

Word Study Meekness

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Words are important. Indeed, it is impossible for man to express his ideas without words. It is even impossible to think without words. Someone once said: "Words are the currency in the realm of ideas". We have, therefore, to be careful with words. John Adams wrote: "Abuse of words has been the great instrument of sophistry and chicanery, of party, faction, and division of society". I think it is true that every word employed by the Holy Spirit through the envoys of Christ has been abused and given a misleading connotation in our generation. I need but mention here: bishop, priest, minister, deacon and baptism to prove the point.

To understand the Word of God is to understand the words of God. An important rule for proper interpretation is this: "Common usage, which can only be ascertained by testimony, must always decide the meaning of any word which has but one signification; but when words have, according to testimony, (i.e. the Dictionary) more meanings than one, whether literal or figurative, the scope, the context, or parallel passages must decide the meaning; for if common usage, the design of the writer, the context, and parallel passages fail, there can be no certainty in the interpretation of language." (Alexander Campbell). All my life I have tried to interpret God's word correctly. I believe God has spoken in the Bible. I, therefore, try at all times to approach it with the humility and docility of a child. "To such a one there is an assurance of understanding, a certainty of knowledge, to which the man of letters alone never attained, and which the mere critic never felt." (Campbell).

The word we are considering this month is *meekness*. A lot of people equate meekness with weakness. They could not be more wrong. Meekness is actually strength under control. The word, for example, was used in ancient times of a horse subject to the bit. There is a lot of strength in a horse and there is a lot of control by a rider.

The Bible speaks of meekness on thirty plus occasions. Here are a few passages for our consideration: "**Now the man Moses was very meek, above all the men who were upon the face of the earth.**" (Numbers 12:3). "**The meek will He guide in judgement: and the meek will He teach His way.**" (Psalm 25:9). "**But the meek shall inherit the earth; and shall delight themselves in the abundance of peace.**" (Psalm 37:11). "**For the Lord takes pleasure in His people; He will beautify the meek with salvation.**" (Psalm 149:4). "**The Spirit of the Lord is upon me; because the Lord has anointed me to preach good tidings unto the meek...**" (Isaiah 61:1a). "**Blessed are the meek: for they shall inherit the earth.**" (Matthew 5:5). "**But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, longsuffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, meekness, temperance: against such there is no law.**" (Galatians 5:22-23). "**Put on therefore, as the elect of God, holy and beloved, bowels of mercies, kindness, humbleness of mind, meekness, longsuffering...**" (Colossians 3:12). "**But you, O man of God,**

flee these things; and follow after righteousness, godliness, faith, love, patience, meekness.” (1 Timothy 6:11). **“...but let it be 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.”** (1 Peter 3:4).

The adjective in Hebrew is *ʿanaw* and the noun is *ani*. The Greek adjective is *praus* and the noun is *praotes*. The Hebrew adjective has also been translated as “humble”, “lowly”, and “poor” in the OT. In classical Greek, *praus* meant “gentle” (of things) and “mild” or “gracious” (of persons). Aristotle saw *praotes* as the secret of equanimity and composure. Many scholars have defined *praus* as: “Someone who is always angry at the right time and never angry at the wrong time”. Anger is very often seen as a sin, but, in the Bible, we read of God’s anger and wrath. Jesus manifested righteous indignation during His ministry on earth. We recall, for example, His action in driving the money changers from the temple (Matthew 21: 12-13; Mark 11: 15-17). The words of Paul come to mind: **“Be you angry, and sin not: let not the sun go down upon your wrath.”** (Ephesians 4:26). In other words: “If you be angry, which may be the case, and which may be unavoidable, see that the sudden excitement does not become sin. Do not let it overleap its proper bounds; do not cherish it; do not let it remain in your bosom even to the setting of the sun. Though the sun be sinking in the west, let not the passion linger in the bosom, but let his last rays find you always peaceful and calm.” (Albert Barnes).

“The supreme characteristic of the man who is *praus* is that he is the man who is under perfect control.” (William Barclay). Perfect control does not lie in self-control, but in God-control. It is vital that we all allow God to control our lives – that we all become true servants of the Paraclete, His Holy Spirit. Then we can be masters of ourselves and servants of others.

One final point. What does it mean: “Blessed are the meek: for they shall inherit the earth?” Was Jesus speaking of this earth? Where is the evidence for the meek possessing this present earth? I have thought about this a lot. Edwin W. Rice has commented: “The proud, the ambitious, the rich, may appear nominally to have much of earthly things, but they do not really enjoy them; only the meek take in all the true benefits to be drawn from the earth.” That may well be right. However, R.E.Nixon has written: “The *earth* may simply mean the ‘land’ with the idea of the promised land.” The Christian’s promised land or rest is, of course, beyond this scene of time. In other words, our everlasting inheritance is the “new earth” (Revelation 21:1). My late brother in Christ, Tom Nisbet, held this view. Many years ago I corresponded with him on various Biblical topics. On Matthew 5:5, he said: “ From our experience in this world we know that the physically meek person is not the one who inherits this physical earth or any part of it; it is usually the very opposite kind of person who does that. Therefore it cannot be the earth on which we now live that is meant. It is spiritual, and I believe the answer is in 2 Peter 3:13 and Revelation 21:1. Jesus would not promise us something that was to be burned up – not much use inheriting that. But after the earth and the works that are therein are burned up, then there will come about the “new heavens and a new earth, wherein dwell Righteousness”.