

THE FRUIT OF THE SPIRIT: MEEKNESS

Galatians 5:22-23

Scripture Reading: Matthew 5:1-12

Intro: We come this morning to the eighth of the nine characteristics which make up “the fruit of the Spirit.” It is the word *mekness*. I have been saying since we began our study of “the fruit of the Spirit” that all of these characteristics find their most perfect display in our Lord Jesus Christ. In Matthew 11, verses 28 through 30 we have these words of our Lord which most of you will remember:

28 Come unto me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest.

29 Take my yoke upon you, and learn of me; for I am meek and lowly in heart: and ye shall find rest unto your souls.

30 For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light (Matt. 11:28-30).

These are words which ought to be read to the whole world because if there is one thing that people in the world lack, and often even Christians are not seen to demonstrate it, is rest. There is a lot of unrest and restlessness in the world, and it is especially evident in these days with conditions the way they are. But human nature has always be restless. Sin makes us restless. People are always looking for that which is going to give them rest or peace, but they are looking for it in the wrong places and usually in the wrong things. And the average person today does not even think that God, or Jesus Christ, or the Holy Spirit have anything to do with rest. In fact, the world has never put much of a premium on meekness or humility. I have even heard it said that meekness is weakness. But the fact that meekness is a fruit of the Spirit, the Holy Spirit, is evidence that meekness is just the opposite of weakness. Meekness is strength, strength which only the Holy Spirit can produce in our lives. From the Lord’s words we can see that it, like all of the other characteristics which make up the fruit of the Spirit, is produced by the Holy Spirit *in our hearts*. We learn from our Lord Who said “learn of Me, for I am meek and lowly in heart.” It is manifested outwardly in the way we live, but it has to have its roots inwardly, in our hearts.

In our Bible reading this past week we read what our Lord said about what is in all of our hearts by nature. The scribes and Pharisees were critical of the disciples because they did not wash their hands before they ate according to the tradition of the elders. They were not talking about a simple washing of their hands as all of us hopefully should do frequently. They were talking about a ceremonial washing of the disciples’ hands.

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But then it was that the Lord spoke up and said the following which you will find in Mark 7:18-23

18 And he saith unto them, Are ye so without understanding also? Do ye not perceive, that whatsoever thing from without entereth into the man, it cannot defile him;

19 Because it entereth not into his heart, but into the belly, and goeth out into the draught [pronounced *draft* and refers to the way that the body uses the good in food, but eliminates the rest], purging all meats?

20 And he said, That which cometh out of the man, that defileth the man.

21 For from within, out of the heart of men, proceed evil thoughts, adulteries, fornications, murders,

22 Thefts, covetousness, wickedness, deceit, lasciviousness, an evil eye, blasphemy, pride, foolishness:

23 All these evil things come from within, and defile the man.

You see, this is why we all need to be saved. We have sinful hearts. By nature we are not concerned about pleasing God. That is why we need to be born again. We need an inner change of heart, and that is something that only God can do for us. Do you want to know the real reason why we are having difficult times in our country now? It is because we have done all that we can to get God and Christ and the Bible out of our lives, and God is judging us for the way we live. We have been teaching our children that there really is no absolute right, or absolute wrong. Everything is relative. Sometimes wrong is right, and sometimes right is wrong.

The list I read to you from Mark 7 is similar to the list that Paul gave us just before he wrote out the characteristics of “the fruit of the Spirit.” Look at Galatians 5:19-21.

The Lord Jesus Christ was not a sinner. He never committed a sin in thought, or word, or deed. He could not sin because He was God, and He still is God, the Son of God. And God sent Him to save us so that we would be like Him, like Him in our hearts so we could be like Him in the way we live. No Christian is perfect, but that is where we are headed. Paul wrote in 2 Corinthians 5:17,

17 Therefore if any man be in Christ, he is a new creature: old things are passed away; behold, all things are become new.

The work of salvation is a work of God where He is changing us in our

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hearts so that we will be like the Lord Jesus Christ. But we need to be learning of Him. That is why God has given us the Bible. This wonderful work of salvation is all explained there. We are made in the likeness of God, and even though man sinned in the beginning, and all of us have been born in sin, yet some of those evidences of our having been made in the image of God, remain. But sin is in control. Jesus Christ died not only as our Substitute to save us from sin's penalty which our Lord took upon Himself, but to save us from sin's power. When we trust in Him, we are saved, and the Spirit of God begins to change us within. He bears fruit in our lives, totally different from what we were before. And one of those characteristics is *meekness*.

Now in speaking of these nine characteristics which make up the fruit of the Spirit, I have expressed to you more than once that I believe that there is a certain progress in the way they are mentioned. Love brings joy, and joy brings peace, and peace produces longsuffering, and longsuffering produces gentleness, and gentleness produces goodness, and goodness produces faith, and faith produces meekness, and meekness produces self-control.

I say that because in speaking of meekness, it requires faith. Goodness and gentleness are evident in meekness. So is longsuffering. A meek person knows the peace of God. Peace comes from joy, and all of this requires love – love of God and Christ and the Holy Spirit and the Word of God and the people of God.

Many expositors believe that meekness is the opposite of anger. One of man's strongest reactions to unpleasant circumstances is to get mad. Anger is one of our greatest problems. People irritate us, and so we get angry. The first murder, when Cain killed Abel, was the result of anger that Cain experienced because his brother Abel's sacrifice was accepted by God, and his own was rejected, rejected because it was the wrong sacrifice.

True meekness requires a lot of spiritual strength. In the fruit of the Spirit we have to learn to see God in all things – our failures, our frustrations, our disappointments, the injury which people do to us. And in all of these, and many other circumstances, so much is dependent upon our attitude toward those circumstances and the people who are involved in them, and how we have *learned* to recognize the hand of the Lord in all that takes place in our lives. When the Lord said, "Learn of Me," He was

speaking of a life-long process of learning. I want to give you some illustrations of meekness from Scripture, but in most of these you can find some instances when they did not manifest meekness. Remember that meekness does not mean weakness. We are all weak by nature, and sometimes the way we react to people and to circumstances is a display of our weakness rather than of the way we have learned to trust God in the troubles that come our way. There is a legitimate place for anger. The Lord on many occasions in Scripture showed anger, but it was never in retaliation like ours so often is, but with Him it was always righteous anger. The sins of others may make us angry, but they also should grieve us in our concern for them.

Meekness is a combination of gentleness and humility. One example we have of meekness in the life of Abraham had to do with the time when Abraham and his family had come back out of Egypt. Abraham, or Abram as he was then, had gone down into Egypt because when he first got into Canaan, the land was experiencing a famine and he went down into Egypt without asking the Lord what he should do in order to provide for his family. Abraham had brought Lot with him when he left Ur of the Chaldees. Lot was with Abram when he went down into Egypt, and he was with his uncle when they all came back to Canaan. The Lord had prospered Abram and his family in Egypt, so when they came back Abram and Lot separately had so many cattle and sheep that they could not live together and have enough pasture for all of their animals, and their herdmen got into a big argument about who would have the best pasture. Well Abram was the one whom God had called to go to Canaan, not Lot. But when the time came for them to decide what part of the land each would have, the first choice rightly belonged to Abram. And Lot should have said to Abram, "You chose the land that you want first, and I will decide where I am going after you decide." But Lot didn't say that. Instead Abram said to Lot as we read in Genesis 13:8-9:

8 And Abram said unto Lot, Let there be no strife, I pray thee, between me and thee, and between my herdmen and thy herdmen; for we be brethren.

9 Is not the whole land before thee? separate thyself, I pray thee, from me: if thou wilt take the left hand, then I will go to the right; or if thou depart to the right hand, then I will go to the left.

And Abram did that knowing that Lot would do what he actually did; he chose the best of the land. Now that was meekness on Abraham's part. And Abram meekly agreed to let Lot have the first choice. Don't think about the outcome, just concentrate on what Abram did in meekness.

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For a second example of meekness, let us consider Joseph. Joseph's brothers hated him because their father obviously loved Joseph the most. So when his brothers got the chance, they wanted to kill him, but they finally sold him into slavery in Egypt. Joseph went from Potiphar's house, when he was falsely accused by Potiphar's wife, to jail. And then after several years, and because he had been able to interpret Pharaoh's dreams of a coming famine, Joseph was given a position second only to Pharaoh in all the land of Egypt. Well, Jacob and his sons ran out of food, and so Jacob sent his sons to Egypt to buy grain. Over a couple of visits to Egypt to get food, Joseph finally revealed who he was, and his brothers were terrified. They knew that Joseph had the authority to kill them or to do anything else that he wanted to do to them. His brothers knew that he had such power. But this is what Joseph said to them as it is record in Genesis 45:5:

5 Now therefore be not grieved, nor angry with yourselves, that ye sold me hither: for God did send me before you to preserve life.

And then a couple of verses later in Genesis 45:7-8 Joseph added this:

7 And God sent me before you to preserve you a posterity in the earth, and to save your lives by a great deliverance.

8 So now it was not you that sent me hither, but God: and he hath made me a father to Pharaoh, and lord of all his house, and a ruler throughout all the land of Egypt.

Years later when Jacob died, Joseph's brothers again thought that he would get even with them for what they had done to him years before.

But this was Joseph's response to them as we have it in Genesis 50:19-21:

19 And Joseph said unto them, Fear not: for am I in the place of God?

20 But as for you, ye thought evil against me; but God meant it unto good, to bring to pass, as it is this day, to save much people alive.

21 Now therefore fear ye not: I will nourish you, and your little ones. And he comforted them, and spake kindly unto them.

This was meekness. We can be sure that Joseph did not come to this position overnight, but he "learned" meekness under the gracious dealing of God with his own heart.

Let me give you one example from the life of David. I hope you remember the story of how, after David became king of Israel and Judah, his own son, Absalom, led an insurrection against David. David had to flee for his life with some who were faithful to him. As they left a man from Saul's family by the name of Shimei came along and cursed David. The

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we read this in 2 Samuel 16:6-13:

6 And he cast stones at David, and at all the servants of king David: and all the people and all the mighty men were on his right hand and on his left.

7 And thus said Shimei when he cursed, Come out, come out, thou bloody man, and thou man of Belial:

8 The Lord hath returned upon thee all the blood of the house of Saul, in whose stead thou hast reigned; and the Lord hath delivered the kingdom into the hand of Absalom thy son: and, behold, thou art taken in thy mischief, because thou art a bloody man.

9 Then said Abishai the son of Zeruiah unto the king, Why should this dead dog curse my lord the king? let me go over, I pray thee, and take off his head.

10 And the king said, What have I to do with you, ye sons of Zeruiah? so let him curse, because the Lord hath said unto him, Curse David. Who shall then say, Wherefore hast thou done so?

11 And David said to Abishai, and to all his servants, Behold, my son, which came forth of my bowels, seeketh my life: how much more now may this Benjamite do it? let him alone, and let him curse; for the Lord hath bidden him.

12 It may be that the Lord will look on mine affliction, and that the Lord will requite me good for his cursing this day.

13 And as David and his men went by the way, Shimei went along on the hill's side over against him, and cursed as he went, and threw stones at him, and cast dust.

David displayed amazing meekness throughout this whole incident. Again remember that this was because David had been learning through the years to leave the affairs of his life in the Lord's hands, knowing that the Lord was sovereign in his trials and that the Lord was totally sufficient to meet His needs.

Other examples of meekness are to be found throughout Scripture, but let my last Example be, our Lord Jesus Christ. The Lord displayed meekness on numerous occasions, but let me take you to the supreme example of His meekness before God and before the Roman world. His surrender to the scribes and Pharisees was evidence of His meekness, not only to them, but especially to His Father in heaven.

Gethsemane showed the Lord's meekness as He surrendered Himself to

God the Father in prayer. You can see the whole account in Matthew 26:36-46.

But it is Luke who recorded words spoken by our Lord as He was hanging on the Cross which displayed His meekness to His Father in heaven in the face of challenges hurled at him by the mob of people who witnessed His death on the Cross. They said that He should save Himself if He were really the Christ, and if He were the King of the Jews. But He was there on the Cross because that was the mission which His Father had sent Him to earth to do. But it was with the greatest meekness that the Lord prayed on the Cross, "Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do" (Luke 23:34). And was at that time that one of the thieves said, "Lord, remember me when Thou comest into Thy kingdom" (Luke 23:42). And the Lord responded with, "Verily I say unto thee, Today thou shalt be with me in Paradise" (Luke 23:43). That criminal was the first of over 3,000 people who came to the Father for salvation during those days. But the Lord's ultimate meekness was to be seen in His final words on the Cross recorded in Luke 23:46, "Father, into Thy hands I commend My spirit." And with those words He died. There could be no greater evidence of meekness than that!

Concl: Years later Paul in commenting upon the humiliation of our Lord which led to His death, wrote these words which have a message for all of us who know the Lord. Listen to His words sent first to the church at Philippi, but preserved because the Apostle Paul was speaking to all future generations of Christians. Let us take His words to heart today because they are a call for us to humble ourselves before God, and to follow our Lord in showing the meekness which we have learned from Him:

5 Let this mind be in you, which was also in Christ Jesus:

6 Who, being in the form of God, thought it not robbery to be equal with God:

7 But made himself of no reputation, and took upon him the form of a servant, and was made in the likeness of men:

8 And being found in fashion as a man, he humbled himself, and became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross.

9 Wherefore God also hath highly exalted him, and given him a name which is above every name:

10 That at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, of things in heaven, and things in earth, and things under the earth;

11 And that every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord,

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to the glory of God the Father (Phil. 2:5-11).

The Lord Jesus said in His famous Sermon on the Mount, “Blessed are the meek: for they shall inherit the earth” (Matt. 5:5). He was repeating what had been said by David years before. You will find David’s words in Psalm 37:10-11:

10 For yet a little while, and the wicked shall not be: yea, thou shalt diligently consider his place, and it shall not be.

11 But the meek shall inherit the earth; and shall delight themselves in the abundance of peace.

I don’t know the full implications of this statement from King David, but obviously the Holy Spirit was using him to tell us, as the Lord repeated later, that the greatest weapon that we have in reaching a godless, wicked world with the message of salvation through Christ, is for the message to be shown in the lives of the people of God who have learned in the hearts the message of meekness for a lost world. There is no message that is more powerful than the message of a life transformed into the likeness of our Lord Jesus Christ.

Anger comes from our flesh. Meekness comes from our Lord. Let us learn to see the Lord’s hand in our circumstances that we may be conformed to the meekness and gentleness of Christ.

Closing verses: Eph. 4:1-3.