



## Spiritual Meekness: An Imperative Virtue for Christian Leaders

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**“Blessed are the meek, for they will inherit the earth”**

Matthew 5:5

This well known statement of our Lord is taken from the Sermon on the Mount when expressing the Beatitudes. However, what does the attribute of *meekness* truly mean? Although this original proclamation by Jesus Christ took place approximately two thousand years ago, the term and its virtue has been referenced throughout the Bible all the way back to the life of Moses.<sup>1</sup> In today’s culture, does this term still have the same meaning and application for leaders and organizations?

This article will explore this crucial issue as it relates to values and ethics in order to demonstrate the significant impact it can have on greatly improving strategic leadership within organizations. More over, it will illustrate the assertive aspect of meekness in action by emphasizing that it does not represent a general disdain for business but an example of business bereft of meekness.<sup>2</sup> To that end, this manuscript will examine how meekness could be instilled in modern organizations and what the nature of leadership might be if meekness was a required part of the job description.

### Meekness Defined

In order to evaluate and discern this objective, it is imperative to fully understand the meaning of meekness. Dictionary.com describes meekness as docile, overly compliant, spiritless, yielding or tame.<sup>3</sup> Merriam-Webster define it as mild, deficient in courage, submissive and weak.<sup>4</sup> However, it is important to note that these modern day definitions of meekness hold an immensely different meaning from the spiritual connotation that is referenced in the Bible and utilized throughout this paper. Thus, the vernacular of meekness that will be espoused in this article may differ from your current definition. When exegetically analyzing the New Testament connotation of “meek”, it is essential to dissect it in Greek in order to correctly interpret its meaning. In this dialect, the word used is *prautes*, which connotes a total lack of self-pride, to the point of a lack of self-concern.<sup>5</sup> The poor and oppressed are often labeled as such, but not because they are cowed but as a result of their humility for their own position, and therefore place a greater emphasis on serving others. Another analogous Greek word for meek discerned via linguistic and historical analysis is *praus*, which is

expressed as a decided strength of disciplined calmness.<sup>6</sup> In contrast to inherent anger, this leadership virtue towards followers demonstrates a benevolent compassion for subordinates.<sup>7</sup>

Likewise, when exegetically examining the Old Testament, the Hebrew word for meek is *anaw*, which refers to someone who is afflicted or bearing a heavy burden.<sup>8</sup> It is largely an explanation about the circumstance someone is willing to endure, rather than a state to succumb to.<sup>9</sup> A great example of someone who lived this virtue was Moses, who was the meekest man to ever live.<sup>10</sup> For instance, Moses never complained to God about the grief Miriam and Aaron caused him. He simply choose to bear the burden. Moses' meek disposition was also evident in Exodus when he was literally wearing himself out trying to help everyone solve their problems.<sup>11</sup> In spite of this, he never complained or even gave thought to how it could affect him personally. Hence, Moses' meekness wasn't a character of timidity or letting other people run over him. On the contrast, it was a powerful demonstration of disciplined strength beyond what most people could endure.<sup>12</sup>

### Spiritual Meekness

Based on this spiritual example of meekness, it should start to become more clear that this virtue refers to those who are willing to share and sacrifice on behalf of others. Conversely, those who seek dominion and will use any means to trample and crush others are the opposite of what God refers to in Scripture. For instance, the Pharisees during Jesus' day trusted in himself that he was righteous, prayed with himself, and thanked God that he was better than other people.<sup>13</sup> On the other hand, the Publican pleaded for mercy admitting he was a sinner during this same parable.<sup>14</sup>

Consequently, meekness does not mean weakness! It doesn't mean that we must cower or retreat from our principles, and does not involve the surrender of our rights.<sup>15</sup> Meek men and women of the Bible demonstrated firm resolve, courage, conviction and strength. Furthermore, meekness in our organizations, as well as toward God's word, requires speaking out against immoral behavior and wickedness.<sup>16</sup> Thus, it demands that we deny ourselves and act on behalf of our followers.<sup>17</sup>

Meekness is also not a submissive or pacifying state, but rather an active proponent of what we know is right.<sup>18</sup> For example, recall the anger Moses exhibited when he came down from Mount Sinai and chucked down the tablets<sup>19</sup> and Jesus fury when He threw the merchants and money changers out of the temple on two separate occasions.<sup>20 21</sup> Thus, the main point about the meek is not their self control, but rather their absolute faith and trust in God. Hence, to be meek means to always turn to God for help, for direction, for training and for the sheer joy of this blessing.<sup>22</sup>

Given the significance that Scripture places on meekness, it is disappointing that it doesn't depict more of us who claim to be Christians. This is primarily attributable to our predominant concern with justifying ourselves rather than with edifying our brother, and at the corporate level, where we are more successful at organizing rallies, institutions, and pressure groups than at extending the kingdom of God.<sup>23</sup> Thus, in addition to the vastly different meanings that meek has when it's examined, the other reason for making this deliberate distinction is to consider the *source* behind this yielding behavior. In other words, spiritual meekness is worthy of this surrender because it is made to the omniscient and loving God that is worthy of our praise, worship and glorification.

## Attitudinal Meekness

Meekness is essentially an attitude or quality of heart whereby a person is willing to accept and submit without resistance to the will and desire of someone else.<sup>24</sup> In the case of Christians, this is God. However, for humanists, they receive their moral authority from a world that seeks its independence from themselves.<sup>25</sup> Unfortunately, this naïve belief has led our organizations into peril throughout history.<sup>26</sup> Moreover, this view can potentially drive leaders within organizations to be more self-seeking and despotic. From a Scriptural perspective, this paradigm is the opposite of what the Apostle Paul speaks of when he refers to the meekness of our Lord Jesus Christ.<sup>27</sup>

A spiritually meek person is not self-willed - not continually concerned with his own ways, ideas and wishes. They are willing to put themselves in second place and submit themselves to achieve what is good for others. Meekness is therefore the antithesis of self-will, self-interest, and self-assertiveness. This is a sign, not of weakness of character, but of strength. It'll require great self-control to submit to others. Consequently, it's a *servant-like* leadership quality that's absent from most modern day organizations.<sup>28</sup> It requires an intrinsic humility and integrity in order to reach its potential, but when it transforms, we have a godly leader that is selfless and servant focused.<sup>29</sup>

## The Ultimate Role Model

Throughout history, there have been many leaders that could be described as spiritually meek. However, the consummate role model that we can look to when aspiring towards this leadership virtue is Jesus Christ. Consequently, He told us that He was meek and demonstrated it through His willingness to take up our heavy burdens and bear them for us<sup>30</sup>, which He had prophesized through His prophet Isaiah.<sup>31</sup> In spite of His omniscient foresight of these events, He exhibited tremendous meekness by enduring this pain with no thought of self and without any complaint.

The ultimate expression of Jesus meekness was depicted when He had the power and ability to release twelve thousand angels at the snap of His finger before and during His crucifixion, yet refrained to atone and redeem mankind.<sup>32</sup> This self-less act of “power under control” revealed His grace, compassion and agape love.<sup>33</sup> The *power under control* that Jesus had rendered has two connected applications that are worth noting: (1) The need to bridle or curb power is one desired interpretation, particularly given the long list of bloodthirsty tyrants and dictators who had walked (and in some places still) walk this earth; (2) The sense of latent power that could be made manifest, but was rather held in check in service to a higher and greater cause.<sup>34</sup> Thus, the powerful example of Jesus' Crucifixion exemplified His meekness through the self-abnegation involved with forgoing a prompt release from excruciating pain, the unleash of forces capable of dispatching soldiers, assembled officials and unbelieving hecklers, and the redemptive value of power held in check for the greater good of others. Hence, in order to discern what meekness is, we should not examine its definition but attempt to model it through the life of Jesus Christ.<sup>35</sup>

## Fruit of the Spirit

Meekness is one of the fruits of the Spirit (i.e. a quality we must possess to be led by the Spirit) that often gets lost in today's culture due to our aggressive, self-centered society.<sup>36</sup> As depicted in the aforementioned text, this is primarily due to its perception that most secular people today can not identify with. However, it is a

quality of character that is very discernable in the greatest leaders to ever grace this earth, and one that is sorely needed today. More over, it is described by the Apostle Paul as a trait that all Christians must have in order to be an effective leader.<sup>37</sup> And most importantly, the spirit of meekness has been shown to be very precious in God's sight.<sup>38</sup>

This much misunderstood and maligned virtue can be an antidote for most of the nervous anxiety that greatly intensifies our day-to-day stresses of life. For instance, the meek are instructed to seek God for righteousness to overcome their injustices.<sup>39</sup> They are also encouraged to increase their dependence and joy in the Lord.<sup>40</sup> And subsequently, they are assured they will be lifted up to live eternally for their rectitude<sup>41</sup>, while the wicked are cast down to the ground.<sup>42</sup> The spirit of meekness enables its possessor to squeeze great enjoyment from their earthly possessions, and deliver them from a greedy disposition as a result of the contentment in their heart. Thus, this is not a virtue to ignore because carnal men consider it a weakness. It may appear to them as such, but the spiritual reality is that it is great strength, an attribute of the Almighty God and a fruit of His spirit that we need. In the end, a little that is righteous is better than riches of the wicked.<sup>43</sup>

Given the fact that we all sin, it is inevitable that we will loose our spirit of meekness. However, when this occurs to a fellow Christian, it is vital that we who are spiritual pick up their burden to help restore them to this virtue.<sup>44</sup> This moral ethic to bear one another's burden is the law of our Lord and Savior. If we patiently endure for what is right, then we have God's commendation.<sup>45</sup>

## Job Description

As significant and relevant as spiritual meekness has been demonstrated to be, it is not surprising that you will not find it as part of a leader's job descriptions given the contemporary connotation of this virtue. However, that's not to say it shouldn't be after considering the voluminous amount of evidence that has shown it would be a tremendous benefit to any organization's leadership.

In reflecting upon this opportunity, imagine what a Biblically based job description of spiritual meekness would look like if it were written for a secular audience? Firstly, it would need to be written in plain glass in order to use vernacular they are accustomed to. Secondly, it would need to illustrate the benefits of this virtue to the organization. And thirdly, it would need to correlate to attributes the leaders would identify with. From an organization's perspective, the meekness attribute would inculcate behavioral integrity to assure their espoused values are congruent with their leader's actions.<sup>46</sup> More over, the compulsion to behave ethically from this moral quality will carry over into greater transparency with respect to the leader's actions. And consequently, the character of their leaders will improve as they adapt to a level 5 servant leadership model.<sup>47</sup>

One of the *benefits* of meekness to leaders that are reviewing this virtue might read as follows:

### Adversity Preparedness

When leaders are faced with adversity, particularly the type that demands immediate attention to prevent a situation from exasperating, a common reaction is a push promulgation methodology.<sup>48</sup> The pro behind this approach is pragmatic expediency and speed to execute the desired change.<sup>49</sup> Conversely, the con of this paternalistic approach is that it can shatter your follower's trust and even deny them their individual dignity by

participating in the process to resolve the situation.<sup>50</sup> Hence, this attribute of meekness will require you to engage with your associates throughout the process to attain their buy in and avoid damaging their trust, which is vital for your leadership.<sup>51</sup>

Some of the other *benefits* to an organization that are reviewing this virtue might read as follows:

Develops Wisdom: Proud men end in shame, but the *meek* becomes wise.<sup>52</sup>

Mentorship: You younger men, follow the leadership of those who are older. And all of you serve each other with humble spirits, for God gives special blessings to those who are *meek*.<sup>53</sup>

Servant Leadership: Serve your associates meekly with decorum and empathic listening.<sup>54</sup>

Trust: Represent your follower's best interests with a meek heart, which means to be quick to listen and slow to speak.<sup>55</sup> They don't care what you know until they know that you care.<sup>56</sup>

Conflict Management: As you encounter those that irritate, anger and cause you grief in your leadership responsibilities, treat them with meekness in order to maintain your composure.<sup>57</sup>

Hence, meekness can resolve conflict through P.E.A.C.E.<sup>58</sup>: **P**lace your faith in Jesus Christ<sup>59</sup>

**E**mploy prayer in your decisions<sup>60</sup>

**A**adjust your focus from yourself<sup>61</sup>

**C**ontrol your anger and tongue<sup>62</sup>

**E**xude your humility and mercy<sup>63</sup>

## Conclusion

In closing, when we examine the last phrase of the Matthew 5:5 that was used to introduce this article: “shall inherit the earth”, this expression is a figure of speech that indicates the highest of blessings.<sup>64</sup> Consider that land is always inherited, it's not taken. It is not ours to take, but God's to give. Consequently, we have no absolute right to it because it ultimately belongs to Him. And although the foresight for this passage came from a Psalm of David, it carries endlessly into time.

In conclusion, *meekness* is not about giving up power but rather diligently harnessing it for the good of others. In other words, one must decide to act meek. It is not innate. It is an impressive self-control virtue that comes from our power as leaders of our respective organizations. Thus, what it really comes down to is what source you choose to follow: God or the world. Hence, consider meekness a spiritual cure (and acronym) for eliminating one's EGO (Easing God Out).

End Notes

<sup>1</sup> Numbers 12:3 NASB

<sup>2</sup> Molyneaux, D. (2003). 'Blessed are the meek, for they shall inherit the earth' an aspiration applicable to business? *Journal of Business Ethics*, 48(4), 347-364.

<sup>3</sup> meekness. (n.d.). *Dictionary.com Unabridged (v 1.1)*. Retrieved August 08, 2009, from Dictionary.com website: <http://dictionary.reference.com/browse/meekness>

<sup>4</sup> meekness. (2009). In *Merriam-Webster Online Dictionary*. Retrieved August 8, 2009, from <http://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/meekness>

<sup>5</sup> Leivestad, R. (Ja 1966). Meekness and gentleness of Christ, 2 Cor 10:1. *New Testament Studies*. 12(2), 156-164.

<sup>6</sup> Good, D. J. (1999). *Jesus the meek king*. Harrisburg, Pa: TPI.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid. 85.

<sup>8</sup> Clines, D. J. A., Gunn, D. M., & Hauser, A. J. (1982). *Art and meaning: rhetoric in Biblical literature*. *Journal for the Study of the Old Testament*, 19. Sheffield, England: JSOT Pr.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid.

<sup>10</sup> Numbers 12:3

<sup>11</sup> Exodus 18:13-23

<sup>12</sup> Morris, R. C. (My-Je 2000). Meek as Moses: Humility, Self-Esteem, and the Service of God. *Weavings*. 15(3), 37-44.

<sup>13</sup> Luke 18: 9-14

<sup>14</sup> Ibid.

<sup>15</sup> Kilgallen, J. J. (F 2003). The Pharisee and the publican (Luke 18:9-14): the point? *Expository Times*. 114(5), 157-159.

<sup>16</sup> James 1:21-25

<sup>17</sup> Matthew 16:24

- <sup>18</sup> Winston, B. (2002). *Be a leader for God's sake*. Virginia Beach, VA: Regent University.
- <sup>19</sup> Exodus 32:19
- <sup>20</sup> Matthew 21:12-13
- <sup>21</sup> John 2:14-17
- <sup>22</sup> Blessed are the meek. (Ag 2007). *Christianity Today*. 51(8), 48.
- <sup>23</sup> Carson, D. A. (2004). *Jesus' Sermon on the Mount and his confrontation with the world: An exposition of Matthew 5-10*. North Dartmouth, MA: Baker Books.
- <sup>24</sup> I Peter 3:4
- <sup>25</sup> Joas, H. (2000). *The genesis of values*. Chicago: University of Chicago.
- <sup>26</sup> Romans 12:1-2
- <sup>27</sup> 2 Corinthians 10:1
- <sup>28</sup> Ciulla, J. B. (Ed.). (2004). *Ethics: The heart of leadership* (2nd ed.). Westport, CT: Praeger.
- <sup>29</sup> Bouden, R. (2001). *The origin of values: Sociology and philosophy of beliefs*. New Brunswick, NJ: Transaction.
- <sup>30</sup> Matthew 11:29
- <sup>31</sup> Isaiah 53:4-7
- <sup>32</sup> Matthew 26:53
- <sup>33</sup> Miller, C. (1995). *The empowered leader*. Nashville, TN: Broadman and Holman. 6.
- <sup>34</sup> Baker, G. P. (Ja. 1953). The constant meek. *Interpretation*. 7(1), 34-41.
- <sup>35</sup> Kreeft, P. (1992). *Back to virtue: Traditional moral wisdom for modern moral confusion*. San Francisco: Ignatius Press.
- <sup>36</sup> Galatians 5:22-23
- <sup>37</sup> Titus 3:1-2
- <sup>38</sup> I Peter 3:3-4

<sup>39</sup> Zephaniah 2:3

<sup>40</sup> Isaiah 29:19

<sup>41</sup> Psalms 22:26

<sup>42</sup> Psalms 147:6

<sup>43</sup> Psalms 37:16

<sup>44</sup> Galatians 6:1-2

<sup>45</sup> I Peter 2:19-21

<sup>46</sup> Simons, T. L. (1999). Behavioral integrity as a critical ingredient for transformational leadership. *Journal of Organizational Change Management*, 12(2), 89-104.

<sup>47</sup> Collins, J. (2001). *Good to great: Why some companies make the leap...and others don't*. New York: HarperCollins.

<sup>48</sup> O'Toole, J. (1996). *Leading change: The argument for values-based leadership*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.

<sup>49</sup> Bossidy, L., & Charan, R. (2002). *Execution: the discipline of getting things done*. New York: Crown Business.

<sup>50</sup> O'Toole. 1995. 12.

<sup>51</sup> Pfeffer, J. (1998). *The Human Equation*. Harvard Press.

<sup>52</sup> Proverbs 11:2

<sup>53</sup> I Peter 5:5

<sup>54</sup> Ames Jr., G. R. (2009, August 5). Remain humble and serve others through God. *The Banner*, p. 6.

<sup>55</sup> James 1:19-27

<sup>56</sup> Ziglar, Z. (2005). *Great quotes from Zig Ziglar*. New York: Gramercy.

<sup>57</sup> Colossians 3:12-13

<sup>58</sup> Pollock, F. (2008). *An encouraging word* [Video]. (Available from Bell Shoals Baptist Church, 2102 Bell Shoals Rd, Brandon, FL 33511)

<sup>59</sup> Romans 3:22, 5:1

<sup>60</sup> Philippians 4:6-7

<sup>61</sup> Proverbs 18:1

<sup>62</sup> Proverbs 21:23, 29:11

<sup>63</sup> Proverbs 13:10

<sup>64</sup> Crosby, M. H. (2005). *Spirituality of the Beatitudes: Matthew's vision for the Church in an unjust world* (Rev. ed.). Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books.