

## ***The Refiner's Fire***

# ***Meekness in the Crucible***

Lesson #10 for December 8, 2007

Scriptures: Exodus 32:1-14; Psalm 62:1-8; Ezekiel 24:15-27; Matthew 5:5,43-48; 1 Peter 2:18-25.

1. What is meekness? Is it the same as humility? What comes to your mind when someone says "meekness"? Or "humility"? Do you know someone today who is truly meek and humble? Why does God place such value on these qualities? Do meekness and humility have a special purpose in our lives today?
2. In our self-centered, competitive, egotistical world, meekness and humility almost seem out of place. Meekness is sometimes described as "enduring injury with patience and without resentment." Why would anyone want such a characteristic? Can you name five truly meek people?
3. The German writer and philosopher, Nietzsche, said that Judaism and Christianity had turned the world on its head. In his way of thinking, "might made right;" strength and power were supposed to rule; and there was no place for meekness, humility, or care for the poor, disabled, or disadvantaged. His philosophy would suggest that in a world that was supposed to have come to its present condition through "survival of the fittest," we should just eliminate stragglers and the weak.
4. Why do you think Jesus said, "Blessed *are* the meek, for they shall inherit the earth"? (Matthew 5:5, *KJV*) Consider the paraphrase rendered by the *Message Bible*: "You are blessed when you're content with just who you are—no more, no less. That's the moment you find yourselves proud owners of everything that can't be bought." If Jesus is trying to prepare a group of people to go to heaven, do they really need to be meek and humble?
5. Our Bible study guide suggests that "meekness is one of the most powerful characteristics of Jesus and His followers." If we are supposed to be "attractive witnesses" to the world, are people attracted to humility and meekness?
6. Is there a relationship between suffering and meekness? From a Christian perspective, is meekness a strength or a weakness?
7. We understand that those who reach heaven will love each other. They will also serve each other. Is it easier to love and serve others when you are truly humble and meek? If meekness is the same as doing things "with patience and without resentment," will there be a need for such characteristics in heaven?
8. Bible students often think of Moses when they hear the word "meekness." Read Numbers 12:1-3. Considering what you know about the life and early training of Moses, how did he get to be meek and humble? Did he learn it from his parents who were slaves? From his training in the Egyptian palace? From herding sheep? From his time spent with God in the wilderness? If you had had personal, almost intimate conversations with God, would you be inclined to be more humble? Right after describing Moses as the meekest man on earth, God said:

Listen carefully to what I'm telling you. If there is a prophet of GOD among you, I make myself known to him in visions, I speak to him in dreams. But I don't do it that way with my servant Moses; he has the run of my entire house; I speak to him intimately, in person, in plain talk without riddles: he ponders the very form of GOD. So why did

you show no reverence or respect in speaking against my servant, against Moses?  
(Numbers 12:6-8, *Message*)

9. Are humble, meek people better able to relate to God?
10. There are some very strange stories in the Bible that might teach us something about meekness. Read Ezekiel 24:15-27. Why did God allow Ezekiel's wife to die and then tell him not to mourn or even act like he missed her? The children of Israel had lost virtually everything and were essentially slaves. But God told them to settle down, act like normal people, build houses, inhabit them, and grow vineyards and crops. The final destruction of Jerusalem was just about to take place. How would you respond if you received the news that you had lost virtually everything in your life that you considered valuable? Is that a time for meekness and humility?
11. When people who are not meek and humble get into difficult situations, they often get angry and want to fight back. Getting angry and fighting back would never do in heaven. Is that why God wants us to be meek and humble?
12. God is the most powerful Being in the entire universe. Is it even possible for such a Being to be humble?
13. Does being meek and humble mean that we are, more or less, like a "doormat," and that we allow unscrupulous people to "walk all over us"? If we see injustice and mistreatment of others taking place, is that a time for meekness and humility or a time for action? Are some people apparently meek and humble because they are afraid to get involved?
14. Why do you think that Jesus promised that the meek will inherit the earth? We often say that those who will be saved are those who have faith and love. Is there a specific relationship between faith/love and meekness/humility?
15. Read Exodus 32:1-14. Why do you think God kept Moses in the mountains so long that the people down below were afraid he had disappeared? Was God intentionally testing them? Why did the people decide to make a golden bull-calf? Clearly, they understood that the One leading them was more than a piece of metal! So when they formed that golden bull-calf and began to worship it—dancing drunk and naked around it—what were they thinking that led them to say, "Israel, this is our God, who led us out of Egypt"? Is it possible that they thought that some fertility cult "god" actually caused all those plagues on Egypt, produced the pillar of smoke and fire, and parted the Red Sea, destroying the Egyptians?
16. God knew all that was going to happen.

The people sat down to a feast, which turned into an orgy of drinking and sex. The LORD said to Moses, "Hurry and go back down, because **your** people, whom **you** led out of Egypt, have sinned and rejected me."... Now, don't try to stop me. I am angry with them, and I am going to destroy them. Then I will make **you** and **your** descendants into a great nation." (Italics supplied; Exodus 32:6-10, *GNB*)

At that time, was God giving us an example of humility and meekness?

17. Exodus 32 goes on to say:

But Moses pleaded with the LORD his God and said, "LORD, why should **you** be so angry with **your** people, whom **you** rescued from Egypt with great might and power? Why should the Egyptians say that **you** led **your** people out of Egypt planning to kill

them in the mountains and destroy them completely? Stop being angry; change your mind and do not bring this disaster on *your* people.” (Italics supplied; Exodus 32:11-12, *GNB*)

18. Doesn't that sound like two parents squabbling over misbehaving children? Why would God ask Moses to record—or even let Moses record—such a conversation? What does it teach us about God and about Moses? Did Moses really convince God to stop being angry? Or was that whole conversation a “test” for Moses? Remember that after dying a few years later, Moses was taken to heaven. Did the onlooking universe need to see that Moses was that loving, caring, and unselfish? After hearing that conversation, would you be more or less inclined to want to have Moses as a “next-door neighbor”?
19. What reasons did Moses give for not wanting God to make a great nation out of him and his descendants? Perhaps the greatest indication of true friendship is that friends look out for each other and stand up for their friend's reputation. What was happening to the children of Israel at that point in time was an entirely unique experience. No nation before or since had/has been led so intimately and directly by any “god.” You can be sure that all the surrounding nations—and the onlooking universe—were closely observing what was going on. (See Joshua 2:8-13) Remember that Egypt was probably the most powerful nation in the world at that time. What would it say about God to them—and to you—that He could bring such a powerful nation to its knees; but after leading His children out into the wilderness, He just destroyed them? Moses was ready to give up his own life rather than allow any questions to be raised about God's reputation!
20. Over the next 40 years, several challenges arose to Moses's leadership. Even his brother and sister raised questions about him! (Numbers 12) Later, Moses' cousin and others who were supposed to be leaders among the people challenged him. (Number 16) In every case except one, Moses responded with meekness, humility, and grace.
21. Consider the lives of some others who were called humble in the Scriptures. Hezekiah was “too proud” but then “humbled” himself. (2 Chronicles 32:24-26) Was that really humility? Consider Hezekiah's earlier experiences! Jesus also described Himself as very meek and lowly. (Matthew 11:28,29) Dr. Luke also recorded Paul's speech when he said that he worked with all humility. (Acts 20:19) What do you think Paul had in mind at that time?
22. Have you personally witnessed a time when someone's humility turned out to be a powerful Christian witness? Why do you think the world considers meek and humble people to be weak, timid, ignorant, even “mousy”?
23. Why do we need to learn to “love” our enemies? How does that prepare us for heaven?
24. Read Matthew 5:43-48. Loving our enemies is about as unlikely a behavior for normal human beings as anything we can imagine! Who are our enemies? Why do we think of them as enemies? How did they get that way? Someone once said, “Love your enemies! After all, you created them!”
25. Is God really expecting something that is impossible for ordinary human beings? Is God asking us to have warm, sentimental feelings toward our “enemies”? Or is God asking us to treat them with care and consideration? Abraham Lincoln once suggested that the best way to destroy one's enemies is to make friends out of them!
26. How does God deal with Satan? Does God really love His enemies? Why does God give Satan so much freedom and control of this earth?

27. When God spoke to Moses and said, "Step aside and let me make a great nation out of you," (Exodus 32:10) shouldn't Moses have said, "God has said it, I believe it, and that's all there is to it"?
28. **What would happen if all Christians made up their minds to truly love all Muslims? Could we conduct a "love campaign" in Iraq? Or is "loving your enemies" a nice theme song but not practical?**
29. Sometimes we find ourselves in undesirable situations. Christians should always work for freedom, fairness, and equality. Read 1 Peter 2:18-25. Those who were slaves in the Roman world were treated about as badly as anyone could be treated. How could Peter tell them not to respond to insults and/or suffering, but rather, to place their hopes in God? He told them to serve their masters faithfully. Doesn't that sound a little bit like allowing yourself to be treated like a "doormat"? Does it help in such situations to know that ultimately and finally, God is in control?
30. Is there ever a time for Christians to get involved in civil disobedience?
31. Augustine of Hippo (Saint Augustine), an early Christian theologian, once said, "Humility is the foundation of all the other virtues; hence, in the soul in which this virtue does not exist there cannot be any other virtue except in mere appearance." Do you agree with that statement? How did he come to that conclusion?
32. Wouldn't pride be the opposite of humility? Often, proud people act in boastful, arrogant, even pushy, ways because they have low self-esteem. If the Christian has a right relationship with God, can he stop worrying about self-esteem?
33. Could we say that ultimately, meekness and humility come by honestly looking at ourselves through God's eyes? Why is God's view of us so different from the world's view of us?
34. How can Christians learn humility and meekness? Almost certainly, it requires a humble and meek example. It is not something that can be taught from a book!

The difficulties we have to encounter may be very much lessened by that meekness which hides itself in Christ. If we possess the humility of our Master, we shall rise above the slights, the rebuffs, the annoyances, to which we are daily exposed, and they will cease to cast a gloom over the spirit. **The highest evidence of nobility in a Christian is self-control.** He who under abuse or cruelty fails to maintain a calm and trustful spirit robs God of His right to reveal in him His own perfection of character. Lowliness of heart is the strength that gives victory to the followers of Christ; it is the token of their connection with the courts above. (DA 301.3)

35. Do our friends see us as a "safe refuge"? Is your church a refuge for those who have been abused by the world? Are people attracted by our meekness and humility?

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