

# THE FRUIT OF THE SPIRIT IS MEEKNESS

By Paul Penno Jr.

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Jesus is meekness. Moses was the forerunner of Jesus. John was the disciple of Jesus.<sup>1</sup> “Decision of character was possessed by John. John was an apt pupil in the school of Christ, and his natural traits of character were tempered by the lessons he there received. But while self was repressed, there was no loss in force of will. And this is evident from a glance at his epistles to the church. No one of the inspired writers, indeed, uses plainer, more forceful language than does John. His speech, like the speech of Paul, was “in demonstration of the Spirit and of power.” He simply let himself become a

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<sup>1</sup> It is interesting to note the parallels between E. J. Waggoner’s perspective on meekness in 1893 and Ellen G. White’s exposition in 1896. E. J. Waggoner, “Blessed Are the Meek,” *The Present Truth* 9, 19 (November 16, 1893), pp. 519, 520; Ellen G. White, *Thoughts from the Mount of Blessings* (International Tract Society, Washington, D. C., 1896, original edition), pp. 28-32. Waggoner uses the examples of Moses, Christ, and John. Ellen White uses the examples of Moses and Christ. Waggoner’s definition of “meekness is in short the opposite of selfishness, which strikes directly against all the fruits of the Spirit, causing an individual to take to himself that which belongs alone to God. And in taking to self that which is God’s—or attempting to do so—an individual does not in reality get anything, and loses all that which God is able to give him.” *Ibid.*, p. 519. Ellen White writes: “. . . He who learns of Christ is emptied of self, of pride, of love of supremacy, and there is silence in the soul. Self is yielded to the disposal of the Holy Spirit.” *Ibid.*, p. 14.

mouthpiece of the Spirit and an instrument of Omnipotence, and decision enforced appeared as an inevitable consequence in all that he said and did.”<sup>2</sup>

“Without meekness there can be no real enjoyment of spiritual blessings. The person who will take honor and glory to himself cannot be altogether at peace with Him who claims all honor and glory and power as due to Himself. So far as a man ascribes these to himself, he makes himself a rival of God. He cannot under such circumstances love God with all his might, mind and strength. Meekness is in short the opposite of selfishness, which strikes directly against all the fruits of the Spirit, causing an individual to take to himself that which belongs alone to God. And in taking to self that which is God’s—or attempting to do so—an individual does not in reality get anything, and loses all that which God is able to give him.

“But what is meekness? It may be said, in the first place, that Christian meekness (which is the only true meekness) is not altogether what it is popularly supposed to be. The common idea of meekness allies it with weakness,—lack of will. It pictures the meek person as one who makes little or no resistance to persons or things that set themselves against him. But this idea is entirely false. It has no place in the make-up of the meek characters of the Scripture record. It should be evident, at a glance, that the Spirit, which is all-powerful, cannot produce

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<sup>2</sup> Waggoner, *Ibid.*

as one of its fruits anything that lacks force and strength.

“Meekness is not the absence of will, but the absence of self. Among Scripture characters with whom the idea of meekness is naturally associated, probably none are more prominent than Moses, and John, the disciple of Christ. The record of Moses is that he “was very meek, above all the men which were upon the face of the earth.” Numbers 12:3. But no one at all familiar with the events of his life could think of him as a weak character, or lacking in resoluteness and power of will. While he persistently refused to be the father of a great nation, or to be angry with those who murmured against him, he was never slow to take vigorous measures for the suppression of idolatry and other sins, no matter how great the number arrayed against him. He was, indeed, one of the most energetic and forceful characters that the world has ever seen.”<sup>3</sup>

Of Himself Jesus said, “Learn of Me; for I am meek and lowly in heart” (Matt. 11:29). The Son of God chose the way of meekness. “For ye know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that, though He was rich, yet for your sakes He became poor, that ye through His poverty might be rich” (2 Cor. 8:9). A rich man’s greatest fear is the loss of his riches. Without fear Jesus chose to give up His riches for our poverty. “Let this mind be in you, which was also in Christ Jesus: Who, being in the form of God, thought it not robbery to be equal with God: but

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<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*

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” (Phil. 2:5-8). The way of meekness is the way of the cross.

The Son of God had a sanctified will wholly in harmony with His Father.<sup>4</sup> He chose to be “made in the likeness of men.” In reality, God “made Him to be sin for us” (2 Cor. 5:21). The magnetic pull was to assert Himself. Instead He denied Himself. “Not my will, but thine, be done” (Luke 22:42). His life was a continual cross. He “was in all points tempted like as we are, yet without sin” (Heb. 4:15). Jesus lived and died by the principle of the cross. Jesus is meekness.

It is possible to have a genetic predisposition to sin and yet not sin, because Christ “took” our fallen, sinful nature, and yet did not sin. In other words, He did most certainly inherit our “genetic predisposition” to sin in that He took a “self” as we have a self; and if He had yielded to the dictates of “self,” He would have sinned. But He chose not to. Thus He “began life . . . with a sanctified human will.” And a “sanctified human will” is one that is

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<sup>4</sup> “Jesus Christ is our example in all things. He began life, passed through its experiences, and ended its record, with a sanctified human will. He was tempted in all points like as we are, and yet because he kept his will surrendered and sanctified, he never bent in the slightest degree toward the doing of evil, or toward manifesting rebellion against God.” Ellen G. White, “To Abide in Christ the Will Must Be Surrendered,” *The Signs of the Times* (October 29, 1894), par. 7.

totally surrendered [*sic.*] to the principle of the cross. What Christ “began” His human life with was what led Him at last to His cross.

(2) From the moment we hear the truth of the Gospel, Christ becomes a true Example to us. At this moment, believing the Gospel, it is possible for us also to surrender our self-will so that we too have a “sanctified human will.” That is of course impossible for us apart from the Gospel.

There is another issue that may need more attention. In some way (it has been proven by science) an unborn infant is able to respond to external stimuli. As an unborn Infant, Christ “began life . . . with a sanctified human will.” We begin life with an unsanctified human will; thus it seems to me possible that our involvement in sin can begin prenatally. This is why we are “born sinners.” We are not conceived sinners—sin is not transmitted genetically. That is why the RC “Immaculate Conception” dogma is wrong. And why Calvinist “original sin” is wrong.”<sup>5</sup>

Jesus took upon Himself something that the sinless Adam did not have—a “self,” and “Mine own will,” which must be denied. He had a constant battle which the sinless Adam did not have—to deny “self,” deny His “own will” in order to follow His Father’s will. “It was not in the cross only that Christ sacrificed Himself for humanity. . . . Every day’s experience was an outpouring of His life” (*Education*, p. 80). This was a constant inner struggle which required that He bear the cross, not

only on Calvary, but all His life. “His whole life was a preface to His death upon the cross” (*Fundamentals of Christian Education*, p. 382). “Self,” His “own will,” was constantly crucified and denied perfectly. “Christ pleased not Himself” (Rom 15:3). It’s true that He came to redeem Adam’s failure; but He also came to redeem our failure.

Someone may say, “It was easy for Him to deny self, deny His own will, for He was naturally in harmony with His Father’s will.” (That is the Roman Catholic idea in the “Immaculate Conception”). But we see Him sweating drops of blood as He cries out, Not My will, but Thine be done” (Mt 26:39). That principle of the cross was never easy for Him!

This throws a flood of light on Rom 8:3, 4. “The likeness of sinful flesh” is thus the reality of the “self” which He took which had to be denied and crucified. He was totally unselfish, but Gethsemane, His cross, was its price.

Only after we have permitted Scripture and especially Jesus to speak, are we prepared to understand Ellen White. “Jesus Christ is our example in all things. He began life, passing through its experiences, and ended its record with a sanctified human will” (*Signs of the Times*, Oct. 29, 1894). In contrast, we begin life with an unsanctified will. A “sanctified human will” is one that is crucified by the principle of the cross. Thus we must “be warned from the ground of making Christ altogether human, such an one as ourselves”, we are selfish. “Not for one moment” was His choice, His chosen human will, unsanctified. She speaks of character, not genetic nature.

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<sup>5</sup> Letter RJW to Kenning (7-6-91).

But nonetheless, from the beginning, Christ was “in all points tempted like as we are, yet without sin.” He was constantly tempted to yield to the clamors of self, but He always said “No.” (We too can learn to say “No”—Titus 2:11, NIV). His temptations were real and they were almost overmastering. Consider Him on His cross, in frightful pain and mental anguish; the kind soldier offers Him a drug to ease His pain and anaesthetize His mental anguish. He turns His head away and refuses it. “Self” said: “Take it, go to sleep, find relief!” (Mt 27:34). Again, as always, He seeks not His “own will.”

“‘Sin dwelleth in me,’ true; and sin never dwelt in Him. But the grand truth is that He was “made to be sin for us, who knew no sin.” He was ‘made under the law.’ His own words are an inspired commentary on Paul’s pregnant phrase—Jn 5:30; 6:38; Mt 26:39. He ‘took’ on His sinless nature our sinful nature that He might know how to succor them that are tempted, in that He ‘took’ a self as we have a self, a self that needed to be denied, to be ‘crucified’ Thus He bore the cross all His life, not only on Calvary’s hill. He could not follow His Father’s will unless He ‘denied’ His ‘own will.’ He tells us so, plainly. Christ was totally unselfish, but unselfishness implies resistance of the temptation to be selfish. Whereas He always denied self, we have yielded to self and we are selfish. Christ’s righteousness is infinitely greater than Adam’s sinlessness.”<sup>6</sup>

“Propensities of sin” or “inherent propensities of disobedience” are not the same as taking our fallen, sinful nature. If my grandfather, became an alcoholic; it is quite possible that I am “inherently” an alcoholic, that is, if I were without Christ, without the gospel, and I discovered how alcohol gives me relief from my emotional and mental distresses, I could become an alcoholic, for I am weak. But I have never (so far as I know) tasted a drop of alcohol (thank God for the Adventist health message), and therefore I have no “propensity” for alcohol. I have “taken” my grandfather’s weakness, tendency, or inclination, but I do not have his propensity, for I have never indulged in alcohol. Christ took our genetic inheritance, our weaknesses, felt to the full the pressure of our tendencies to indulge self, resisted our “inclination,” but never “for a moment” did He sin, nor “for a moment *yield* to corruption.” No “taint of, or inclination to, corruption rested upon Christ,” an equivalent statement. He felt the full force of the temptation to “yield” but did not permit it to “rest” upon Him.

The etymology of the word “propensity” is the Latin *propendere*, from which we get our word “pendulum.” A pendulum hangs down, never up; it *responds* to gravity. An “evil propensity” is a *response* to temptation, but the Baker letter wisely says of Christ that “on not one occasion was there a response to [Satan’s] manifold temptations,’ nor did He ‘step on Satan’s ground, to give him any

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<sup>6</sup> Letter RJW to Desmond Ford (12-18-92).

advantage.’<sup>7</sup> This explains why, although we have ‘inherent propensities of disobedience’ which we have ‘inherited’ environmentally, ‘we need not retain one sinful propensity’ while we still most certainly retain our sinful nature.”<sup>8</sup>

What about “‘inbred sin.’ It is inbred selfishness, the same as the “unsanctified will” that we begin life with. And Jesus was ‘in all points tempted like as we are,’ thus also tempted to yield to that temptation, but He totally denied it, crucified it, and thus was totally unselfish.”<sup>9</sup>

Moses “was very meek, above all the men which were upon the face of the earth” (Numbers 12:3). The Holy Spirit inspired him to write those words because he was in line for the throne of Egypt and gave it up for “the reproach of Christ” (Hebrews 11:26). Moses was meek because his will was crucified with Christ.

The world views meekness as gentleness, timidity, and compliance, without strength, power, or resolve. Christian meekness is crucifixion of self-will. Moses gave his will to God. The result was a resolute and forceful leadership which met confrontations with idolatry, heresy, rebellion, and wickedness. Moses met the challenges of criticism and backsliding without taking personal offense because egocentrism no longer reigned in his life.

Moses’ failure in leadership by striking the Rock the second time, was followed by a continual

example of deepening repentance and dependence upon God. “The high and lofty One, that inhabiteth eternity,” said, “I dwell in the high and holy place; with him also that is of a contrite and humble spirit, to revive the spirit of the humble, and to revive the heart of the contrite ones” (Isa. 57:15).

What would meekness look like in our Day of Atonement? Would it be the assertion of women’s rights, or a youth take-over, or a controlling male-hierarchy? Would it be the hypnotic drumbeat of repetitious worship ditties that create deep vibrations? Is it user-friendly principles of church growth that employ mediums of culture with a Christian coating for the purpose of lifting people to a higher level?<sup>10</sup> Is it triumphal pageantry at great convocations? Is it statistical progress reports? Perhaps a world-wide sustained recession is teaching us a lesson from the bottom line that this is not the Divine measure of church success.

Meekness is the fruit of righteousness by faith. All self-centered appeals to come to Christ can only result in a religion of selfishness where the principle of the cross is abhorrent. “Babylon . . . is fallen, is fallen” (Revelation 18:2). The religion of self is the religion of Babylon, and to the degree that it has been permitted to enter modern Israel, there is the religion of Baal worship. It can only result in lukewarmness.

We are living in the Day of Atonement when carnal minds that are enmity with God will be won by the *agape* of Christ’s cross. The natural born fear and

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<sup>7</sup> Letter Ellen G. White to W. L. H. Baker (August 4, 1893). *Manuscript Releases*, Vol. 13, p. 20.

<sup>8</sup> Letter RJW to Woodrow W. Whidden, II (8-29-91).

<sup>9</sup> Letter RJW to Stephen Emse (9-3-91).

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<sup>10</sup> The medium is the message.

consequent hatred of God is miraculously changed by the Priestly Psychiatrists' Spirit of love being shed abroad in our hearts. This can only come about as a result of the principle of the cross. Paul had this experience, "I am crucified with Christ: nevertheless I live; yet not I, but Christ liveth in me: and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by the faith of the Son of God, who loved me, and gave Himself for me" (Galatians 2:20).

The "religion" motivated by self-centeredness leads to Spiritualism and self-destruction, because Lucifer become Satan invented it.<sup>11</sup> The religion motivated by the *agape* love of Christ's cross leads to the second coming of Christ. When you choose to continually die with Christ in a deepening repentance and consequent obedience to the commandments of God, then Christ's Day of Atonement ministry will have prepared you for His second coming.

"The meek shall inherit the earth; and shall delight themselves in the abundance of peace" (Psalm 27:11).

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<sup>11</sup> "The independence and self-supremacy in which we glory are seen in their true vileness as tokens of servitude to Satan." Ellen G. White, *Thoughts from the Mount of Blessing*, p. 14.