled. So we can say that '*meekness* or *gentleness*' means 'controlled strength'.

To get to the heart of the meaning of the word in terms of the fruit of the Spirit we would say '*meekness*' is 'strength under the control of God.' One commentator says 'Meekness is not merely the absence of pride and arrogance, so much as it is the fullness of the presence of God, where pride and arrogance cannot abide.' Meekness is thus humility and submissiveness towards God. The Hebrew word '*anvah*' has the sense of 'humility'. It refers to our total dependence on God, our submission to his will and our hope in him alone for salvation. '*Meekness (gentleness)*' means we have a temperament towards God that quietly accepts his dealings with us. It means we know our place before God. We allow ourselves to be of service as he sees fit in his plan. It means we strive to bloom where God has planted us. To do the task he has called us to. It means we are content with what God gives. '*Meekness*' means we know of our deep need for God. We know our need for him to give direction to our lives, to control our lives. It means we know very well our shortcomings and freely admit our sin and that we don't have all the answers. The meek or gentle Christian does not put God in charge on a part time basis, just when things go well. Meekness accepts that God is in control when things are not good, and meekness lives life without disputing or resisting God. A meek person, despite all the power he may have, quietly surrenders to God each day. The song writer captured the meaning well when he wrote: 'Have you own way Lord, have your own way, hold ov'r my being absolute sway; mould and make me, after your will, till I am waiting, yielded and still.' We see this attitude so clearly in Psalm 37 (:3-11) "***Trust*** in the Lord and do good; dwell in the land and enjoy safe pasture. ***Delight yourself*** in the Lord and he will give you the desires of your heart. ***Commit your way*** to the Lord; ***trust in him*** and he will do this: He will make your righteousness shine like the dawn, the justice of your cause like the noonday sun. ***Be still*** before the Lord and ***wait patiently*** for him; do not fret when men succeed in their ways, when they carry out their wicked schemes. ***Refrain from anger*** and turn from wrath; do not fret- it leads only to evil. For evil men will be cut off, but those who hope in the Lord will inherit the land. A little while, and the wicked will be no more; though you look for them, they will not be found. ***But the meek will inherit the land and enjoy great peace.***" It takes great self discipline to trust God; to delight in God, even when things aren't going well. It takes great control to wait for God to act, rather than taking matters into our own hands. To refrain from anger and to not fret. But

that's what God wants us to do. That's what he means by being meek; to hand over the control of our lives to him and to remain faithful to him no matter what.

'*Meekness*' is first expressed in our relationship to God. Then, as an outflow of that, it expresses itself in our relationship with other people. You could say that '*meekness*' describes our humility and submissive attitude towards God. And '*gentleness*', the other way of translating the Greek word, describes how we are to relate to one another. Again, remember that being gentle with one another does not mean we are weak. It is actually an expression of power. We can afford to be gentle because we have the infinite resources of God. We have the power of the Holy Spirit in us. We don't have to rant and rave, and be intimidating. Being gentle with one another is not a matter of weakness. In fact it's a high degree of strength. It takes a lot of strength not to punch someone out when they are abusive and you have the physical strength to do it. It takes a lot of strength not to give someone a tongue lashing they will never forget when we have been badly wronged. If you refuse to rant and rave, to lash out, because you trust God will deal with it, then you are showing the fruit of '*gentleness*.' A prime example of this was Moses. Moses is described in the Bible as being "*...more meek than any one on the face of the earth.*" (Numbers 12:3) Now Moses was in no way a weak person. He was a very strong leader. There was a time when he had a temper and was willing to use his fist. Remember him striking down and killing the Egyptian. But God had dealt with him and Moses had learned '*meekness*' from his submission to God. So we see in Numbers 12 that while Moses maintained his strength as a leader, he was willing to accept personal attacks on his character without resentment. He left it to God to deal with. That is the context of Numbers 12. Miriam & Aaron spoke against Moses because he had married a Cushite. They also got jealous of Moses, suggesting God had spoken through them as well. We are told in :3 that Moses was "*...more meek(humble) than anyone on the face of the earth*". Then we read on :4ff "*At once the Lord said to Moses, Aaron & Miriam 'come out of the Tent of Meeting, all three of you'. So the three of them came out. Then the Lord came down in a pillar of cloud; he stood at the entrance to the Tent and summoned Aaron & Miriam. When both of them stepped forward, he said, 'Listen to my words: When a prophet of the Lord is among you, I reveal myself to him in visions, I speak to him in dreams. But this is not true of my servant Moses; he is faithful in all my house. With him I speak face to face, clearly and not in riddles; he sees the form of the Lord. Why then were you not afraid to speak against my servant Moses?' The anger of the Lord*

*burned against them, and he left them."* Moses had such a privileged position with God, such as no one had ever again till Jesus came. But he did not stand on his position. He did not pull rank. He was humble. He trusted God to defend him. His power was under God's control. Are we 'meek' like that, knowing God will deal with those who deal in their strength with us?

We see the same with Jesus. He says in Matthew "*Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am **gentle and humble** in heart and you will find rest for your souls.*" The very thing that attracts us to Jesus is his gentleness. He is almighty God. He is all powerful, able to take sin and death by the scruff of the neck and defeat evil. Yet he is gentle and humble. Jesus was not looking after number one. He was not winning through intimidation or tough nosed tactics. He defeated evil by meekness, by submission. Note the words of Peter (1 Peter 2:23ff) "*When they hurled their insults at him, he did not retaliate; when he suffered he made no threats. Instead, he entrusted himself to him who judges justly. He himself bore our sins in his body on the tree, so that we might die to sins and live for righteousness; by his wounds we are healed.*" Notice again the submission trusting in God. Is this submission, this meekness, a weakness? No way. By Christ's humility, by his submission and obedience has come the way of restoring the entire universe. Now that is power under God's control.

Peter mentions in the verses prior: "*To this you were called, because Christ suffered for you, leaving you an example, that you should follow in his footsteps.*" Humility, gentleness, submission to God, meekness is our calling. It is by meekness that we display the nature of Jesus and his work in redemption. It is by meekness that we display how the grace of God works through Jesus. Meekness, gentleness, is so important when it comes to witnessing for Jesus. Again in Peter we read (1 Peter 3 15 ff) "*But in your hearts set apart Jesus as Lord. Always be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks you the reason for the hope that you have. But do this with **gentleness and respect**, keeping a clear conscience, so that those who speak maliciously against your good behaviour in Christ may be ashamed of their slander.*" Witnessing for Christ should never be done by 'Bible bashing', brow beating, using any method to win the argument, using manipulation or intimidation. Certainly not like the Frank king, Charlemagne, who brought those he conquered into the church by the sword! Such methods belie the very essence of the gospel, that we are won over to

Jesus by his gentleness and grace. When we deal with each other in the church, again gentleness is essential. Paul writes in 2 Timothy 2: 24 ff "*...the Lord's servant must not quarrel; instead, he must be kind to everyone, able to teach, not resentful. Those who oppose him he must gently instruct, in the hope that God will grant them repentance leading them to a knowledge of the truth...*" Notice again the linkage with gentleness and leaving the control to God. It is God who changes hearts. It is the Spirit who gives the new birth that leads to repentance. By being assertive and domineering we may get people to behave the way we think they should. But has there been a change of heart? Is there a genuine repentance and love for God? That only comes about when it's the Spirit who does the changing using our gentleness to display the servant nature of Jesus. As Paul says in 2 Corinthians 10:1 "*By the meekness and gentleness of Christ, I appeal to you...*" Paul is admonishing the Corinthians to listen to his teaching based on the meek and gentle spirit of Christ. That also ought to characterise the life of every believer.

Since meekness and gentleness are so important in our lives how do we develop that fruit? In developing our meekness and humility towards God, we should first meditate on the greatness of God. (Isaiah 40:25,26) "*To whom will compare me? Or who is my equal?*" says the Holy One. *Lift your eyes and look to the heavens: Who created all these? He who brings out the starry hosts one by one, and calls them each by name. Because of his great power not one of them is missing.*" Second, meditate on the humility of Jesus. He depended on the Father, submitted to the Father, hoped in the Father and accepted the Father's will in his life at all times. In developing our gentleness towards other people we should meditate on Philippians 2:1-8 "*...Your attitude should be the same as that of Christ Jesus: who, being in very nature God did not consider equality with God something to be grasped but made himself nothing, taking on the very nature of a servant... and became obedient to death-even death on a cross.*" Look for opportunities to be a servant "*even as the son of man came not to be served but to serve.*" The best way to witness for Jesus is to live like him. Thirdly, depend on the Holy Spirit to work the fruit of the Spirit in you. Pray in all situations. Ask him to replace your aggressiveness and pride with humility and gentleness. Take deep breaths before speaking and pray for the Spirit's leading. Finally remember, being meek and gentle is not about being losers. Jesus said the "*Meek shall inherit the earth*". How come? It's not about conquering the earth. It's about inheriting it. Everything is under God's control and "*He gives grace to the humble.*"

## QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION

*These questions can be followed up personally, with a Christian friend, in your small groups, or in discussion after the service. Reflection is important because too often we hear a good sermon and soon forget it without actually growing spiritually or changing in attitude or what we do. The reflection questions are meant to be challenging, because our spiritual growth and the salvation of others is so important.*

- Explain the meaning of the Bible's word for meekness/gentleness as 'controlled strength'.
- How do we demonstrate meekness towards God? Is this in evidence in your life? How so?
- How do we demonstrate gentleness towards other people? Is that a fruit of the Spirit you live out? Do you need to work on it by God's grace?
- How can we develop gentleness in our lives?