

THE UPWARD CALL

*Brethren, I do not regard myself as having laid hold of it yet;
but one thing I do: forgetting what lies behind and reaching forward to what lies ahead,
**I press on toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God
IN CHRIST JESUS.**
(Philippians 3:13-14 NASB)*

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The Meek Inherit The Earth

April 24, 2009

Recently, the European press described President Obama as meek. Whether he is or is not meek, I do not know, and this is not the subject of this issue. What caught my attention was what I heard on a local talk-radio show. A woman called in to this show to complain about the president being called meek. She identified herself as a Christian and was upset because she did not want a meek president, as if meekness were a dirty word. Other callers, who seemed to hold the same beliefs as this woman, did likewise. So, what interested me was a so-called Christian seeing meekness as a bad character trait for our national leader and, I assume, other leaders as well. But wasn't Moses meek, and didn't the Lord Jesus call Himself meek and teach that the meek shall inherit the earth?

(Now the man Moses was very meek (H6035 *anav*) [humble], above all the men which were upon the face of the earth.) (Numbers 12:3 KJV [NASB, YLT])

Take my yoke upon you, and learn of me; for I am meek (G4235 *praos*) [gentle] and lowly [humble] in heart: and ye shall find rest unto your souls. (Matthew 11:29 KJV [NASB])

Tell ye the daughter of Zion, Behold, thy king cometh unto thee, meek (G4239 *praos*) [gentle], and sitting upon an ass, and a colt the foal of an ass. (Matthew 21:5 KJV [NASB])

[9] For evildoers will be cut off, but those who wait for the LORD, they will inherit the land. [10] Yet a little while and the wicked man will be no more; and you will look carefully for his place, and he will not be {there.} [11] But the humble (H6035 *anav*) [meek] will inherit the land, and will delight themselves in abundant prosperity. ... [22] For those blessed by Him will inherit the land; but those cursed by Him will be cut off. (Psalm 37:9-11, 22 NASB [KJV])

“Blessed are the meek (G4239 *praos*) [gentle/humble], for they shall inherit the earth.” (Matthew 5:5 ASV [ALT, NASB/ ISV, NLT])

This got me thinking, and I quickly realized that the issue is how one defines the word *meek* and, I should add, similar words like *gentle*, *humble*, and *lowly*. As noted in the above verses, English translations vary in which word they use in translating from the original languages.

In the English language, the words *meek*, *gentle*, *humble*, and *lowly* are synonyms that are often used interchangeably, even though there might be some subtle differences in their respective meanings. However, the greater challenge in using these words is the fact that they can have both a favorable and an unfavorable connotation. In a favorable sense, the word *meek* “stresses a mildness and patience of disposition which is not easily stirred to anger or resentment”; in an unfavorable sense, it “connotes spineless submissiveness.” In a favorable sense, the word *humble* “suggests an unassuming character in which there is an absence of pride and assertiveness”; in an unfavorable sense, it “connotes an almost abject lack of self-respect.” The word *lowly* is “an older equivalent for humble but never carries the unfavorable connotation of abjectness.” [Source: *Webster's New World Dictionary*, 1966, The World Publishing Company.]

The above explanation captures the full spectrum of the adjective *meek* and its noun form *meekness* (Greek feminine); however, the important question is: How does Scripture view *meekness*? The fact of the matter is that built into the meaning of meekness is the process by which one becomes meek. Meekness deals with one's character; it is a quality of character that comes about by a process or, we could say, through experiences of life. After all, what made Moses and Jesus meek, and what will make those who shall inherit the earth meek? We need to know.

To assist in our discussion, the Strong's Concordance numbers, along with the respective Hebrew or Greek transliteration of the word, have been placed in the above verses. According to Strong's Concordance, *anav* (H6035) means "*depressed* (figuratively), in mind (*gentle*) or circumstances (*needy*, especially *saintly*): - humble, lowly, meek, poor," and *praus* (G4239) is "apparently a primary word; *mild*, that is, (by implication) *humble*: - meek; similar to G4235 (*praus*)." Notice that the word *depressed* is used to define meek. To some, this might not be a very positive word. After all, who wants to be depressed? However, this makes sense if we understand that this speaks to a process, which is best explained by another Hebrew word for meek, *aniy* (H6041), which, according to Strong's Concordance, means "*depressed*, in mind or circumstances (practically the same as H6035 subjectively and H6041 objectively): - **afflicted**, humble`, lowly`, needy, poor." Notice the word *afflicted* and how it is used by Zechariah, as translated in a more literal translation.

Rejoice exceedingly, O daughter of Zion, Shout, O daughter of Jerusalem, Lo, thy King doth come to thee, righteous, and saved is He, afflicted (H6041) [meek/lowly/humble] and riding on an ass, and on a colt, a son of she-asses. (Zechariah 9:9 YLT [MKJV/KJV/NASB])

Jesus was meek because He was afflicted. In other words, the afflictions that he suffered gave Him the quality of meekness. Scripture says of Jesus as a man: **Although He was a Son, He learned obedience from the things which He suffered** (Hebrews 5:8). Christ was perfected or made complete in character through His sufferings. He is the Son perfected forever. He was a learner; He was teachable as He listened to His heavenly Father. Even His sinless soul was perfected as He cried out to the Father at Gethsemane. His soul was deeply grieved or, we could say, depressed to the point of death (Matthew 26:38). In other words, His character as Man was perfected through all that He suffered. This is why He is able to aid those who are tempted (Hebrews 2:18). He is a High Priest who can sympathize with our weaknesses (Hebrews 4:15) and who is able to save us to the uttermost (spirit, soul, and body) if we draw near to God through Him (Hebrews 7:25). Through His afflictions, He was made meek.

We see that the same character was developed in Moses as he suffered the reproach of Christ, looking to the reward, the reward of the inheritance of the kingdom.

By faith Moses, when he had grown up, refused to be called the son of Pharaoh's daughter; choosing rather to endure ill-treatment with the people of God, than to enjoy the passing pleasures of sin; considering the reproach of Christ greater riches than the treasures of Egypt; for he was looking to the reward. (Hebrews 11:24-26 NASB)

Moses suffered and became meek as he tended sheep on the west side of the wilderness (Exodus 3.1) for forty years. While in Egypt, he thought that he could deliver his brethren his way, but it would not do. He was too strong in himself. He had to be broken if he was to be of any use in fulfilling God's plan for the Hebrew people. Simply, he had to be broken of his own strength and understanding, and become totally dependent on the Lord. Like Jesus, Moses learned by the things that he suffered. First, he learned that he could not do what God had called him to do (Exodus 4.10). He was poor in spirit, and he needed God. Paul, who died daily, came to the same place in his life with Christ, for to him to live is Christ, and he learned to be content in all things and to do all things through Christ (Philippians 1:21; 4:10-13). Second, Moses learned of God's purpose and plan, which led him to line up with what God was doing (Exodus 4:18-23). Through his afflictions, Moses not only learned the ways of the Lord but also his utter need for the Lord. He became teachable, and this gave him the quality of meekness.

Thus, meekness is a quality of character, a virtue that is learned, and this learning comes through trial, suffering, or affliction. Knowledge comes from learning, and to learn one needs to be teachable; affliction is designed to make one teachable and pliable in the hands of God. The meek are ones who learn obedience through their suffering, affliction, or depression; who learn their utter dependence on and need for the Lord; who are broken; who are teachable and pliable. Through their trials, they have become patient, gentle, and kind toward others; they have been humbled to see that they are nothing but Christ is all; they seek for the reward, for the city which has foundations, whose architect and builder is God (Hebrews 11:10). They are the ones who will inherit the earth. **"You have made them to be a kingdom and priests to our God; and they will reign upon the earth"** (Revelation 5:10 NASB; also 20:6). So, let us not demean the word *meek*, but let us seek to be meek and pray that God raise up true leaders, ones who have become meek and teachable through their afflictions.