

God's call to show lowliness and meekness in our dealings with others

A sermon preached by Henry Dixon
at Strangers' Rest Evangelical Church, on 9th July 2017

*¹I therefore, the prisoner of the Lord, beseech you that ye walk worthy of the vocation wherewith ye are called, ²with all lowliness and meekness, with longsuffering, forbearing one another in love; ³endeavouring to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace.
(Ephesians 4.1 – 3, KJV)*

Introduction

These verses are from the beginning of the section of Paul's letter to the Ephesians where he speaks about the practical implications of the great truths that he has spoken about in the first half of the letter. In chapters 1 to 3 he has spoken about how we have been blessed as individuals with every blessing in the heavenly places in Christ, about how God has made us alive when we were dead in our trespasses and sins, and raised us up with Christ and seated us with him in the heavenly places. He has also spoken about God's wonderful plan for the church, to bring people who are complete opposites, Jews and Gentiles, together into one family.

Having spoken about these glorious doctrinal matters, the apostle then, in chapter 4, starts to speak about how these great truths should affect the way in which we live. He urges his readers to "walk worthy of the calling" with which they have been called. When the apostle says that his readers are to "walk", he means that they are to live a consistent lifestyle.

The apostle says that the believers have been “called”. By this he means God has issued a summons to them to come into a saving experience of himself. They were far from God, and dead in their sins. They had been slaves of the desires of the flesh. They had been in the grip of Satan. But then God caused them to hear the Gospel. At the same time, he worked in their hearts to give them understanding of that message. He convicted them of their sin, and moved them to believe on Christ. They were converted.

But this calling is not just to be saved and to go to heaven. It is also a calling to be different; to be a holy people. Paul says that his readers are to be markedly different from what they used to be, and different from the way in which people who are unbelievers live. This is something which comes out again and again in chapters 4 to 6. They used to think and live a certain way, says the apostle, but they must do so no longer.

Today I want to focus on the first two qualities that the apostle mentions when he starts to give examples of how believers are to live. Whatever is mentioned first in a list of commandments is often the most important, and is the foundation for all that follows. The apostle says that we are to live “all lowliness and meekness”.

What do these two words mean?

The word “lowliness” in the original Greek is a compound of two words, “low” and “mind”. It means having the quality of thinking low thoughts of yourself, being humble, not being arrogant or boastful. Someone who is “lowly” will be willing to be corrected, and will receive criticism quietly without answering back angrily. Someone who is lowly will find it hard to be critical of others, because he is very aware of his own weaknesses and failings.

The word “meekness” means to have the characteristic of being gentle, non-aggressive, mild and kind. The person who is meek will respond quietly when he is insulted or mistreated, and not reply with threats or insults, still less with physical aggression. The meek person, when criticised will welcome the criticism, and ponder it carefully. The meek person, if he feels he needs to challenge the behaviour of another, will do so with great gentleness and kindness, not in order to hurt the other, or to get his own back, but out of love, to help the other person to walk more closely with the Lord.

These two characteristics of lowliness and meekness of course go hand in hand. The person who is lowly will also be meek, whereas the person who is proud will also often be aggressive and harsh.

Paul here says that our way of life, particularly in the way that we relate with each other as believers, should be characterised by this lowliness and meekness.

I wonder if these virtues get the attention from us that they deserve. We know that we must not be sexually immoral. We know that we must not steal. We know that we must not lie. But I wonder, do we make it a priority in our lives to be lowly and meek?

We should note also that the call of Scripture to show lowliness and meekness in all our dealings is the direct opposite of what our world says. Our world says, "Assert yourself. Do not allow yourself to be treated like a doormat. Do not take any nonsense from anyone. Give as good as you get." Instead of training people to be meek and humble, organisations today offer "assertiveness courses" to train people to assert themselves and claim redress for grievances. Our culture today is very much of the view that if you think you have been wronged you should complain loud, long and hard until you get satisfaction. We see this in many places: employees complaining aggressively against their employers if they think they have been wronged; parents complaining aggressively against the teachers of their children if they think their children have been treated unfairly; customers complaining loudly against suppliers if they think they have let them down, and so on.

Sometimes people object to meekness because they say that meekness is a sign of weakness. On the contrary, it takes a very strong and self-controlled man or woman to be meek. Proverbs chapter 16 verse 32 says, "He that is slow to anger is better than the mighty; and he that ruleth his spirit than he that taketh a city."

So, as we think about these qualities, I want us to think about reasons why we should have them, and also about how we can cultivate these qualities.

1. Why we should have these qualities

1) Because God commands us to have them

As well as the command here in Ephesians, there are many other places in Scripture where we are commanded to be meek in our dealings with others.

Paul says that if a brother sins, we are to restore him in a spirit of meekness. He says in Galatians chapter 6 verse 1, “Brethren, if a man be overtaken in a fault, ye which are spiritual, restore such an one in the spirit of **meekness**; considering thyself, lest thou also be tempted.”

We are to put on meekness. Paul says in Colossians chapter 3 verses 12 and 13, “Put on therefore, as the elect of God, holy and beloved, bowels of mercies, kindness, humbleness of mind, **meekness**, longsuffering; forbearing one another, and forgiving one another, if any man have a quarrel against any: even as Christ forgave you, so also do ye.”

An elder must be not quarrelsome, but gentle. Paul told Timothy that as a man of God, he was to be pursue meekness. He wrote in Timothy chapter 6 and verse 11, “But thou, O man of God, flee these things; and follow after righteousness, godliness, faith, love, patience, **meekness**.” Timothy, as an elder, was to be an example to the whole church. So if Timothy should follow after meekness, so should we.

Paul also instructed Timothy to show meekness as he dealt with his opponents. He wrote in 2 Timothy chapter 2 and verses 24 and 25, “And the servant of the Lord must not strive; but be gentle unto all men, apt to teach, patient, in **meekness** instructing those that oppose themselves; if God peradventure will give them repentance to the acknowledging of the truth.” Again, this is written not just for pastors, but for all of us to obey.

Paul said that all of us are to show meekness to all men. He wrote in Titus chapter 3 and verse 2, that Titus is to put “in mind” the believers “to be subject to principalities and powers, to obey magistrates, to be ready to every good work, to speak evil of no man, to be no brawlers, but gentle, shewing all **meekness** unto all men.”

James says that we are to show that we have true wisdom by our meekness. “Who is a wise man and endued with knowledge among you? let him shew out of a good conversation his works with **meekness** of wisdom.”

Peter said that wives are to be meek in the way that they relate with their husbands, even ones that do not believe the Word. He said in his first letter, chapter 3 and verse 4, that the beauty of wives is to be that of “the hidden man of the heart, in that which is not corruptible, even the ornament of a **meek** and quiet spirit, which is in the sight of God of great price.”

He also said that as we give an account for our hope to unbelievers, we are to do so with meekness. In chapter 3 of his first letter, verse 15, “But sanctify the Lord God in your hearts: and be ready always to give an answer to every man that asketh you a reason of the hope that is in you with **meekness** and fear.”

So we see that there are many commands in the New Testament for us to show lowliness of mind, and meekness, in the way in which we relate with others, both believers and unbelievers.

2) Because being meek is one of the “signature characteristics” of a true Christian

In the “beatitudes”, as recorded in Matthew’s Gospel chapter 5, Jesus gives us the defining characteristics of a true disciple, who has been born again. One of these defining characteristics is meekness. He says in verse 5, “Blessed are the **meek**: for they shall inherit the earth.”

3) Because being meek is one of the fruits of the Holy Spirit

The apostle Paul tells us in Galatians chapter 5 and verses 22 and 23, “But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, longsuffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, **meekness**, temperance.”

4) Because God is gentle and meek

God is gentle in the way he treats his people. Isaiah says in chapter 40 of his prophecy, verse 11, “He shall feed his flock like a shepherd: he shall gather the lambs with his arm, and carry them in his bosom, and shall gently lead those that are with young.”

God treats his enemies with great patience, gentleness and meekness. Jesus said as recorded in Matthew chapter 5 and verses 43 to 45,

Ye have heard that it hath been said, Thou shalt love thy neighbour, and hate thine enemy. But I say unto you, Love your

enemies, bless them that curse you, do good to them that hate you, and pray for them which despitefully use you, and persecute you; that ye may be the children of your Father which is in heaven: for he maketh his sun to rise on the evil and on the good, and sendeth rain on the just and on the unjust.

5) Because Jesus was humble and meek

Isaiah prophesies about Jesus, in chapter 42 of his prophecy, verses 2 and 3, "He shall not cry, nor lift up, nor cause his voice to be heard in the street. A bruised reed shall he not break, and the smoking flax shall he not quench." Jesus is gentle in the way he deals with his failing people. Thank God, he is gentle with you and with me.

Isaiah prophesied in chapter 53 and verse 7 about the way in which Jesus would respond when he was ill-treated, "He was oppressed, and he was afflicted, yet he opened not his mouth: he is brought as a lamb to the slaughter, and as a sheep before her shearers is dumb, so he openeth not his mouth."

Jesus described himself as meek and lowly. He said, as recorded in Matthew chapter 11 verses 28 to 30,

Come unto me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. 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. For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light.

When he entered Jerusalem he rode meekly on a donkey. When he was ill-treated before his crucifixion and when he was on the Cross he made no threats, nor did he answer back. Peter says, in his first letter chapter 2 and verse 23, "When he was reviled, [he] reviled not again; when he suffered, he threatened not; but committed himself to him that judgeth righteously". As they drove the nails into his hands and feet, he prayed, "Father, forgive them; for they know not what they do." (Luke 23.34)

6) Because Biblical examples were meek and humble

Think of David, as he was hounded by Saul, how he refused to raise a hand against Saul to get his own back at him. Think of how, when David was fleeing from his son Absalom, his enemy Shimei rained down curses upon him, and threw dust and rocks at him and his men. Joab

wanted to go and kill Shimei, but David said, “Let him alone, and let him curse; for the Lord hath bidden him. It may be that the Lord will look on mine affliction, and that the Lord will requite me good for his cursing this day.” (2 Samuel 16.11 – 13). David bore Shimei’s cursing meekly, and committed himself to God.

Think of how Steven, as his accusers threw rocks at him, in his dying breath prayed, “Lord, lay not this sin to their charge.” (Acts 7.60).

Think of Paul who, as he related with the Thessalonians, dealt with them with great tenderness and gentleness. He said in his first letter to the Thessalonians, chapter 2 and verses 7 and 8, “But we were gentle among you, even as a nurse cherisheth her children: So being affectionately desirous of you, we were willing to have imparted unto you, not the gospel of God only, but also our own souls, because ye were dear unto us.”

2. How can we cultivate lowliness and meekness

I hope that I have persuaded you that lowliness and meekness are very important virtues, which are commanded many times in Scripture, and exemplified by God the Father, the Lord Jesus Christ, and by the saints in the Bible.

But how can we cultivate these qualities? They go right against the grain of our natural tendencies.

Let me make some suggestions to you.

1) Remember what you are in and of yourself

Who are you in and of yourself? Who am I? We are merely dust of the earth into which God has breathed life. God said to Adam, “for dust thou art, and unto dust shalt thou return” (Genesis 3.19). That is all we are, in and of ourselves. How can we think of ourselves as having any great status, when we remember who we are? The man of the world says, when he is insulted, “Don’t you know who I am?” The Christian says, when he is insulted, “I know **what** I am, so how can I be offended?”

2) Remember that all your gifts are from God.

We should remember that all gifts that we have, whether they be intelligence, good looks, abilities, have come from God. They can be removed from us at any time, in an instant. Therefore we have nothing to boast about, or feel proud about. Paul says in 1 Corinthians chapter 4 and verse 7, “Who maketh thee to differ from another? and what hast thou that thou didst not receive? now if thou didst receive it, why dost thou glory, as if thou hadst not received it?”

3) Remember that you are a hell deserving sinner.

If you and I got what you deserved for our lives, where would we go? To hell. “All our righteousnesses are as filthy rags” (Isaiah 64.6). The good deeds that we might rely on to make us acceptable to God are, in God’s sight, “dung” (Philippians 3.8). At whatever point we might condemn others, we ourselves are guilty of the same sins, in one form or another. Are others murderers? So are we, in the way we get angry and insult others. Are others adulterers? So are we, in our lustful thoughts. Are others idolaters? So are we in our greed and self-importance. How can we rear up in self-righteous anger towards others for their sins when we properly realise our own sinfulness?

4) Remember that your salvation is entirely by grace.

If you are a Christian, on what basis have you been saved? Is it on the basis of any virtue or merit of your own? Not at all. “For by grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God: Not of works, lest any man should boast” (Ephesians 2.8 – 9). Our salvation is entirely from God. “Of him are ye in Christ Jesus, who of God is made unto us wisdom, and righteousness, and sanctification, and redemption: That, according as it is written, He that glorieth, let him glory in the Lord” (1 Corinthians 1.30 – 31). “But God forbid that I should glory, save in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, by whom the world is crucified unto me, and I unto the world” (Galatians 6.14).

How can we possibly be proud and arrogant, or rough with others, when we remember that we have been saved entirely by God’s grace?

5) Remember God's patience with you as a Christian

How many times have you failed the Lord? How many times have I? Has the Lord cast you off? Has he lost patience with you? Has he trampled you under his feet? Thanks be to God, he has not treated us as our sins deserve.

If only we properly remembered our sins and failings as believers, we could never be rough and impatient with others for their sins.

6) Remember that you are heading for glory

If you are a Christian, then you are heading for glory. You have unspeakable happiness awaiting you in the presence of the Lord. Any way in which you have been mistreated here in this life will be abundantly compensated for in the life to come. You do not need to worry about looking after your interests. Your heavenly Father is looking after them for you. So you can be meek and gentle with those who mistreat you, knowing that the Lord will repay to you many times over whatever you have lost in this world.

Conclusion

I have sought to remind us this evening of the importance of lowliness and meekness, and also to speak of how we can cultivate these characteristics in our lives. I have been assuming that I am speaking to Christians. But the question must be asked, are you, perhaps, not a Christian? If meekness is absent from your life, you are missing one of the defining characteristics of someone who has been born again, who is a true disciple of Christ. Could it be that, even though you have been known and accepted as a Christian, and have served God hard for many years, you have never been converted? If you have any doubts, I urge you, come to Christ, and ask him to save you.

This booklet contains the edited notes of a sermon which was preached by Henry Dixon.

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