

COMING TO THE KNOWLEDGE OF THE TRUTH (THROUGH EVALUATION III)

Continuing with the thought of the last few articles on 2 Timothy 3:7, let's dig a little deeper into the idea of coming to the knowledge of the truth. We have studied the first three logical steps in coming to the knowledge of anything - education, meditation, and participation. The last two articles have examined different aspects of the fourth step, evaluation. First we looked in detail at the designated standards we choose to evaluate ourselves against. Then we studied the idea of the value we put on things. In this article we want to again look at the idea of our designated standards, but from a very practical standpoint. Let's look at three standards in the Bible and evaluate our performance against them.

A Standard of Wisdom and Grace. In Colossians 4:5,6 Paul tells us how we should walk and talk. We are to "walk in wisdom" around those that are outside the Church, "redeeming the time." We should do this because time is precious, and we need to act with all the wisdom that we can in order to lead someone else to the Lord. We show our wisdom best when we reveal our faith in God. When we act calmly, logically, and deliberately we show that we trust in the providence of God. We show we believe God knows what's best for us and loves us enough to give it to us. But if we act worried and frenzied, we show the unbeliever that we're also hopeless, confused, and struggling to make sense of a world with so much pain, despair and no hope of a reward. The Christian evaluates his goals and acts according to God's wisdom.

The next thought in this passage leads us to evaluate our speech. It is to be gracious, seasoned with salt, and for the purpose of answering every man. Gracious speech is good, kind, and beneficial to others. It is seasoned with salt in that it tastes good, but can with stronger doses kill germs and cause healing in the body. Salty speech can kill sin and promote the healing of God to the repentant heart. Salty speech is correcting when it needs to be, but seasoned with grace so as not to be discouraging. Often the tongue speaks before the brain has evaluated the consequences. A good impression is replaced by a bad one.

Consider Paul's counsel in Titus 2:7,8 concerning our actions and speech. He speaks of a "*pattern of good works*" in our deeds,

a doctrine of "*uncorruptness, gravity, sincerity*" for our thoughts and intents, and "*sound speech*" for our communications. All of these are so that those of the "*contrary part*" would not be able to evaluate Titus as evil. Paul covers what we plan to do, what we actually do, and how we do it when we do it. This doesn't leave much room for spontaneity, does it?

The questions to evaluate are: Have I walked and talked with wisdom in the past? Am I doing so now? How do I intend to do in the future?

A Standard Based on the "Good Part." In Luke 10:41,42 Jesus gives the final remarks to an incident with two sisters that had invited Him into their home. One sister, Martha, was busy trying to prepare food and a meal for her guests. Her sister, Mary, was sitting, listening to Jesus speak. Martha became frustrated and asked Jesus to send Mary to help her with the food. Jesus' reply is so classic that it still reverberates around us today. He said Martha was "*careful and troubled about many things.*" Consider what she was doing. She was preparing food and performing domestic duties. No doubt she wanted to impress her famous guest with her hospitality. She evaluated the situation wrong! Jesus was not one to be impressed with hospitality as much as He was with a concern to learn. Mary had it, and Jesus saw it in her. He said that Mary had chosen the good part that would never be taken from her! Just imagine that there is something you can choose to cultivate in yourself now that will not be destroyed when the world is on fire!

While we're here at Martha and Mary's house, let's imagine how each of them would have evaluated Jesus' visit. Martha with memories of how hard she worked to be the perfect hostess to a large crowd, how frustrated she got when she became exhausted, and how Jesus didn't really appreciate her and come to her rescue like she wanted would give a poor evaluation! Mary had an experience she would never forget. One that would become even more real to her after Jesus' resurrection. She probably had few memories of the crowd or Martha's frustration. She was too occupied with Jesus' words to her. She would have a wonderful evaluation of the Master's visit. We've got the same man at the same house at the same time speaking the same message as experienced by two different women who had two different evaluations of the event. The difference was the standard each was evaluating against. Martha's brought care and trouble, but Mary's brought the good part.

Where do you stand? Are you now in a state of care and trouble brought on by the daily grind, or are you appreciating every day in the Lord's service knowing you have chosen the "good part"? Evaluate your past behavior and either repent of it or embrace it. Resolve to choose the "good part" in this very moment and never trade it for care and trouble in the future!

A Standard of Service to Others. We have two great examples of service in physical things and spiritual things. In Proverbs 31:10-31 we learn of the virtuous woman and what she did to deserve such a reputation. Read this passage slowly and think of each thing she did for her family. She provided food, shelter, clothing, even a good name for her husband. That took some doing. How much time do you think she had for herself? She was spending all her time on the things that would protect and promote her family.

Some might say she was selfless, having given all of herself for her family. She might have evaluated her life with thanksgiving because she had the chance to serve the ones she loved. Again, the same situation evaluated using two different standards, giving two different results. Which one fits you?

In Acts 20:26,27 Paul gives the second example of service to others, this time in spiritual things. Paul tells the Ephesian elders that he is "*pure from the blood of all men.*" How could he say this? Had he been careful not to injure anyone physically? No, it was because he had "*not shunned to declare unto you all the counsels of God.*" According to Paul's designated standard of the power of the gospel, it was as serious as a matter of blood that the entire gospel be presented to others. Just as blood is essential for the body to live, so to Paul was the gospel necessary for the soul to live. We would agree with this. Are we doing something about it? Do we value the gospel as a precious gift to give to others, a life changing and life saving gift? Do we value the service of keeping the blood of others (spiritually speaking) off our hands?

From the virtuous woman's actions and Paul's preaching we see how we can impact the lives of others, both physically and spiritually. We can do this, if we diligently evaluate what's really important to us right now and for our future and choose the right standards.

Parting Thoughts

You have studied with me the standards of Bible figures concerning how we should walk, talk, think, work, and sow the gospel. I hope you have already adopted all of these standards as your own. If not, I beg you to evaluate what you're living for. If you've not been completely committed to these standards in the past, evaluate where you are right now. Evaluate yourself for the future and make whatever priority adjustments are necessary so you can spend eternity in heaven!

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APOLOGIA

QUESTION: Can you explain the meaning of meekness? It seems that some think that in order to possess the quality of meekness you should not really stand up for what you believe in.

ANSWER: Probably of all the character virtues spoken of in the Bible this one is the least understood. One of the reasons is that there has been a shift in the way people in this country think. As one author put it, "the shift in American culture from character to image has turned vanity and pride into virtues."

Meekness is best seen when contrasted with its opposite, pride. Pride simply put is an "all about me" attitude. Pride has "self" at the center of all that we say and do. It manifests itself in many ways but when it is stripped of all its disguises and deceptiveness what is left is a "me" mindset. It is the love of self more than anything else. It has the ability to taint in a negative way every aspect of our lives. It affects our relationships, our finances, and our spirituality to just mention a few.

One of the most descriptive passages in the Bible depicting pride is found in Luke 18. Beginning in verse 9 we read,

"Also He spoke this parable to some who trusted in themselves that they were righteous, and despised others: Two men went up to the temple to pray, one a Pharisee and the other a tax collector. The Pharisee stood and prayed thus with himself, God, I thank you that I am not like other men- extortionists, unjust, adulterers, or even as this tax collector. I fast twice a week: I give tithes of all that I possess." Luke 18:9-12

One cannot but help to note the "me" centeredness of this individual. Jesus began by mentioning that pride begins by a

trust in one's self to the extent that others become despicable. In addition note the use of the word "I". Over and over again the emphasis was on what the Pharisee did; I fast, I tithe, I am not like others who sin. This passage certainly catches the spirit of pride that is so prevalent in our society today.

As stated previously, meekness is best seen when contrasted with pride. It is in fact an exact opposite. It is also probably one of the least admired character qualities and the most lacking character quality in America . However, meekness is a quality that all followers of Christ must possess. In fact if He lives in you, meekness will soon begin to develop.

Part of God's plan in sending Jesus to live in the flesh was to give us an example of how we ought to be. As sinners we miss the mark. But if we are, by the grace of God, to begin to be conformed to His will for our life, we must have an understanding of what the mark we have missed is! In Jesus we have a complete picture of what we are to be. This picture includes the quality of meekness. Jesus says,

"Come to Me all you who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take My yoke upon you and learn from Me, for I am meek and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For My yoke is easy and My burden is light." (Matt. 11:28-30)

Meekness is a trait that is associated with humility. It flows from a humble attitude that manifests itself in the patient endurance of offenses. Often translators use the word gentleness when translating this word. Gentleness implies leniency and long suffering.

As was implied by the question, many today think that meekness is the same thing as being weak. This is why so many think that if you are meek you stand for nothing. However, meekness is not weakness. Rather it is power under control. It is the ability to control self and manifest the true spirit of Christ in the heat of adversity or persecution. Proverbs compares those who are meek with those who are not in a couple of passages.

"He who is slow to anger is better than the mighty, and he who rules his spirit, than he who takes a city." (Pro. 16:32)

"Whoever has no rule over his own spirit is like a city broken down, without walls." (Pro. 25:28)

Notice that one who has power under control is a victor while those who have no control are defenseless. Meekness or gentleness always involves the control of self and emotions that are so destructive in our lives.

Another point to note is that meekness is not cowardice, lack of conviction, or human niceness. In fact it is the opposite. It is courageous, possesses strength, conviction, while maintaining a good disposition that flows from Christ-likeness and not from our love of self.

As mentioned in Matthew 11, Jesus is meek and lowly. But still, He always defended God and His glory. He courageously gave Himself to die for our sins without having a strike-back attitude. Bear in mind that He certainly had the power! As the song goes, "He could have called 10,000 angels" but he did not. He patiently endured the criticism, slander, and unfair treatment by the hands of the Jewish leaders and Romans. However, when God's honor or the truth was perverted or neglected, He stood firm. Space does not allow us to include some of His rebukes of the scribes and Pharisees, but rebuke them he did! He also cleansed the temple and pointed out the hypocrisy of the established religious ones of His day.

Thus it is to be with us. Our attitude should not be one where we seek to proudly defend self and our rights. We are dead to self and consequently, insults and personal attacks against us do not cause us to react out of anger and revenge. Rather our meekness causes us to humbly accept these types of things. However, when it comes to defending God, His honor, and His truth, we must stand up!

In all things we need to remember that we are to be like our Savior. Jesus was meek and lowly. This gentleness is a fruit of the Spirit produced in us as we receive and obey the Word in our lives. May we all strive to be as He was so that all glory will be His!

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GOSPEL MEETINGS

<u>DATES</u>	<u>LOCATION</u>	<u>SPEAKER</u>
April 27 - May 4	Junction City Congregation Junction City, KY	Rodney Sneed (Eubank, KY) & Hunter Bulger (Fort Deposit, AL)
May 2 - 4	Pleasant Ridge Congregation Woodbury, TN	Thaddeus Eubank (Waynesburg, KY)
May 5 - 9	Van Lear Congregation Van Lear, KY	J.D. McDonald (Woodbury, TN)
May 12 - 16	Estesburg Congregation Eubank, KY	Joe Hill (Hager Hill, KY)
May 15 - 18	Ashlock Congregation Near Celina, TN	Wilbur Bass (Auburn, AL)
May 16 - 18	Fayetteville Road Congregation Fairburn, GA	Kevin Mills (Newnan, GA)
May 19 - 23	Hopkinsville Congregation Hopkinsville, OH	J.D. McDonald (Woodbury, TN)
May 25 - 29	Camilla City Congregation Greenville, AL	Gerald Carter (Eubank, KY)
June 1 - 6	Taylor's Cross Roads Congregation Roanoke, AL	Tony Whiddon (Roanoke, AL)

SEARCH THE SCRIPTURES

1. In Judges, what did Jephthah's vow to the Lord end up costing him?
2. According to David in Psalm 62, what are men of high degree?
3. In the book of Isaiah, which city was referred to as a marketplace for the nations?

4. John said the law came through Moses, but what two things came through Jesus?
5. What were the names of the two women whom Paul urged to be of the same mind?

ANSWERS NEXT MONTH . . .

and remember last month's questions?

1. How old was Noah when the flood ended? 601 YEARS OLD (Gen. 8:13)
2. Who came to David and rebuked him for his sin with Bathsheba? NATHAN (2 Sam. 12:1-12)
3. In Proverbs Solomon says that wisdom should be sought after like what? SILVER AND HIDDEN TREASURES (Pro. 2:4)
4. Paul said it was always his goal to preach the gospel where? WHERE PEOPLE HAD NOT HEARD OF CHRIST (Rom. 15:20-21)
5. According to Paul's letter to Titus, who should be rejected after two warnings? A HERETIC (Titus 3:10)