

**THE FRUIT OF THE SPIRIT, PART 8 (MEEKNESS)**  
**Galatians 5:22-23**

Many of you probably remember this like yesterday but in January of 1994, just two days before the Olympic figure skating trials, there was a “whack heard around the world.” Nancy Kerrigan, one of the figure skaters competing for a spot in the Olympics, was attacked by a man in the hallway of a Detroit ice-skating rink after practice. The man came up to her by surprise and actually clubbed her in the knees more than once, trying to injure her so that she could no longer compete. Some of you can recall the video of her sitting on the ground and crying out, “Why?” over and over. Well, upon investigation and following what was like a real-life soap opera, it was soon discovered that the ex-husband of Tonya Harding, another competing figure skater, was ultimately responsible for the attack. He had hired someone to injure Nancy and take her out of the competition ensuring Tonya a win. It’s a horrible story, but that’s the kind of dog-eat-dog world that live in, where in order to get to the top and make the money and get in the limelight, you just take out whoever is in your way. If someone’s on the ladder that you’re climbing and they’re in your way, you just push them off and keep climbing or use them for your own advantage as a stepping stone – do whatever it takes to get ahead. These days it’s popular to file a lawsuit – you sue McDonald’s for making their coffee too hot that you spilled on your lap; just this week a man is suing Popeye’s for running out of sandwiches. The mentality is that you do what it takes to get ahead and keep up with the Jones’, and it doesn’t matter at whose expense. Well that earthly, self-promoting attitude was spilling over into the Galatian churches. Undeserving, unconditional grace was being forgotten and legalistic spiritual competition was on the rise. Instead of grace and no peace there was envy and jealousy. They were in serious need of fruit of the Spirit virtue that is meekness (some of your translations read gentleness). You’ll see what I mean as we read our text again today in Galatians 5:13-26 today.

If you’re just joining us this morning or have recently joined us, we have spent this year in the book of Galatians, a powerful epistle authored by the apostle Paul to a group of churches in central Turkey that had been infiltrated by false teachers known as Judaizers. They were called Judaizers because they were mixing Old Covenant Mosaic Judaism with New Covenant Grace in Christ. Their message was salvation by faith in Christ **plus** works of the Law and they had really messed things up and brought the believers into bondage. Paul planted these churches and they were off to a great start in God’s grace – they believed in Christ and understood His payment for sin on the cross was sufficient and were experiencing the new freedom of spiritual life by the Holy Spirit. However, the Judaizers, who seemed to follow Paul around and make it their job to throw wrenches into the gears of everything he did, managed to succeed in Galatia. These believers had lost their confidence in Christ’s sufficiency and were resorting back to living by works of the Law – specifically circumcision and keeping OT Law and feasts. Because of this, the entire culture of the church had changed. They were no longer rejoicing over their salvation and believing they had all they needed in Christ, but back trying to earn it. They no longer saw each other as equal products of God’s incredible grace but were on competing scales again. Things had become very performance-based and competitive. Needless envy and jealousy were spreading. They were no longer walking by the Spirit who would produce **meekness** instead of the self-exalting jealousy and envy.

I find myself more and more convinced every week that the best way to understand the fruit of the Spirit that Paul mentions here is to simply look at the culture of the Galatian churches and study it in light of that. This virtue list is designed and pointedly aimed at the Galatian churches. Paul, carried along by the Holy Spirit in him, picked these specific virtues for the specific situation at hand and if we study these virtues without studying the Galatian problem of legalism or taking it into careful consideration, we can really miss

out on so much it has to say for us today in our local church. So I keep reminding us that though there is an inner war going on between the flesh and spirit and that battle begins within the individual, we have to remember that Paul has his goal set on correcting the overall culture of the church community. This virtue list that we call the fruit of the Spirit is mainly others-centered and designed to restore and transform the church community and relationships. So we need to ask the question: Is it having that effect on us as a community of believers here at Chadron Berean? As we've focused on the incredible and sufficient grace in Christ and how we're all one in Christ, growing in our understanding of all that we are in Christ, do we now see each other in Christ? As complete in Christ (Col. 2:10)? When we look at each other, do we see another trophy of God's grace or do we see each other on ladders? One a little higher than the other, one person deserving more or less grace than the other? Are we in competition for grace? What an insane thought! Grace by definition is free. It's unearned. But the attitude and mindset rubbing off of the Judaizers was the idea that we need to earn grace by works and with that comes this "me first" mindset. They were no longer serving each other but were self-absorbed. And that is not meekness. To understand meekness, which can be quite difficult to grasp, it's helpful to study the opposite of it.

### **I. THE OPPOSITE OF MEEKNESS.**

Because the focus is no longer on Christ and what He has done, the Galatians started doing – you could say they became religious. That's what happens when you forget the gospel. Religious, pharisaical arrogance and self-centeredness is being created by the legalism because at the core of any religion is an attempt *to exalt self* and develop your own righteousness. Christ isn't enough for the religious heart so it works to get to heaven by its goodness and works, right? The Pharisees were a great example of the opposite of meekness – full of **selfish ambition** and vain glory. The thesaurus describes the opposite of meekness as haughty, arrogant, assertive, harsh, brash, aggressive, domineering, condescending, pontificating, showy, swelled-headed, egocentric and narcissistic just to name a few. If someone is a narcissist – it means that life is all about them. They are all that they care for. When you search narcissism, it actually comes up as a personality disorder (which it's not a personality disorder, it's a sin). But here's what it said, "Symptoms include an excessive need for admiration, disregard for others' feelings, an inability to handle any criticism, and a sense of entitlement." It's the spirit that cries "Me first!"

#### **❖ The opposite of meekness is the spirit of "Me first!"**

I can't help but think of Diotrephes from 3 John. Paul says in 3 John 9, "I wrote something to the church, but Diotrephes, **who loves to be first** among them, does not accept what we say. For this reason, if I come, I will call attention to his deeds which he does, unjustly accusing us with wicked words; and not satisfied with this, he himself does not receive the brethren, either; and he forbids those who desire to do so and puts them out of the church." So here we have a great example of *the opposite of meekness*: a guy who loves to be first, wants all the attention, and not only that, wants all the power too. He wanted to lord himself over everyone and everything happening in the church and lacked compassion and mercy. Traveling evangelists and teachers were stopping by the church seeking shelter and sustenance, but he forbade it. I kept noticing in my studies that the opposite of meekness quite often seeks positions of authority like Diotrephes.

#### **❖ The opposite of meekness seeks positions of authority and abuses power.**

Think the tower of Babel. All the people in the world were spreading out and filling the earth like God wanted, but you had one bunch that said, "Let's stay and build a tower and make a name for ourselves and be the most powerful in the earth." Think of the sons of Korah who tried to usurp Moses's and Aaron's authority. The sons of Korah questioned them, "Why do you exalt yourselves above the assembly...and lord it over us?" (Numbers 16:3, 13). But were Moses and Aaron lorded it over them? No. They were simply doing what God asked. They didn't choose to be leaders. God

chose them. Moses was quite hesitant to lead. Actually Num. 12:3 says Moses was more meek than any man on the face of the earth! And we all know what happened to the unmeek sons of Korah – the earth split open and swallowed them up. The next day, many who blamed Moses and Aaron for it were killed by a plague. Miriam challenged Moses and ended up with leprosy. The Judaizers had the same self-appointing and self-exalting spirit. They loved to be first and wanted that power of being in a prominent position – but that’s just it – those who really want power really don’t belong in power because their heart isn’t right. Those who can handle it, typically are hesitant of it. Paul said in 4:17, “They [the Judaizers] eagerly seek you, not commendably, but they wish to shut you out so that you will seek them.” They hem you in – like cattle they shut all the gates leading to anyone’s voice but theirs or like a gymnasium, they close all the exit doors except the one where they are. Paul didn’t have a problem with others teaching in the church but these guys were removing freedom to think and trying to get them to only seek them and follow them. They were trying to get the Galatians into their system so that they would be sought. It was all about them. They don’t want people following Christ – they want people following them. It’s all a show for these guys and the more converts they made, the more they would boast. Look at 6:12: “Those who desire to make a good showing in the flesh... so that they may boast in your flesh.” False shepherds want numbers and notoriety, fame and fortune, power and authority.

And this opposite spirit of meekness is not fit to lead because it is impulsive, quick to retaliate out of anger and a lack of concern for others. It isn’t patient. It isn’t understanding. It isn’t wise. It reminds me of James and John early on in Christ’s ministry: There was a certain Samaritan village that wouldn’t receive them so they asked, “Lord, do You want us to command fire to come down from heaven and consume them?” like Sodom and Gomorrah or something (that’s how they earned the nicknames, “Sons of Thunder”). Jesus, “turned and rebuked them and said, “You do not know what spirit you are of; for the Son of man did not come to destroy men’s lives, but to save them.” You do not know what spirit you are of... whatever meekness is, that’s not it. That’s the opposite of it. Paul said recent converts weren’t to be elders because they can become conceited and fall into the condemnation incurred by the devil. James actually describes this “me first” attitude as **earthly, natural and demonic, but meekness he describes as wisdom from above**. “Who among you is wise and understanding? Let him show by his good behavior his deeds in the gentleness[*same word for meekness*] of wisdom. But if you have bitter jealousy and selfish ambition in your heart, do not be arrogant and so lie against the truth. This wisdom is not that which comes down from above, but is earthly, natural, demonic. For where jealousy and selfish ambition exist, there is disorder and every evil thing. But the wisdom from above is first pure, then peaceable, gentle, reasonable, full of mercy and good fruits, unwavering, without hypocrisy. And the seed whose fruit is righteousness is sown in peace by those who make peace” (Jas. 3:13-18). The opposite of meekness is spurred on by jealousy and selfish ambition and it is not pure, not peaceable, not gentle, not considerate, not full of mercy or good fruits, not stable, and is hypocritical. But the wisdom of meekness is good in all of those things. Let’s study it more now.

## II. **THE MEEKNESS OF THE SPIRIT.**

Meekness is not natural to man. It is too wise. It cannot be had without the Spirit of God because **it is, as James said, from above**. If you don’t have the Spirit from above, you can’t have His meekness and you only receive the Spirit and go to Heaven when you die by putting your faith in Christ. If you haven’t confessed your sin and accepted Christ as your Savior from sin, you can do that today, right where you sit right now. The biblical command is believe on Christ and you shall be saved (John 3:16). But even for recent converts, meekness can be hard to come by. I think it can

be seen the most clearly in those who have been walking with the Lord consistently for a long time and are truly servant leaders. It's one of those things that's hard to explain but you know it when you perceive it. I wish we could just call it humility and it is closely linked to it, but it is more than that. Ephesians 4:2 puts humility and meekness side by side. I wish we could just call it gentleness too, as it is often translated, but it is more than that as well. Gentleness in English doesn't quite capture it. One of the problems with meekness is that it is **often misunderstood as weakness or helplessness**, like a little lamb with it's feet tied. Nietzsche said meekness is a false virtue that the weak applaud because it's the only virtue they can actually pull off. It was a virtue that was not applauded in the Greco-Roman society of Paul.<sup>1</sup> But meekness is anything but weakness. It is not a helpless victim that can do nothing. It is actually best described as power under control.

❖ **Meekness is power under control.**

Like a powerful horse that is capable of so much yet has been tamed and trained to use its power for good. It is considerate and submissive. It has restraining power. **It shows restraint out of consideration for others** – unlike the sons of thunder who just wanted to call down fiery indignation on everyone. It doesn't use its position or power to push people around or play king of the mountain. It doesn't explode on someone or retaliate when it's wronged but has the wisdom to trust in and wait on the Lord and to seek the **long term** good of others. Meekness is **not easily provoked** by offense and injury because it has its hope set on God and eternal blessings, not just temporal. It can see through certain natural responses and into deeper issues. Because of that, it is **“prepared to endure anything rather than do the like actions to wicked men...”** It is to **lose what you could preserve** like standing, power, a good name, or the material goods.<sup>2</sup> You see, it's not that the meek doesn't have the power or right to defend itself, but that **it refuses strike back and be just like the one that struck it**. I guess we could say that in a dog-eat-dog world, that the dog being eaten refuses to be just like the other dog and eat back. When Jesus said the meek shall inherit the earth, He probably quoted the best chapter on meekness in all of Scripture – Psalm 37. “Do not fret because of evildoers, be not envious toward wrongdoers. For they will wither quickly like the grass and fade like the green herb. [rather] Trust in the Lord and do good; dwell in the land and cultivate faithfulness. Delight yourself in the Lord; And He will give you the desires of your heart. Commit your way to the Lord, trust also in Him, and He will do it. He will bring forth your righteousness as the light and your judgment as the noonday [let Him vindicate you!]. Rest in the Lord and wait patiently for Him; do not fret because of him who prospers in his way because of the man who carries out wicked schemes. Cease from anger and forsake wrath; do not fret; it leads only to evildoing. For evildoers will be cut off, but those who wait for the Lord, they will inherit the land. 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. But the humble[meek] will inherit the land and will delight themselves in abundant prosperity. The wicked plots against the righteous and gnashes at him with his teeth. The Lord laughs at him, for He sees his day is coming. The wicked have drawn the sword and bent their bow to cast down the afflicted and the needy, to slay those who are upright in conduct. Their sword will enter their own heart, and their bows will be broken.”

In Psalm 37 you really get the point about meekness not retaliating and defending itself because it is wiser than that. It doesn't mean it is helpless to fight back, it just has control over the anger and refuses to do evil as evil does evil. When the wicked come for you and slander you and malign you for your upright conduct – something we're going to see more and more as this nation drifts into godlessness – **meekness is a virtue we will need more and more** – if you don't support the homosexuality or you don't support abortion, and are labeled as a bigot with hate speech and slandered, but how do you respond? You see the persecuted church understand this virtue more than anyone – do you retaliate? It's not that you can't retaliate, but that you refuse to out of concern

for them and refusing to be just like them. The meek remain faithful and submissive to God and wait for God to vindicate them in His timing and in His way.

Meekness is one of those words that comes up twice in regards to evangelism and apologetics (defending the faith). When you're in a debate with someone and they are criticizing you and your beliefs, you need power under control regarding your tongue. 2 Timothy 2:24-25 says, "The Lord's servant must not be quarrelsome, but kind to all, able to teach, patient when wronged, with gentleness [meekness] correcting those who are in opposition." 1 Peter 3:13-15 says, "Who is there to harm to you if you prove zealous for what is good? But even if you should suffer for the sake of righteousness, you are blessed. And do not fear their intimidation, and do not be troubled, but sanctify Christ as Lord in your hearts, always being ready to make a defense to everyone who asks you to give an account for the hope that is in you, yet with gentleness [meekness] and reverence." Meekness controls the power of the tongue.

There's a reason Jesus said in the Sermon on the Mount, "The meek shall inherit the earth" (Mt. 5:5) – because they're the only ones who can really handle something like that! It's a virtue for the coming kingdom and for eternity. Regarding the kingdom Jesus said, "many who are first will be last; and the last, first." The way up in His kingdom is down. Only the meek are fit to rule in His kingdom. Do you remember what Paul said to the Corinthians in 1 Cor. 6 who were taking each other to court? Do you, "dare go to law before unrighteous and not before saints? Or do you not know that the saints will judge the world? If the world is judged by you, are you not competent to constitute the smallest law courts? Do you not know that we will judge angels? How much more matters of this life? So if you have law courts dealing with matters in this life, do you appoint them as judges who are of no account in the church? I say this to your shame. Is it so, that there is not among you one wise man who will be able to decide between his brethren...?" Is there not a meek man with wisdom from above to make a decision for you? But then he says this because they shouldn't need that man if they themselves were meek! "Actually, then, it is already a defeat for you, that you have lawsuits with one another. Why not rather be wronged? Why not rather be defrauded? On the contrary, you yourselves wrong and defraud. You do this even to your brethren. Or do you not know that the unrighteous will not inherit the kingdom of God?" Meekness would put a stop to those lawsuits against each other before they even begin and again, inheriting the kingdom comes up, as it does often with meekness.

Before Peter had the Spirit of God, he was not meek. He was the mouthpiece for everyone and bossy – "Me first." But after He denied Christ three times, his disposition changed didn't it? Now Christ was having to talk Him into feeding His sheep. But it took that failure to create a meek, "Who am I?" spirit in him that is necessary for church leadership. You see, the meek are not impressed with themselves. One commentator even wrote that meekness is, "the quality of not being overly-impressed with a sense of one's own self-importance."<sup>3</sup> Instead of, "Me first," meekness says something more along the lines of, "Who am I?" I'm a product of grace. I only do my duty. Without Him I can nothing (Jn. 15:5). Like David, when God extended the Promise of Abraham to Him – "Who am I?" (2 Sam. 7:18). That wasn't false humility, he was being serious – "Who am I, O Lord God, and what is my house, that You have brought me this far?" Like Mephibosheth when David extended to him all the rights of being a son of the king, giving him all Saul's possessions and eating regularly at the King David's table, said, "What is your servant that you should regard a dead dog like me?" (2 Sam. 9:8).

❖ **The meek spirit says, "Who am I?"**

The meek understands free grace and that they don't deserve it. Therefore, they can be gracious and merciful to others! The meek are merciful and considerate, even to the ignorant. **Jesus is described as meek and humble at heart.** He was meek to the ignorant. When He was arrested in the Garden of Gethsemane, He could've called down legions of angels to come and rescue Him. When He was slapped and spit on, beaten and flogged, He could've retaliated in righteous indignation. He could've called down fire – but He had power under control. On the cross He cried out, “Father forgive them, for they know not what they do.” They were quite ignorant of His power and identity but He didn't retaliate and He didn't defend Himself. But He also wasn't some helplessness victim. **Out of submission to the Father, it was power under control. And so we're not surprised that once again, the cross is our greatest example of meekness.**

### III. **WHAT MEEKNESS LOOKS LIKE IN OUR RELATIONSHIPS.**

There was one translation that didn't translate this word *prautes* as meekness or gentleness. It translated it as “Good Faith”. And I liked that. Meekness is having enough good faith in someone to be considerate of them and submit to them and their interests as more important than your own.

#### **A. It submits to God. (1 Pet. 5:1-7; Jas. 4:6-10)**

It doesn't fight against God or debate Him continually or question His commands and motives. It has good faith in Him. Meekness is said to be “that temper of spirit in which we accept His dealings with us as good, and therefore without disputing or resisting.” Like Psalm 37, it trusts the Lord and waits on Him even when it still can't find a reason too or explain the trial. It submits to the Scripture too. James says, “In meekness receive the word implanted, which is able to save your souls.” In 1 Peter 5:5-7, Peter told younger men aspiring to be leaders in the church (who tend to be aggressive and quite ambitious) to submit to God by submitting to the elders in charge of them until they're really ready. “Humble yourselves under the mighty hand of God, that He may exalt you at the proper time, casting all your anxiety on Him, because He cares for you.” Meekness understand that it's God who ultimately does the exalting His way in His timing.

One of the things I don't want us to take home from today is that since we aren't to promote ourselves and be selfishly ambitious, we then apply that to everything and fail to do anything with what the Lord has entrusted us with or fail to stand up for anything in this world. That would be the **wax fruit of meekness**, which fails to take any initiative or do anything or assert anything. Wax fruit meekness is complacent and makes excuses. It basically says, “Well, God is sovereign so I'll just sit here.” That's not meekness. True meekness, as James said, is unwavering in planting seeds or watering seeds. It understands God is sovereign and it is up to Him to cause the growth, but that doesn't stop the meek from planting and watering (1 Cor. 3:7). There was a terrible ending for one man in Jesus' parable of talents who didn't do anything with the talent that was entrusted to Him in life (Matt. 25:14-30). So like we saw last week, we are to be faithful stewards of the gifts, talents, resources and personalities God gave us. We were created in Christ Jesus for good works (Eph. 2:10).

#### **B. It submits to others out of reverence for Christ. (Eph. 5:21-6:9; 1 Pet. 5:5)**

How we think ourselves effects how we conduct ourselves with others. John Stott said, “Our conduct to others is governed by opinion of ourselves.”<sup>4</sup> The meek see themselves as products of God's grace and by nature grace is inclusive, not exclusive like a Judaizer. Look at Galatians 6:1. It says, “Brethren, if anyone is caught in any trespass, you who are spiritual, restore such a one in a spirit of gentleness [meekness]; each one looking to

yourself, so that you too will not be tempted. Bear one another's burdens and so fulfill the Law of Christ. For [*and here is the opposite of meekness and what the Judaizers thought*] if anyone thinks he is something when he is nothing, he deceives himself." The Judaizer's thought they were something special. They were arrogant, and when you're arrogant like that, you think less of others and aren't merciful. But the meek, who are spiritual, do not come to a hurting or downcast brother or sister harshly or arrogantly, but come with understanding and are considerate of the fact that even they are simply a product of God's grace and any time, they too can fall. That's what meekness looks like carried out in our relationships. It's a brother or sister helping to carry another's burden. Being submissive and teachable out of reverence for Christ. It's an elder leading with a servant heart and not lording it over those allotted to their charge (1 Pet. 5:2-4; Philemon 1:8-9), a congregation submitting to its elders, a persecuted believer refusing to retaliate, a wife submitting to her husband and her husband loving her with the love of Christ, a child submitting to their parents – all out of a submission to God and His Word and in a reverence for Christ (Eph. 5:21). The first, last. The last, first. Up is down, down is up.

If the opposite of meekness is like the story of Nancy Kerrigan and Tonya Harding, trying to one up the other and take the other out of the race, meekness is more like these pictures we see during the Boston Marathon of one or two runners helping another runner finish their race, carrying them along. Stopping and submitting to the idea that their interests are more important than their own. Yeah you might get passed up if you stop to help someone, but the last will be first. Matthew 20:24-28 – “But Jesus called them to Himself and said, ‘You know that the rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and their great men exercise authority over them. It is not this way among you, but whoever wishes to become great among you shall be your servant, and whoever wishes to be first among you shall be your slave; just as the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give His life as a ransom for many.’”

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<sup>1</sup> Derek Rishmawy, *Meekness Is Not Weakness* article: Christianity Today June 2019, 28.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid.

<sup>3</sup> BDAG, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000), 861.

<sup>4</sup> John Stott, *The Message of Galatians: The Bible Speaks Today* (Downers Grove, Illinois: Intervarsity Press, 1968), 159.