

Lesson 5

Defining Meekness

In this part of our study we will focus on meekness as it is a part of the self-denial that Jesus demands (Mark 8:34). Meekness is not easily defined. To say the least, one cannot cite a synonym that fully conveys the idea. To some meekness is synonymous with weakness. Others may think that meekness is a quality over which we have no control. To them, we either have it or we don't.

God demands that we be meek. The meek of the earth were told to seek God (Zeph. 2:3). In contrast to the outward adorning, Peter says that a woman should wear the ornament of a "meek and quiet spirit" (1 Pet. 3:4). Paul urged Timothy to follow after meekness (1 Tim. 6:11). The Colossians were told to put on meekness (Col. 3:12).

Since God commands meekness, it must not involve weakness. Furthermore, that suggests that we have control over whether or not we are meek.

The idea of meekness cannot be expressed with one synonym. There are several ideas involved. W.E. Vine said,

The meaning of *prautes* is not readily expressed in English, for the terms meekness, mildness, commonly used, suggest weakness and pusillanimity to a greater or less extent, whereas *prautes* does nothing of the kind. Nevertheless, it is difficult to find a rendering less open to objection than

"meekness"; "gentleness" has been suggested, but as *prautes* describes a condition of mind and heart, and as "gentleness" is appropriate rather to actions, this word is no better than that used in both English versions. It must be clearly understood, therefore, that the meekness manifested by the Lord and commended to the believer is the fruit of power. The common assumption is that when a man is meek it is because he cannot help himself; but the Lord was "meek" because he had the infinite resources of God at His command. Described negatively, meekness is the opposite to self-assertiveness and self-interest; it is equanimity of spirit that is neither elated nor cast down, simply because it is not occupied with self at all (Vines 3:56).

Meekness is not easily defined. One cannot cite a synonym that fully conveys the idea.

1. The lexicons. Thayer defines the word translated "meekness" as "gentleness, mildness" (535). Bauer says it means, "gentleness, humility, courtesy, considerateness" (699). Vine says, "It is that temper of spirit in which we accept his dealings with us as good, and therefore without disputing or resisting; it is closely linked with the word *tapeinophrosune* (humility), and follows directly upon it. . . . This meekness, however, being first of all a meekness before God, is also such in the face of men, even of evil men, out of a sense that these, with the insults and injuries which they may inflict, are permitted and employed by Him for the chastening and purifying of His elect. . . . In Gal. 5:23 it is associated with *enkrateia*, self-control" (3:55-56).



Meekness

2. The dictionaries. Funk and Wagnall define “meekness” as “of gentle and longsuffering disposition, submissive, compliant, humble” (792). American Heritage Dictionary says the word “meek” means “showing patience and humility; gentle . . . submissive” (782).

3. Other writers. Barclay states that our term was “. . . used of animals which have been tamed and which have learned to accept discipline and control” (*Flesh and Spirit* 113-114). Barnes wrote, “Meekness relates to the manner in which we receive injuries. We are to bear them patiently, and not to retaliate or seek revenge” (*Barnes Notes on the New Testament: Ephesians, Philippians and Colossians* 71).

William Hendriksen commenting on Ephesians 4:2 said, “The mention of lowliness leads naturally to that of meekness. The meek individual is slow to insist on his rights . . . With Abraham he prefers to let Lot have first choice (Gen. 13:7-18), with great reward . . . for Abraham (*New Testament Commentary Exposition of Ephesians* 183).

Foy E. Wallace, Jr. remarked, “Meekness is often mistaken for passivity, timid reticence and a sort of an inferiority complex. But the ba-



sic element of meekness, derived from its root meaning, is equilibrium—the full and complete possession of all the faculties of one’s being, and inner mastery. It has been illustrated in some lexical definitions as the captain at the helm of his ship in the midst of the storm, who, in full control of the vessel, guides the ship steadily through the storm” (*The Sermon on the Mount* 16).

4. A summary. From all of the above we conclude that meekness involves: (a) humility toward God and man, (b) submission to God’s will, (c) accepting the discipline we receive, (d) gentleness and mildness, and (e) self-control or inner mastery or strength.

Questions

1. Why is meekness hard to define? _____

NOTES

2. List some synonyms of “meekness.” _____

3. Cite three passages that show that God demands that one be meek. _____

4. How would you show that meekness is not to be equated with weakness? _____

5. Summarize Foy Wallace’s comments on meekness. _____

6. Barclay says meekness is used of _____
_____ which have been

_____ and which have
learned _____

and _____.
7. Barnes suggests that meekness relates to the manner in which we _____
_____.
8. In your own words define “meekness.” _____

9. Give a dictionary definition of meekness. Use your own dictionary rather than the one given in the lesson. _____

10. List any practical lessons you learn from this study. _____

