# THE GENTLE MAN; A BIBLICAL MANDATE

Text: Matthew 11:28-30

In all of the biblical texts of the four Gospels, i.e., Matthew, Mark, Luke and John consisting of eighty-nine chapters, there is only one place where Christ describes Himself. Now that your curiosity is piqued, allow me to get right to the point; it is found in Matthew 11:29. “Take My yoke upon you, and learn of Me; for I am meek and lowly in heart: and ye shall find rest unto your souls.” In this description our Lord tells us to “…learn of Me….” On either side of Matthew 11:29 our Lord gives the admonition and requirement to be learners of our Lord’s nature as evidenced in Matthew 9:13 and Matthew 12:7, 17-20. The Lord is saying, look beyond admiration of Me on this matter; imitate it. I can think of no better message to bring to fathers on this Father’s Day morning than to challenge each and every dad and future dads to obey the Lord’s command and learn this great principle, which, in essence, is to be a “gentle man.”

## 1. WHAT DOES MEEK AND LOWLY MEAN?

Meek is translated from the Greek word *praos*, which means gentle, humble, mild and, of course, meek. I found a great definition of a word akin to meek--gentleness (*prautes*) which describes those who are of a quiet, gentle spirit, in opposition to the proud and supercilious Scribes and Pharisees and their disciples. The compound word *gentleman* once fully expressed the meaning of the word *meek*, but in our modern society it has almost wholly lost its original meaning. Numbers 12:3: “Now the man Moses was very meek, above all the men which were upon the face of the earth.” As we observe Moses in Scripture, we see that this is no mousy, namby-pamby man. He stands before the most powerful man in the earth (Pharaoh) demanding right to be done in letting the children of Israel be free to leave their enslavement. He (through the Lord’s help), picks up poisonous snakes by their tails, orchestrates ten plagues upon Egypt and parts the Red Sea. Meekness is not weakness; it is power under control. More importantly, it is power under God’s control.

William Barclay wrote of the word *meek*: “It was the lack of that very quality which ruined Alexander the Great, who, in a fit of uncontrolled temper in the middle of a drunken debauch, hurled a spear at his best friend and killed him. No man can lead others until he has mastered

himself; no man can serve others until he has subjected himself; no man can be in control of others until he has learned to control himself. But the man who gives himself into the complete control of God will gain this meekness which will indeed enable him to inherit the earth." Matthew 5:5: "Blessed are the meek: for they shall inherit the earth."

Wuest writes that *tapeinos* (the Greek word we translate lowly) "is found in an early secular document where it speaks of the Nile River in its low stage in the words, 'It runs low.' The word means 'not rising far from the ground.' It describes the Christian who follows in the humble and lowly steps of his Lord." The Lord Jesus said, "Ye have heard how I said unto you, I go away, and come again unto you. If ye loved Me, ye would rejoice, because I said, I go unto the Father: for My Father is greater than I" (John 14:28). These words were said shortly before our Lord died, rose again and ascended to the Father. You see, while Christ was on Earth, He submitted Himself to the Father's perfect will. Notice the wording of Philippians 2:6-8: "Who, being in the form of God, thought it not robbery to be equal with God: But made Himself of no reputation, and took upon Him the form of a servant, and was made in the likeness of men: And being found in fashion as a man, He humbled himself, and became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross." As Christ was giving the farewell addresses to His disciples He was telling them that this time on earth was a temporary dispensation when He would operate in subservience to the heavenly Father until He was joined again at the throne in Heaven where equality with the Father would be exercised. If, therefore Christ could humble Himself while on the earth, why do we not do the same?

2. OUR LORD PRACTICED WHAT HE PREACHED.

Matthew 11:2, 3: "Now when John had heard in the prison the works of Christ, he sent two of his disciples, And said unto Him, Art thou He that should come, or do we look for another?" Jesus sent John the most comforting answer in Matthew 11:4-6. To understand better the kindness, meekness and gentleness of our Lord's nature, let's go back to the prophecy of Isaiah, of which our Lord was referring. John was very familiar with the prophecies from which Jesus was quoting (Isaiah 35:3-6; Isaiah 61: 1-3). In this prophecy the Lord strengthens the weak, feeble and fearful. He also uses those ancient words to assure John that he has been right on time, it is indeed the year of our Lord and John was the one who rightly introduced this prophetic timing. I actually believe Jesus was giving John the truth that the Heaven he was about to enter is a precursor to the coming golden age when beauty shall be exchanged for ashes, joy for

mourning and the garment of praise for the broken hearted. And then follows up by saying in Matthew 11:6: “And blessed is he, whosoever shall not be offended in Me.”

The woman at the well was not given a pass on sins that she had committed, but Christ revealed through their conversation that He was indeed the Messiah and that she, as well as anyone who would repent, wherever they were and whoever they were could find worship and acceptance in Him (John 4:16-29). In a similar situation our Lord saves the life of the woman caught in the “very act” of adultery (John 8:4). The words of our Lord show His mercy combined with justice. John 8:10, 11: “When Jesus had lifted up himself, and saw none but the woman, He said unto her, Woman, where are those thine accusers? hath no man condemned thee? She said, No man, Lord. And Jesus said unto her, Neither do I condemn thee: go, and sin no more.” Romans 8:3: “For what the law could not do, in that it was weak through the flesh, God sending his own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh, and for sin, condemned sin in the flesh.” Christ, knowing His very reason for coming to the earth was giving her a promise that she no doubt understood by the time of our Lord’s death and resurrection. Christ was also giving her the promise that she would no longer have to live powerless under the temptations of the flesh. She is not going to have to live under the bondage that the pleasures of the world falsely promises (I Timothy 1:6), but she will now live in a new power that only Christ can give (Philippians 2:13).

Mark 14:30, 31: “And Jesus saith unto him, Verily I say unto thee, That this day, even in this night, before the cock crow twice, thou shalt deny Me thrice. But he spake the more vehemently, If I should die with thee, I will not deny thee in any wise. Likewise also said they all.” All of the disciples, not just Simon Peter, assured our Lord that they would rather die than deny Him. But when given the choice, they decided to run. How did Christ respond? Rather than a scathing rebuke, He gives them a mild rebuke with overwhelming peace and assurance as seen in Luke 24:36-45 and an especially comforting word to Thomas in John 20:24-29.

<u>3. THE MOST FAMOUS DISCIPLE OF JESUS WAS A RECIPIENT OF HIS GENTLE NATURE.</u>

In Acts 8:1-3 we are informed that the infamous Saul of Tarsus (before he was transformed into Paul, the Apostle) consented to the death of the first New Testament martyr, Stephen. He also caused “…havoc…” (Acts 8:3a), which is defined from the Greek word *lymainomai*, meaning to make filthy; to soil, to defile; to insult; to maltreat; to dishonour, to treat shamefully

or with injury, to ravage, to devastate, to ruin. Paul was "…haling men and women committed them to prison" (Acts 8:3b). The word for *haling* is from the Greek word *syrō* which means to drag, draw or hale before the judge, prison or to punishment. To say this man was wicked and mean-spirited would be an understatement.

There was a group in Corinth that were questioning Paul's authority, which had been given to Him by the resurrected Lord (Romans 1:1; I Corinthians 1:1; I Corinthians 15:9,10). They were saying he was in the flesh, in other words not only not an apostle, but not right with God. Let's see how the thoroughly converted Paul responded to his opposition in II Corinthians 10:1, 2. Please give attention to his opening plea in II Corinthians 10:1a: "Now I Paul myself beseech you by the meekness and gentleness of Christ…." We see not only does Paul practice the Christ-like quality of being a true gentleman, but he commanded it to the other disciples in II Timothy 2: 22-26.

In Romans 9:9-16, we recognize the very familiar teaching of Jesus from the Sermon of the Mount as found in Matthew 6:37-48. Comparing the former Saul of Tarsus with Paul, the beloved apostle is a commentary on Romans 12:1, 2. Paul is no longer conformed into the mean and ruthless man that he once was, but now is transformed, bearing the beautiful likeness of Christ (II Corinthians 3:18). His testimony is found in Galatians 2:20.

Conclusion:

Should you do a word study on the word *gentleman* you'll find several definitions. I think the best is: a man who is characterized by qualities of refinement, courtesy, and good manners. Historically, the term denoted a man of noble or gentle birth, but in modern usage, it often refers to someone who exhibits qualities like politeness, respectfulness, and a high standard of conduct.

We don't hear this French phrase much any more: *noblesse oblige*, translated literally, nobility obligates. It means that those of great privilege or wealth also have the responsibility to give back to those who are less fortunate than one's self. In reading what *noblesse oblige* meant in the middle ages, it referred to the obligation of the noble knights and ladies that extended beyond the documented royalty to the common man. It reflected behavior, demeanor and lifestyle showing no distinction between the great earl or humble freeman.

Secular society often has high ideals of what it means to be a gentleman, but only Christianity can make a man a true gentle man. "…For

unto whomsoever much is given, of him shall be much required...” (Luke 12:48b).

*I want to express my appreciation to Dr. Sam Davison who gave me the inspiration for this message.

-Pastor Pope-