



**“I say unto you, Love your enemies, bless them that curse you, do good to them that hate you, and pray for them which despitefully use you, and persecute you” (Matthew 5:44).**

## **Strength Under Control**

**Central Truth:** A meek person displays strength in a godly manner.

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What picture comes to your mind if someone mentions a meek person? Most of us think of a timid, insecure, pitiful excuse of a man — a Mr. Milquetoast who is afraid of his own shadow and apologizes for the space he takes and the air he breathes. That is the exact opposite of the Bible description of one who is meek. The person described above is not meek; he is a coward.

Meekness is not weakness! Moses was meek *“above all the men . . . upon the face of the earth”* (Numbers 12:3). Read the biblical account of his life and work. He was no weakling. He was bold; he was strong; and he made an impact for God.

Meekness is strength under control, disciplined power. The horse that the Greek emperor rode in the official state parades was called a meek animal. Was it a swaybacked, head-drooping, broken-spirited animal? Not at all. It was the finest piece of horseflesh in the kingdom — a head-tossing, highstepping, bright-spirited animal which had been broken to obey bit and reign. It showed strength under control.

God calls us to be meek. That does not lessen our sense of worth or our powers to act. It means that we are disciplined under God's will. A meek, quiet spirit is called an *“ornament . . . , which is in the sight of God of great price”* (I Peter 3:4).

How does a meek person act? Stephen, witness for Christ, shows us how.

## **I. MEEKNESS REBUKES SINNERS (Acts 7:51-53)**

Stephen's ministry as a deacon included visiting in many homes for benevolent purposes. That gave him an opportunity to witness to many people. God blessed his witness, and that deacon became a soul-winner. Some unbelievers did not like that. They brought Stephen before the very council which had condemned Jesus to death that he, too, might be tried. There that meek and gentle man rebuked the sinners who stood to judge him.

His rebuke was clear (verse 51). He called them obstinate and stubborn people, hard of heart and dull of hearing. He accused them of acting like pagans in rejecting the evident work of the one true God, even though they called themselves God's chosen people. The offense was too serious for Stephen's witness to be unclear. They could not misunderstand their sins.

His rebuke was factual (verse 52). He called their own national history to witness of their sins. God had sent His prophets, and they had killed them rather than receiving their message. They could not deny their guilt.

His rebuke was courageous (verse 53). Some form of the pronoun *you* occurs several times in Stephen's address. Such a charge as he delivered held danger from two sources. (1) The council could condemn him or (2) the mob could kill him. But he who has stood before the face of God has no fear to stand before the face of man and speak what God has spoken.

Where is the spirit of timidity in this meek man? It is not there. He is God's messenger. He does not respond to man's likes or dislikes. "*The lion hath roared, who will not fear? the Lord God hath spoken, who can but prophesy?*" (Amos 3:8).

The person who is meek before God is strong before people. On the other hand, the one who refuses to humble himself before God will be weak when he stands before people. If your spiritual leader is a meek man before God, thank God for him and support him with all your might. He is God's messenger.

## **II. MEEKNESS LOOKS TO GOD (Acts 7:54-56)**

Here is the key to meekness. The meek person keeps his eyes on God. That is why he is meek.

He looks to God when dangers assail. Stephen concluded his message of condemnation upon the "*betrayers and murderers*" of Jesus the Messiah with these words, "(You) *have received the law by the disposition of angels, and have not kept it*" (verse 53). That was too much for his hearers. They

knew in their hearts that the accusation was true, but they would not admit it.

They were filled with anger. They were convicted in their hearts. But instead of repenting, they ground their teeth as they looked at Stephen in their rage. They had murder in their hearts.

What did Stephen do? He kept his eyes on God. *“He, being full of the Holy Ghost, looked up stedfastly into heaven, and saw the glory of God, and Jesus standing on the right hand of God”* (verse 55). What a vision! No wonder he was meek before God and bold before others.

Neither the opposition nor the approval of others changes the stance of the meek person. He knows whom he has believed. He is committed to the will of God, not the approval of people. He may be opposed, but still he continues faithful to God. He may be rejected, but still he knows that God has accepted him. Since meekness is disciplined strength (strength under control), the discipline is always for Jesus' sake.

When testimony is given, the meek person keeps his eyes on God. That is why human opinion did not change Stephen's witness. The people raged against him. They gnashed their teeth in their fury. They became so overcome with anger that the crowd became a mob. Violence broke out, and a good man was brutally murdered. In it all, Stephen kept his eyes on the Lord. And what did he see? Hear his testimony: *“Behold, I see the heavens opened; and the Son of man standing on the right hand of God”* (Acts 7:56). Let that encourage you to keep your eyes on Jesus when troubles threaten you.

### **III. MEEKNESS ENDURES FAITHFULLY (Acts 7:57-59)**

Like love, it does not give up hope or fail from lack of strength. It endures in its commission.

**A. Meekness endures when people refuse to bear the truth** (verse 57). The crowds could not withstand the conviction which the Holy Spirit bore upon Stephen's words. They knew that their nation had rebelled against God in almost every phase of their national life. They knew they had sinned against God in the death of their Messiah, Jesus of Nazareth. But they were not willing to accept the truth of it.

At first they shouted aloud to drown out Stephen's voice. They thought that if they couldn't hear the preacher they wouldn't be convicted. So they just tried to shut him out. That didn't work for them. It was not Stephen's voice, but the Holy Spirit, who convicted them.

Then they stopped their ears, perhaps putting their fingers in them or putting their hands over them. But that did not still the voice of the Spirit.

If yelling at the top of their voices and stopping their ears to shut out sound was not effective, there was only one thing left to do. They must stop the voice of him who spoke. They must kill him.

All the while, the meek and humble Stephen kept looking to God and speaking his message. Since meekness is disciplined strength, Stephen had strength to endure when people refused to hear the message and turned against the speaker instead.

**B. Meekness endures when death threatens** (verse 58). As if they were one man, the mob rushed at Stephen — a mass of people bearing down on one man. They hustled him out of the city, dealing none too gently with him in the process. Dragging him to an appropriate place, they prepared to stone him to death. And Stephen faithfully looked up to God. That is the strength which characterizes meekness. He would not use his strength to attack his adversaries, but he used it rather to remain faithful to God and the message God had given him.

Multitudes of God's people have faced the same issue through the ages. They have been placed in dungeons, tied to a stake to be burned alive, threatened with being beaten to death, all of which they could have escaped by denying their Lord. They endured all of that in a spirit of Christian meekness like that of the saints mentioned in Hebrews 11:37, 38. Their meekness was their strength, for their strength was disciplined to obey the Lord.

**C. Meekness endures by calling on the Lord** (verse 59). Who can imagine Stephen's pain and suffering as the mob stoned him? They continued stoning him while he appealed to his Lord. At one point, while there was still strength in his body sufficient to do it, he rose to his knees, and cried aloud, "*Lord Jesus, receive my spirit. . . . Lord, lay not this sin to their charge*" (verses 59, 60). What a testimony he gave of strength in meekness!

Stephen manifested a spirit like that of his Lord "*who, when he was reviled, reviled not again; when he suffered, he threatened not; but committed himself to him that judgeth righteously*" (1 Peter 2:23). Only a person of disciplined strength could do that.

Meekness is strengthened when one calls on the Lord to strengthen his spirit. Try it when you are in trouble, even during life-threatening calamities. You will find that "as thy days, so shall thy strength be" (Deuteronomy 33:25). Learn what a difference prayer makes.

#### **IV. MEEKNESS CONCENTRATES ON THE NEEDS OF OTHERS (Acts 7:60)**

Look at Stephen's last recorded words. First, there was a prayer of commitment: *“Lord Jesus, receive my spirit”* (verse 59). It indicated no question but that he would die. Neither did he question what would happen at his death; he would go directly to the presence of the Lord Jesus, who would receive him. What a blessed assurance!

Second, there was a prayer of intercession. The bruised, broken, and bleeding martyr struggled to his knees to offer his final prayer. It was a prayer for others — for his murderers. He said, *“Lord, lay not this sin to their charge”* (verse 60). How like the words of his Lord Jesus whose final prayer was, *“Father, forgive them; for they know not what they do”* (Luke 23:34). He was not as concerned about his own death as he was about the guilt of his murderers.

We might understand Stephen's actions if he had called for God's judgment upon those who brutally beat the life from his body. But he did not. They were stoning him for what they supposed was blasphemy, making Jesus equal with God. But he knew that they were spiritually blind and lost. So he asked God to forgive.

And finally, here is one of the most beautiful statements in the Bible. The mob was howling. The rocks were pounding. The life was slowly being beaten from Stephen's body. And in the midst of all that uproar *“he fell asleep.”* Think about that. In the midst of a riot, he fell asleep in Jesus!

Behold the difference a spirit of meekness makes in the child of God. No wonder a meek and quiet spirit is an ornament of great value before God (I Peter 3:4). *“Lord God, teach us how to exercise the blessed spirit of meekness.”*

### **Questions for discussion**

1. What is meekness?
2. How is meekness related to courage?
3. How is meekness related to fellowship with God?
4. Why does a meek person keep looking to God?
5. How does meekness enable a person to endure for the Lord?
6. Why is a meek person uninfluenced by popular opinion?
7. How is meekness related to a forgiving spirit?
8. How can you cultivate a spirit of meekness?
9. What do you need to change in your life in order to become meek?
10. How can you show a spirit of meekness this week?