

Increasing in Holiness The Holiness of Meekness (Gentleness)

Intro: I once read about a man named J. Upton Dickson who was writing a book called “Cower Power.” He had founded a group called by the acronym, **DOORMATS**. That stands for “**Dependent Organization of Really Meek and Timid Souls—if there are no objections.**” Their motto was: “**The meek shall inherit the earth—if that’s okay with everybody.**” Their symbol was the yellow traffic light.

I mention this organization because it seems to confirm the modern misconception about the meaning of meekness. Today the word “meek” seems to hardly represent a virtue at all; instead it is a sign of personal weakness--timidity at best and cowardice at worst. However, the Scripture presents meekness in a very different light. It is a characteristic of our holy God which the Holy Spirit seeks to produce in us to make us holy people.

But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control; against such things there is no law. (Gal. 5:22-23)

Has God committed us to being a lifetime doormat? Must we surrender our will to everyone and be used by everyone? Let's explore how God defines meekness and how it works in the holy life of a disciple.

What is this meekness?

The Greek word is "prautes" and its varying translations in our English versions indicate the difficulty of finding an exact modern synonym (meekness, gentleness, humility). So some word study will help:

Prautes as defined by the OT

In the Greek OT “prautes” was the word used to translate the Hebrew word עָנָו meaning “poor” or “needy”. The Hebrew word came to describe a person who viewed his own role as a servant and who thus quietly and gently subjected himself to God’s will.

Prautes as defined by the ancient Greeks...

A person having a humble and kind demeanor which calms another's anger would be described as “prautes.”

A king who had the authority and power to render punishment may choose instead to show kindness and forgiveness. Such a king would be praised for his “prautes.”

A person who could discuss things without losing one's temper because of unkind and unfair personal remarks would be described as “prautes.”

Prautes might describe a horse controlled by its rider, a watchdog friendly to its family. There is great strength present, but it is tempered by a gentle spirit.

In his moral discourses Aristotle had this to say about "prautes"...

"the ability to bear reproaches and slights with moderation, and not to embark on revenge quickly, and not to be easily provoked to anger, but to be free from bitterness and contentiousness, having tranquillity and stability in the spirit."
(On Virtues and Vices)

Indeed, the man who displays "prautes" is angry "on the right grounds, and against the right persons, and in the right manner, and at the right moment, and for the right length of time."
(Aristotle, Nicomachean Ethics)

Prautes as exemplified by Moses and Jesus...

The example of Moses

Now the man Moses was very humble, more than any man who was on the face of the earth. (Numbers 12:3)

Though as God's chosen servant he could have rebuked Aaron and Miriam, he kept silent, trusting in the Lord to exonerate him of the charges made against him.

The example of Jesus

"Take My yoke upon you, and learn from Me, for I am gentle and humble in heart; and you shall find rest for your souls. (Mt. 11:29)

Notice His meekness at His trial.

And while He was being accused by the chief priests and elders, He made no answer. (Mt. 27:12)

He was oppressed and He was afflicted, Yet He did not open His mouth; Like a lamb that is led to slaughter, And like a sheep that is silent before its shearers, So He did not open His mouth. (Is. 53:7)

His meekness at His trial was evidence of strength, not weakness! He was submissive, never resisting or disputing the will of God. His absolute trust in the Father enabled Him to show compassion, courage, and self-sacrifice even in the most hostile situation.

Some working definitions of prautes:

A meek person is "strong enough to be gentle."

It is strength under control!

It is the ability to suffer wrong rather than do wrong!

Gentleness (or meekness, KJV), then, is that virtuous quality by which..."we treat all men with perfect courtesy, that we can rebuke without rancor, that we can argue without intolerance, that we can face the truth without resentment, that we can be angry and sin not, that we can be gentle and yet not weak." (Barclay)

How do we demonstrate it in everyday life?

In receiving the word of God

Therefore putting aside all filthiness and all that remains of wickedness, in humility receive the word implanted, which is able to save your souls. (Jas. 1:21)

Think of our prior suggestion about meekness—“a person who viewed his own role as a servant and who thus quietly and gently subjected himself to God’s will.”

The meek are those who know themselves to be poor in spirit, who have learned, honestly and from their hearts, to regret all the dehumanizing and subhuman things in which they have been involved as wanderers in this lost world, and who now in humility want only the will of God. (Packer)

In enduring the wrongs of others

And so, as those who have been chosen of God, holy and beloved, put on a heart of compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience; bearing with one another, and forgiving each other, whoever has a complaint against anyone; just as the Lord forgave you, so also should you. (Col. 3:12-13)

"The humble and gentle attitude which expresses itself in a patient submissiveness, free from malice and the desire for revenge."

Buechner offers this insightful statement on the self-destructive consequences of a lack of meekness. “Of the seven deadly sins, anger is possibly the most fun. To lick your wounds, to smack your lips over grievances long past, to roll over your tongue the prospect of bitter confrontations still to come, to savor to the last toothsome morsel both the pain you are given and the pain you are giving back--in many ways it is a feast fit for a king. The chief drawback is that what you are wolfing down is yourself. The skeleton at the feast is you. - Frederick Buechner, *Wishful Thinking, Transformed by Thorns*, p. 117”

In preserving the unity of the Spirit

I, therefore, the prisoner of the Lord, entreat you to walk in a manner worthy of the calling with which you have been called, with all humility and gentleness, with patience, showing forbearance to one another in love, being diligent to preserve the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace. (Eph. 4:1-3)

In teaching the church

Meekness (prautes) is necessary for the Christian man who lays claim to wisdom and would be a teacher of others.

Who among you is wise and understanding? Let him show by his good behavior his deeds in the gentleness of wisdom. (Jas. 3:13)

In restoring an erring brother

We must approach brethren in error with a spirit of gentleness (prautes).

Brethren, even if a man is caught in any trespass, you who are spiritual, restore such a one in a spirit of gentleness; each one looking to yourself, lest you too be tempted. (Gal. 6:1)

In reaching the lost

We must correct those in opposition with humility (prautes).
with gentleness correcting those who are in opposition, if perhaps God may grant them repentance leading to the knowledge of the truth, (2 Tim. 2:25)

In defending our faith

We are to answer inquiries concerning our hope with meekness (prautes).
but sanctify Christ as Lord in your hearts, always being ready to make a defense to everyone who asks you to give an account for the hope that is in you, yet with gentleness and reverence; (1 Pet. 3:15)

In responding to leadership

Meekness (prautes) is necessary for the Christian woman who would be precious in the sight of God.
but let it be the hidden person of the heart, with the imperishable quality of a gentle and quiet spirit, which is precious in the sight of God. (1 Pet. 3:4)

CONCLUSION: In this life victory and success are often the result of exerting one's power forcefully on others, crushing them if necessary to get what you want. But in God's world there is a different value. He has made a special promise: “Blessed are the meek, for they shall inherit the earth” (Mt. 5:5). What the world may sense as weakness God considers a wonderful strength.