

# The Sermon on the Mount: A Reformed Exposition

## Chapter 4: Blessed Are the Meek

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Blessed are the meek: for they shall inherit the earth (Mt. 5:5).

The third beatitude follows logically upon the previous two. In fact, the Hebrew word for meek (*anaw*) comes from the same root and is related to the term for poor (*ani*). The one who is poor in spirit will be meek. The person who mourns over his sin and depravity will be humble-minded. The term meek is multifaceted and thus not easy to define whether in Hebrew, Greek or English. (For example, Webster's Dictionary defines "meek" as "patient and mild; not inclined to anger" as well as "too submissive; spineless; spiritless."<sup>1</sup> Our Lord is not saying that the spineless, effeminate, or spiritless will inherit the earth (e.g., Jesus and Paul were meek yet strong leaders who stood up to sin and rebuked evil.). Therefore, there is no single word which is capable of fully defining this term. As we study the virtue of spiritual or Christian meekness, we need to draw upon all the biblical terms and examples that shed light on this word.

### What is Christian Meekness?

The key to understanding this beatitude is to accurately define the term "meek." What is meekness? To understand what biblical meekness is we need to note the following.

First, we must not confuse the Savior's use of this word with the usage of the world, or professing Christians who follow the world. The word "meek" (Gk., *praeis*) is a common term that has acquired a unique meaning in its Christian context. It is a spiritual virtue that cannot be separated from our relationship to God and the work of the Holy Spirit within us.

For example, when the ancient Greeks used this term in a positive sense, it referred primarily to outward behavior. If a man had a horse that was calm and gentle, then it was a "*praeis*" horse. It also was used to describe men who were not fierce, violent, cruel or angry. It described men who were gentle, kind or mild in their behavior. While these usages are helpful and necessary for defining this term, we must keep in mind that the meekness our Lord had in mind, like all the other virtues described in the beatitudes, is not a matter of *natural* disposition. Jesus describes distinctly Christian virtues that are completely unknown to unregenerate men. They are attitudes and behaviors that are produced by the Spirit of God.

Therefore, the term meek, as used by Jesus, does not describe people who are born with a gentle disposition. There are people who, by birth or genetics, are generally calmer and nicer than others. They rarely lose their tempers and comport themselves well in difficult circumstances. There are also people who through rigorous training, such as various Hindus, Buddhists and martial artists, who appear, at least outwardly, very humble, gentle and calm in stressful situations. Our Lord is not describing such people.

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<sup>1</sup> Jean L. McKechnie. Gen. Supervisor, *Webster's New Twentieth Century Dictionary of the English Language Unabridged* (New York: Collins World, 1978), 1119.

Christ is also not describing people who are weak, shy, quiet or who avoid confrontation because they do not like conflict of any kind. Meekness does not mean cowardice. It must not be confused with people who go out of their way to avoid disagreements, debate or verbal conflict. Jesus and Paul were meek, yet they were not afraid of theological or ethical confrontation. They boldly confronted sin and false doctrine and even used strong language when appropriate (see Jn. 4:16; 8:19, 44; Mt. 21:12; Mk. 11:15; Gal. 1:8, 9; 2:11 ff; etc.). We mention this observation because in our day, meekness, love and humility are often equated with a lack of backbone and compromise. Men who stand up to false doctrine are even accused of being arrogant and unloving. The Protestant Reformers were meek men; yet they were strong as they spoke and wrote on the authority of Scripture and other crucial doctrines. Christian meekness is totally compatible with godly manliness, ecclesiastical authority and biblical confrontation. “God forbid that we should ever confuse this noble quality, one of the noblest of all the qualities, with something merely animal or physical or natural.”<sup>2</sup>

Second, this word can only be understood in the light of the two previous beatitudes. Therefore, the meekness described flows from poverty of Spirit. It is gentleness, patience and humble-mindedness which spring from our consciousness that, in ourselves, we are sinners who are unworthy, unprofitable and completely devoid of any spiritual goodness. The person who truly understands his condition without Christ, whom the Holy Spirit has given a true assessment of his guilt and depravity, will be meek. The Holy Spirit develops meekness within us because He has caused us to lay prostrate in the dust before God as unworthy beggars. The person who has mourned over his own sins and condition will be gentle and patient with others because God had mercy on him. It is a Spirit-given attitude of oneself that leads to the kind, godly, gentle treatment of others. The Holy Spirit must first strip away all of our pride, self-sufficiency and autonomy before we can be meek toward others. The person who is poor in spirit, who mourns over his sins does not exalt himself, seek his own or demand his rightful place. He understands that he is a sinner saved by grace. Thus, we see that the meekness of which Jesus is speaking is not constitutional or natural, but flows from God’s grace. God takes men that are prideful, angry, bitter, mean, unmerciful, vehement, impetuous, and by His grace enables them to be humble, gentle, merciful, forgiving and patient.

Third, Christian meekness, like the other Christian virtues described in the beatitudes, is connected to a proper understanding of God’s nature and character. When we see the righteousness, holiness and absolute sovereignty of God coupled with His mercy, compassion, patience and kindness toward us as sinful, finite and pitiful creatures, we understand how meekness forms an essential part of the character of every genuine Christian. If God has been kind and merciful toward us, then obviously we must be gentle and compassionate toward others. Since we were completely dead in trespasses and sins and God reached into our hearts and saved us from our sin and ourselves, then obviously we have no reason to boast. Every Christian who looks at God and himself must assume a position of humility throughout all of life. The believer has the attitude of Jeremiah who said, “Through the LORD’s mercies we are not consumed, because His compassions fail not” (Lam. 3:22); or Paul who wrote, “For who makes you differ from another? And what do you have that you did not receive? Now if you did indeed receive it, why do you boast as if you had not received it?” (1 Cor. 4:7).

Fourth, there are some excellent examples of meekness in Scripture. When Miriam and Aaron spoke against Moses, the Holy Spirit made the following parenthetical comment. “Now the man Moses was very meek, above all the men which were upon the face of the earth” (Num.

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<sup>2</sup> D. Martyn Lloyd-Jones, *Studies in the Sermon on the Mount*, 1:68.

12:3, KJV). Moses, the most powerful man in Israel and perhaps the most important figure of the Old Covenant era, is called the most meek because of his amazing long-suffering toward others and because he refused to defend himself and his position. Moses had a very humble spirit that trusted in God and waited upon Him for a resolution of this conflict. “Later Jeremiah will follow his example when Hananiah claims that the Lord speaks through him (Jer. 28:1-4). Both Moses and Jeremiah surrender the issue to the Lord. Moses clearly has not forgotten the lesson of Kibroth Hataavah (11:10 ff.)! He has become the most humble (KJV: ‘meek’) of all men.”<sup>3</sup> Scripture connects Christian meekness as a virtue together with reliance upon God. We see this connection in how David cried out in prayer: “Lord, You have heard the desire of the humble [or meek]; You will prepare their heart; You will cause Your ear to hear, to do justice to the fatherless and the oppressed, that the man of the earth may oppress no more” (Ps. 10:17-18).

The supreme example of meekness was Jesus who said, “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” (Mt. 11:29-30). Christ lived in complete dependence upon the Lord and committed every aspect of His life totally unto the Father. He does not rule as the arrogant, earthly leaders do, but is lowly, humble and gentle with His flock. “Now no command given to him of the Father was grievous, no suffering made him grudge, no pains made him shrink from his enemies, and his answers to them were full of meekness.”<sup>4</sup> He dined with tax collectors, prostitutes and sinners because He placed lost souls before Himself. He quietly endured persecution, derision, lies and scorn. Paul says that He voluntarily left behind the throne room of God and all His prerogatives as God to take the form of a servant, to humble Himself and become obedient to the point of death, even the death of the cross (Phil. 2:8). “[H]e was ‘brought as a lamb to the slaughter, and, as a sheep before her shearers, was dumb.’ He uttered no complaint, displayed no fretfulness—‘Not my will, but thine be done’ [Isa. 53:7; Lk. 22:42]. And then, with regard to mankind:—‘When he was reviled, he reviled not again; and when he suffered, he threatened not; but committed himself to him who judgeth righteously [1 Pet. 2:23]; and, so far from cherishing resentful feelings toward his enemies, he wept when he thought of the miseries they were drawing down on their own heads, and died with this prayer on his lips—‘Father, forgive them; for they know not what they do’ [Lk. 23:34].”<sup>5</sup> “The spirit and example of Christ provide the norm which should govern all Christian conduct.”<sup>6</sup>

We also learn from Christ’s example that meekness does not mean compromise. Christian meekness is completely compatible with sternness and strictness when dealing with heresy, apostasy and unrepentant, scandalous sin. The idea that is rather common in our day that sternness and boldness are incompatible with meekness and gentleness is refuted by our Lord’s own example. The same Jesus who was the perfect example of meekness and humility drove the money changers out of the temple with a whip (Jn. 2:14 ff.). He denounced the false teachers and hypocrites in Israel with extremely strong language (cf. Mt. 23). He referred to the scribes and Pharisees as “hypocrites,” “blind guides,” “fools” and “white-washed tombs” (Mt. 23:13-27). He demanded that unrepentant sinners be cast out of His church (Mt. 18:17). “Such severity did not annul His gentleness; on the contrary, it was generated by the loving depths of His compassion for the lost, as is shown, for example, by the way in which the prolonged and unsparing

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<sup>3</sup> A. Noordtjiz, *Numbers* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1983), 107.

<sup>4</sup> David Dickson, *Matthew* (Carlisle, PA: Banner of Truth, [1647] 1981), 157.

<sup>5</sup> John Brown, *Discourses and Sayings of Our Lord*, 122-123.

<sup>6</sup> Philip E. Hughes, *The Second Epistle to the Corinthians*, 345.

denunciation of Mt. 23 is brought to a conclusion by one of the tenderest and most moving of all His utterances.”<sup>7</sup>

This point needs to be made because it is very common today to accuse people who are strict on doctrine of being arrogant and unloving. There is nothing wrong with being strict on doctrine as long as this strictness is coupled with meekness. The case for the Westminster Standards must be pressed strongly and fervently, but with gentleness and compassion. The cause of truth is not furthered when people who present the truth act disagreeably, arrogantly and meanly. It also is not furthered when men confuse meekness or gentleness with compromise and a lack of discipline. We live in a time when supposedly conservative Presbyterian denominations tolerate all sorts of false doctrines and even heresy relating to justification in the name of humility and compassion. Such tolerance is wicked and destructive of the corporate sanctification of the church.

Another outstanding example of Christian meekness is found in the apostle Paul. “Now I, Paul, myself am pleading with you by the meekness and gentleness of Christ—who in presence am lowly among you, but being absent am bold toward you” (2 Cor. 10:1). While Paul appeals to his authority as an apostle (note the “I, Paul, myself”) to denounce the false apostles, he does so with a Christ-like meekness. He pleads for repentance “by the meekness and gentleness of Christ.” “As Christians are bound to be meek and gentle, Paul begged the Corinthians not to force him to be severe.”<sup>8</sup> Thus, we see that under certain circumstances a meek, gentle approach to discipline must give way to boldness, decisiveness and severity. Paul acknowledged that, in person, his tendency was to be very meek, but when absent he would write in a bold manner with utter disregard of the opinion of his opponents. The same Paul who could be as gentle as a lamb, under certain circumstances, could refer to people accepting damnable heresy in the church as foolish (Gal. 3:1, 3). He could even say, by the Holy Spirit, that he wished false heretical teachers would “cut themselves off” (Gal. 5:12)! Both Jesus and Paul were meek, yet they were also not effeminate cream puffs.

## Meekness in Action

Having examined the meaning of meekness, now let us turn our attention to how this Christian virtue ought to affect our everyday lives. There are two main things to consider.

First, Christian meekness must permeate our relationship with God. It should do so in the following ways. (1) The meek believer has an attitude of submission when he comes to the Word of God. In this, once again, we see that spiritual meekness combines humility with a trust in God. The meek believer is a person who is immediately willing to set aside his own interests or desires in order to obey what the Scripture teaches. The person who comes to the Bible with the notion that he will only focus on and accept doctrines and commands that he likes is obviously not living the lifestyle of meekness that Jesus expects and demands. The man who imposes his own wisdom, presuppositions and ideas on to the Word of God is *not* living in humble submission to God.

The reason that so many professing churches in our day are so compromised theologically and ethically is the simple fact that they are not meek or humble before God. It is pure arrogance which sets aside God’s law in favor of secular pop psychology. It is obstinate pride which sets aside the absolute sovereignty of God for the absolute sovereignty of the sinful

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<sup>7</sup> Ibid.

<sup>8</sup> Charles Hodge, *1 and 2 Corinthians* (Carlisle, PA: Banner of Truth, [1857, 59] 1974), 606.

human will. It is obviously not humble when men reject the worship that God has authorized for silly, manmade gimmicks. Only men who are haughty and full of themselves would set aside the doctrine, government, ethics and worship of Scripture and replace it with their own speculations, theories and practices. This statement is as true of modern Arminian fundamentalist evangelicalism as it is of Roman Catholicism.

The people in the pews often don't see things this way because they have essentially adopted a pagan, humanistic, antinomian concept of meekness. Thus, Roman Catholics do not see the pope as one of the most arrogant men alive because he sets himself up in the church as God, as Christ Himself. But rather, they look at his gentleness, his outward demeanor and say, "What a blessed holy man." You see, an anti-christ can appear gentle like a lamb, but inwardly is a ravenous wolf (Mt. 7:15).

Therefore, one of the first tests of Christian meekness is: do you bow the knee to Jesus Christ by promptly and sincerely submitting to His Word? Let us not forget this fundamental God-ward element of meekness. "He is spiritually meek who conforms himself to the mind of God, and does not quarrel with the instructions of the Word, but with the corruptions of his heart. Cornelius' speech to Peter savoured of a meek spirit: 'Now therefore we are all here present before God to hear all things that are commanded thee of God' (Acts 10:33). How happy it is when the Word which comes with majesty is received with meekness (James 1:21)."<sup>9</sup>

(2) Meekness toward God can also be observed in how we submit to His providence. The man who is meek does not complain or murmur when he encounters the afflictions of life. Like Job he will say, "The LORD gave, and the LORD has taken away; blessed be the name of the LORD" (1:21). Or as Eli spoke, "It is the LORD. Let Him do what seems good to Him" (1 Sam. 3:18). The meek believer calmly submits to both the good and bad things in life because he has assumed a position of complete humility before God. He understands his true condition of guilt and sinfulness; that in and of himself he deserves nothing but wrath, death and hell. He also trusts in God's goodness, mercy and compassion and knows that God has his own best interest in mind. Therefore, the meek does not rebel against divine providence but instead learns and profits from it. Meekness is necessary in order for one to be content and teachable. Those who are meek do not struggle against God. They do not "kick against the goads" (Ac. 9:5). Are you happy and content with God's providential dealings with you? Are you meek, submissive and content before Him? If you are, you are greatly blessed.

Second, God requires meekness toward other men. In fact, Paul says that meekness should permeate our behavior. "I, therefore, the prisoner of the Lord beseech you to walk worthy of the vocation wherewith ye are called, with all lowliness and meekness, with longsuffering, forbearing one another in love; endeavoring to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace" (Eph. 4:1-3, KJV). The internal disposition of every Christian must be lowliness and meekness. The believer must approach his relationships with a humble and gentle spirit. The context of this passage is important, for Paul is teaching what is necessary to unity and peace in the church. He also says this attitude and behavior is the calling of every believer. If the church is to function properly Christians must put away self-assertion, self-esteem, self-exaltation and pride. Believers are to have a low opinion of themselves and set aside personal ambition, ego and self-assertiveness in dealing with others. Note that Paul adds the word all—"with all lowliness and meekness"—because every situation, at every time, requires this mindset. "Humility has been called the first, second, and third essential of the Christian life.... The meek individual is slow to insist on his rights. He realizes that in the sight of God he has no rights at all that are his by

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<sup>9</sup> Thomas Watson, *The Beatitudes*, 105-106.

nature.... He would rather 'take' wrong than inflict it (1 Cor. 6:7). With Abraham he prefers to let Lot have first choice (Gen. 13:7-18), with great reward...for Abraham!"<sup>10</sup>

Humility and meekness are crucial because they are necessary for sinners to coexist in peace. A man will not forgive another unless he first sets aside his pride. A person will not show compassion unless first he is meek. People who are arrogant and think much too highly of themselves will not show kindness to others. When a man is humble and meek he will exercise longsuffering. "Meekness is that unresisting, uncomplaining disposition of mind, which enables us to bear without irritation or resentment the faults and injuries of others."<sup>11</sup> "Yes, all of you be submissive to one another, and be clothed with humility, for God resists the proud, but gives grace to the humble" (1 Pet. 5:5).

A meek spirit is crucial for controlling our passions. It enables all the members of Christ's church, with their diverse personalities, tastes and backgrounds, to have communion with each other. As we noted, it is meekness and not doctrinal compromise that is the key to Christian unity. It holds the first place among the Christian graces because it results in a number of godly characteristics.

The person who is meek overlooks a brother's smaller faults. Although obviously scandalous sins must be dealt with in accordance with Matthew 18, there are minor rubs and offenses that can be covered over with love. "Love covers a multitude of sins" (1 Pet. 4:8). A person who is humble and gentle understands that his own faults are great and does not seek to make an issue out of every little offense. A meek person will bear personal injuries. His humility makes him willing to bear and forbear. If he is angered by a minor offense or an innocent mistake, his meekness keeps his anger in check. The person who is meek is not easily provoked. If it is necessary to confront sin in a brother's life, it must be done with humility and meekness. "Brethren, if a man is overtaken in any trespass, you who are spiritual restore such a one in a spirit of gentleness, considering yourself lest you also be tempted" (Gal. 6:1). A meek Christian shows consideration toward the repentant sinner and demonstrates humility by refraining from a censorious spirit.

A meek person is not judgmental of others. He is not quick to jump to conclusions; he gives others the benefit of the doubt. He refuses to listen to an evil report about another Christian. Because he understands his own depravity and unworthiness, he is very careful in maintaining the reputation of other Christians. "Solomon tells us, it is the glory of a man to 'pass over a transgression' (Proverbs 19:11). It is more honour to bury an injury than revenge it; and to slight it than to write it down."<sup>12</sup> The person who is taking note of the faults of others seeks to tear others down in order to build themselves up. A judgmental attitude is a symptom of a proud and haughty spirit.

A person who is meek is quick to forgive. A person with a humble and gentle spirit is quick to forgive and forget because he knows that he is a sinner saved by grace. He knows that Jesus has forgiven him a mountain of iniquities, so he is happy to forgive the offenses of other believers. He does not take note of other people's sins and faults and he refuses to hold a grudge. He understands that we who have been forgiven much must be kind, gentle and compassionate with other believers who sin. He, of course, does not ignore or overlook scandalous or serious sins, but when the offender repents and confesses he immediately forgives and extends the right hand of fellowship.

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<sup>10</sup> William Hendriksen, *Galatians and Ephesians* (Grand Rapids: Baker, [1967, 68] 1979), 2:183.

<sup>11</sup> Charles Hodge, *Ephesians* (Carlisle, PA: Banner of Truth, [1856] 1964), 141.

<sup>12</sup> Thomas Watson, *The Beatitudes*, 108.

The person who is meek learns to put away all malice and evil speaking. “Let all bitterness, wrath, anger, clamor, and evil speaking be put away from you, with all malice. And be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, even as God in Christ forgave you” (Eph. 4:31-32). A Spirit-produced meek mind does not vent itself with bitter speech, verbal brawling, slander or hurtful speech. A humble spirit which understands one’s own sins and depravity is tenderhearted, compassionate and ready to suffer abuse without verbal retaliation. This, however, does not mean that Christians are not free to clear themselves of slander. They most certainly are. But they are to do so without attempting to hurt or injure the other person verbally. When Michael the archangel got into a verbal dispute with the devil over the body of Moses, Michael “dared not bring against him a reviling accusation, but said, ‘The Lord rebuke you!’” (Jude 9).

The meek person is ready to accept instruction and admonition. The proud man refuses to receive teaching; he despises admonition. A meek and humble spirit is happy to be corrected because he understands that we all fall short of the glory of God; we all could greatly improve in our sanctification before Christ. The person who is meek gladly submits to the teaching of the Lord because he places obedience to Christ and the good of the church before his own self-interest. The proud man rejects that which interferes with his human autonomy and selfish lusts. Thus we understand why Scripture says, “God resists the proud, but gives grace to the humble” (Jas. 3:6; 1 Pet. 1:13).

A person who is meek is quick to acknowledge his sin and repent of it. He doesn’t cover over his own iniquities. He doesn’t make excuses for his behavior. He doesn’t blame shift or lie because he is afraid of his reputation. Many of the problems and disturbances that are found in churches today are a direct result of people who are proud and, thus, refuse to admit their sin and repent. Instead, they deem it necessary to attack others in the church especially the pastor and the elders. A meek person considers others as better than himself, while the proud is willing to slander others to preserve his own self-image. Once again, we see the great importance of Christian meekness.

Given all these considerations, it is important that we give great priority to spiritual meekness. We are born as men of pride, as people who are self-centered, selfish and arrogant. But the Holy Spirit subdues our hearts; Christian meekness can only be produced by the Holy Spirit. “But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, longsuffering, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness [or meekness], self-control. Against such there is no law. And those who are Christ’s have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires” (Gal. 5:22-24). Let us pray for meekness of heart and put off everything that is contrary to a humble spirit. “‘Put on therefore as the elect of God meekness’ (Colossians 3:12). Put it on as a garment, never to be left off. Meekness is a necessary ingredient in everything. It is necessary in instruction: ‘In meekness instructing...’ (2 Timothy 2:25). Meekness conquers the opposers of truth. Meekness melts the heart. Meekness is necessary in hearing the Word. ‘Receive with meekness the ingrafted word’ (James 1:21)... Meekness is needful in reproof. ‘If a man be overtaken with a fault, restore such a one with a spirit of meekness’ (Galatians 6:1).”<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>13</sup> Ibid, 113.

## The Inheritance of the Meek

Jesus says that the meek are blessed because they will inherit the earth. This statement is almost a direct quotation from the Greek translation of Psalm 37:11 (LXX 36:11): “For yet a little while and the wicked shall be no more; but the meek shall inherit the earth, and shall delight themselves in the abundance of peace.” There are a number of things to note about this statement.

First, it is completely contrary to the Jewish way of thinking in the days of our Lord. The Jews had developed a carnal concept of the kingdom. They believed that the Messiah would come and would rule by a military dictatorship. He would be a brilliant military leader who would crush the enemies of the Jewish people through battle, bloodshed and warfare. The meek, suffering servant of Isaiah 53 and the book of Psalms was not really part of their thinking at this time. In spite of Jesus’ teachings about the kingdom that contradicted their view, the Jews wanted to take Him by force and make Him king (Jn. 6:15). The Jews at that time had forsaken the spiritual concept of the kingdom for a fierce nationalism. Their concept of the visible church had degenerated into carnal racism.

The Savior’s statement about the inevitable victory of the spiritually meek would have been a shock to the Jews. In this statement He is telling the people that they have it all wrong regarding the kingdom. Jesus is saying to the people that their theology of the kingdom is carnal and worldly. The kingdom is spiritual, not carnal. It will not come in by revolution or physical battle. It is for those who: are poor in spirit; mourn over their sins; are humble and meek before God; follow the Messiah and wait upon the Lord for the victory. The kingdom comes by the sword of the Spirit, not by physical conquest.

Second, it is contrary to the way the world thinks and acts. From Genghis Khan to Napoleon, Adolf Hitler, Stalin and Osama Bin Laden the philosophy of dominion has been that the strong and mighty, who are not afraid to use force, shall inherit the earth. Mao Se Tung said, “Power flows from the barrel of a gun.” From the boardroom to the degenerate “gansta rapper,” the concept of life is the same. The powerful and ruthless will excel while the weak will be obliterated and forgotten. “One would think that ‘meek’ people get nowhere because everybody ignores them or else rides roughshod over them and tramples them underfoot. It is the tough, the overbearing, who succeed in the struggle for existence; weaklings go the wall.”<sup>14</sup>

The Bible-believing Christian, however, has a completely different outlook because he understands the sovereignty of God and the power of the cross. He trusts in the promises of God and thus does not need to attempt to force the issue by carnal means. He knows that ultimately God decides the course of history and not men with guns and bombs. The meek are those who believe in the victory of the gospel, trust in God, humbly submit to His will and work to spread the gospel instead of death and destruction. Christians are completely different from Nazis, Communists, Islamic militants and power hungry politicians. They trust and obey, without fretting, for they know that Christ is King; that He is ruling now and that His all-powerful Spirit cannot be thwarted. “Not by might nor by power, but by My Spirit, says the LORD of hosts” (Zech. 4:6).

Third, our Lord’s statement is contrary to much of the thinking of modern evangelical churches. Many churches believe that the key to success in life and ministry is not a humble submission to God’s Word but rather by a humanistic, pragmatic manipulation of the masses. A

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<sup>14</sup> John R. W. Stott, *Christian Counter Culture*, 43.

humble reliance upon the Spirit has been replaced by the adoption of the philosophy of the world. The key to success is a ministry rooted in man-made programs, giving the people what they want rather than what God requires which is what they really need. Most modern pastors do not look to the Reformers or the Puritans as a godly model of ministry. They much prefer the entertainer, the celebrity and thus will say and do all sorts of things that have nothing to do with God's Word to attract a crowd and make a name for themselves. They have abandoned *sola Scriptura* and have adopted American popular cultural and sociological ideas. Their actions and teachings prove that they really do not believe that the meek will inherit the earth. They apparently think that God needs their help, pragmatism and creativity; that the Holy Spirit needs the assistance of Madison Avenue and Hollywood to have kingdom victory over this earth. They believe that the clever, creative, charismatic, compromising church growth expert will inherit the earth. This sort of pragmatic, unbiblical thinking is what is driving evangelicals more and more toward an unbiblical ecumenism. It has driven many to avoid doctrinal precision; to eschew criticizing false and absurd doctrines; and, attack those who take a stand for the truth.

We also see the implicit rejection of this beatitude in the common evangelical approach to politics. The idea of staying on the narrow path of Scripture and only supporting Christian principles, platforms and candidates is seen as insane in our era. Instead, most conservative Christians have made common cause with the thoroughly corrupt and unbiblical Republican Party and have sought power and influence through large ecumenical/pluralistic organizations (e.g., the Moral Majority). Once again the driving force behind this thinking is pragmatism, not Scripture. In the last thirty years, as evangelicals have repeatedly thrown their support behind the Republicans, the Republicans have drifted toward the left on government programs, education, spending and even some social issues. The big tent strategy is totally contrary to Scripture. Even the Christian Reconstruction movement, which for the most part is Reformed, has adopted an unbiblical ecumenism, embracing Arminians, Charismatics, high church Episcopalians and Shepherdites. The whole idea is that bigger is better and large numbers are the key to success.

In contrast to the modern evangelical's view on the progress of the church or on politics, Jesus said, "Blessed are the meek" (Mt. 5:5). He did not say, "Blessed are those who trust to their powers, abilities and their own institutions." No, rather it is the very reverse of that. "And this is true, not only here, but in the whole message of the Bible. You get it in that perfect story of Gideon where God went on reducing the numbers, not adding to them. That is the spiritual method, and here it is once more emphasized in this amazing statement in the Sermon on the Mount."<sup>15</sup> The meek person does not have faith in himself and his own abilities, but rather trusts in God. Once again we must emphasize that Christian meekness is always connected to a biblical view of ourselves coupled with a trust in Christ and His sovereign power to save.

Fourth, like the previous beatitude, there is an important eschatological or future aspect to this blessing. The poor, the mourners, the meek, the persecuted will inherit the earth. The proud man who does not mourn now, who lives for the present, has no future. The things he does have will be taken away. The man who lacks meekness is in a cursed position. The only thing waiting for him is the suffering of hell. Without the humility that acknowledges sin and looks to Christ, he has neither heaven nor earth but only the lake of fire.

When Jesus spoke of the meek inheriting the earth, He referred to two things. a) The Bible teaches that there will be an eventual victory of the gospel on this earth before the second coming of Christ. Believers may suffer in the present. They may be on the defensive. They may even be a minority despised by all men. But God will bless His gospel. Daniel says that the stone

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<sup>15</sup> D. Martyn Lloyd-Jones, *Studies in the Sermon on the Mount*, 64.

[Christ] that struck the image became “a great mountain and filled the whole earth” (Dan. 2:34-35). Paul says that a time is coming when even the Jews will be converted to Christ (Rom. 11:26). Isaiah says that “the earth will be full of the knowledge of the Lord as the waters cover the sea” (Isa. 11:9; cf. Hab. 2:14). David says that all nations will serve Him (Ps. 72:8-11); that all the ends of the world shall turn to the LORD (Ps. 22:27-28). Malachi teaches that Jesus’ name shall be great among the nations (Mal. 1:11). Our Lord said, that “the kingdom of heaven is like leaven, which a woman took and hid in three measures of meal till it all was leavened” (Mt. 13:31-33). The gospel of the kingdom will conquer until the whole earth is leavened.

Interestingly, Paul takes the promise that Abraham would inherit the land of Canaan (Gen. 13:15; 15:7) and applies it to all New Covenant believers through Christ. But, speaking by the Holy Spirit, he makes a significant change. He does not speak of believers as heirs of the land (i.e. Palestine), but as heirs of the world. “For the promise that he would be the heir of the world was not to Abraham or to his seed through the law, but through the righteousness of faith” (Rom. 4:13). “In light of Pauline teaching as a whole...we cannot exclude from the scope of this promise, as defined by the apostle, the inclusive messianic purport. It is defined as the promise to Abraham that he should be heir of the world, but it is also a promise to his seed and, therefore, can hardly involve anything less than the worldwide dominion promised to Christ and to the spiritual seed of Abraham in him.”<sup>16</sup> As believers in Jesus, we hold a title to the earth in Christ. Believers may endure suffering, but kingdom blessings will come in history upon this earth. What Mohammed, Napoleon, Hitler and Stalin attempted to do through brute force, Jesus will accomplish through the message of the gospel.

The blessing given to the meek will ultimately be fulfilled in the consummated order of the new heavens and the new earth. The time is coming when the wicked shall be cut down like grass (Ps. 37:2); they shall be cut off (Ps. 37:22) and like smoke they shall vanish (Ps. 37:20). But the righteous man’s inheritance shall be forever (Ps. 37:18). “The meek will inherit the earth and shall delight themselves in the abundance of peace” (Ps. 37:11). With this eternal perspective in view—this knowledge of complete vindication and victory—we can afford to be meek, humble and gentle. We can endure suffering, injustice and affliction at the hands of the wicked.

Jesus shows us the extreme folly of loving this world and the things of this world. Those who neglect Christ to attain riches, lands and possessions will, in the long run, lose everything. If you have not humbled yourself before God and embraced Christ, then right now is the time to do so. If you admit your sin and guilt and look to Christ and His atoning death, then you will be co-heirs with the Savior. “Therefore let no one boast in men. For all things are yours: whether...the world or life or death, or things present or things to come—all are yours. And you are Christ’s, and Christ is God’s” (1 Cor. 3:21, 22, 23).

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<sup>16</sup> John Murray, *The Epistle to the Romans* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, [1959, 65] 1968), 1:142.