
3

LEARNING GENTLENESS

Matthew 5:5; Psalm 37:1-11

It is comparatively easy to be honest with ourselves before God and acknowledge ourselves to be sinners in his sight, says commentator Martyn Lloyd-Jones. "But," he continues, "how much more difficult it is to allow *other people* to say things like that about me!" (*Studies in the Sermon on the Mount* [Inter-Varsity Press, U.K., 1977], pp. 68-69).

I can read a corporate confession in church and it causes me no great problem; I can take it in stride. But let somebody else come up to me after church and call me a sinner, and I want to punch that person in the nose! I am not prepared to allow other people to think or speak of me what I have just acknowledged before God that I am. There is a basic hypocrisy here; there always is when meekness, the third quality Jesus emphasizes, is absent.

Open

■ Would you want to be called "meek"? Why or why not?

Study

■ Blessed are the meek, for they will inherit the earth. (Matthew 5:5)
The Greek adjective translated "meek," means "gentle," "humble," "considerate," "courteous," and therefore exercising the self-control without which these qualities would be impossible.

1. It is important to note that in the beatitudes "the meek" come between those who mourn over sin and those who hunger and thirst after righteousness. The particular form of meekness which Christ requires in his disciples will surely have something to do with this sequence. Compare this beatitude with the preceding two. How is it similar and how is it different?

2. What is surprising about this beatitude?

3. Why is meekness often looked down on as a character trait?

4. We shrink from the image of Jesus as meek and mild because it conjures up a picture of him as weak and effeminate, yet he described himself as “gentle,” using the Greek adjective found in verse 5, and “humble in heart” (Matthew 11:29). How could Jesus be described as a “meek” person?

What sort of gentleness is this, on account of which those who have it are pronounced blessed? I believe Martyn Lloyd-Jones is right to emphasize that this meekness denotes a humble and gentle attitude to others which is determined by a true estimate of ourselves.

5. Think of “gentle,” “humble,” “considerate” and “courteous” people you have known. Why did you find them admirable?

6. What does it mean to you that the meek will “inherit the earth”?

Rather than the meek inheriting the earth, one would have expected the opposite. One would think that meek people get nowhere because everybody ignores them or else rides roughshod over them and tramples them

underfoot. Isn't it the tough, the overbearing who succeed in the struggle for existence? Even the ancient Israelites had to fight for their inheritance, although the Lord their God gave them the Promised Land. But the condition on which we enter our spiritual inheritance in Christ is not might but meekness, for everything is ours if we are Christ's (1 Corinthians 3:22).

Summary: Meekness is a true view of oneself, expressed in attitude and conduct with respect to others. This makes us gentle, humble, sensitive and patient in all our dealings with others.

In Old Testament days, when the wicked seemed to triumph, the holy and humble people of God still had the confidence that they and all things ultimately belonged to God. This confidence was never expressed more aptly than in Psalm 37, which Jesus seems to have been quoting in the beatitudes.

7. Read Psalm 37. Pick out the verbs in this psalm. How do they express meekness?

8. Three times this passage advises us not to fret (vv. 1, 7, 8). How does fretting contradict an attitude of meekness?

9. What is the relationship between meekness and trust in God?

10. Which verses in this psalm express the idea that “the meek will inherit the earth”?

11. What promises does this psalm hold for those who continue in an attitude of gentleness and humility?

12. What will be the results of the opposite of meekness—rebelliousness against the Lord?

13. Which promises in this psalm mean the most to you right now, and why?

Summary: The godless may boast and throw their weight about, yet real possession eludes their grasp. The meek, on the other hand, although they may be deprived and disenfranchised by the world, yet because they know

what it is to live and reign with Christ, can enjoy and even “possess” the earth, which belongs to Christ. Then when Christ returns there will be “a new heaven and a new earth” for them to inherit.

Apply

■ How does your view of “meekness” need to be revised in the light of the character of Christ and this beatitude?

Where do you need to trust God more and not fight for your own way?

Pray

■ Ask the Lord to show you relationships or situations where you are being proud or harsh instead of gentle and humble. Thank him for setting the example of gentleness in his earthly life and in his continuing dealings with you.