

## God's 'Heart Measure'

**Becoming Meek and Lowly in Heart**

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Well, as I spend time in my wood shop, I am constantly reminded of the importance of a measurement system. Now when we measure anything, we are comparing something like a piece of wood to a standard, like a tape measure. I cannot even begin to tell you how many times I have started assembling a cabinet or a drawer only to find out that I had a measurement somehow slightly off.

Turn with me to Revelation 11. I am convinced that woodworking is God's way of teaching me patience, by the way. And I am sure many home improvement DIYers can relate when I say "measure twice, cut once."

**Revelation 11:1** Then I was given a reed like a measuring rod. And the angel stood, saying, "Rise and measure the temple of God, the altar, and those who worship there."

Jesus Christ is of course the one doing the measuring of His church. He is the righteous Judge. And we know from the underlying Greek here that the Temple referenced here is the Holy Place, the sanctuary or room just outside the veil where the priests were allowed to enter and offer incense on the incense altar. The measuring here then is a measuring of the true church by Jesus Christ.

Over in I Corinthians; Richard just referenced, we are in that period of time. And as you turn, remember I Peter 4, verse 17. Does that ring a bell?

**I Peter 4:17** For the time has come for the judgment to begin at the house of God.

We, the church of God, are being measured now against God's standard to see how we fit into His Kingdom. In I Corinthians 11 we will read verses 28 and 29.

**I Corinthians 11:28-29** But let a man examine himself, and so let him eat of the bread and drink of the cup. For he who eats and drinks in an unworthy manner eats and drinks judgment to himself, not discerning the Lord's body.

Now we see we are to examine ourselves. To examine something is really to test or measure it against a standard. As we examine ourselves, my question is twofold. What are we measuring? And what measurement system or standard are we using in our evaluation? Think on that.

Some might suggest we are to measure our outward actions against the letter of the law, the Ten Commandments, and this is not wrong. No doubt outward obedience to the law of God is required to even have a relationship with God. But remember, the Pharisees were the strictest letter of the law keepers, and what did that earn them? Jesus called them in Matthew 12,

**Matthew 12:34** "Brood of vipers! [that is no compliment] How can you, being evil, speak good things? For out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaks."

Jesus clarifies the problem that Isaiah prophesized about long before in Matthew 15:8. You can jot that down. No need to turn there.

**Matthew 15:8** "These people draw near to Me with their mouth, and they honor Me with their lips, but their heart is far from Me."

God's measurement system goes far beyond the outward obedience to the letter of the law, brethren. Do we remember Jesus' words recorded in Matthew 22, verse 37? What is the greatest commandment?

**Matthew 22:37** "You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart."

What comes first? Loving God with all our hearts. Have we ever counted all the times in the Bible that we are told to do something for God with all our hearts? I can tell you, it is a lot! In Deuteronomy alone we see the expression "with all your heart" used nine times.

You do not have to turn there, I will hit them quickly. Deuteronomy 4:29, we are to seek Him with all our heart. Deuteronomy 6:5; 13:3 and 36. We are to love Him with all our hearts. Deuteronomy 10:12, we are to fear, walk in all His ways. Again, love Him and serve Him with all our hearts. Deuteronomy 11:13, we are to love and serve God with all our heart. Deuteronomy 26:16, we are to observe His commandments with all our hearts. Deuteronomy 30:2, we are to obey His voice with all our hearts. In Deuteronomy 30:10, we are to turn to the Lord your God with all our hearts.

All our hearts is what God is most interested in, brethren.

We could add Joshua 22:5, we are to love, to walk in all His ways, to keep His commandments, to hold fast and serve Him with all your heart. Jeremiah 29:13, you will seek Me and you will find Me when you search for Me with all your heart. Joel 2:12, Turn to Me with all your heart. And in Matthew 22:37. We read that earlier. Mark 12:30, repeated in Luke 10:27, you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart.

What is it God is most interested in? It is pretty clear. Our heart. We know the heart here represents our mind and our inner feelings, our thoughts, our feelings, our passions, our desires, our affections, our purposes, our intent. Our heart is the center of our intelligence, we could say. It underpins our will, our character, and ultimately drives all of our outward actions, including words and deeds that all come first from our heart, which is in our mind.

We know that God judges our hearts. We could go to many scriptures on this as well, just a few, Jeremiah 11:20; 17:10; and 20:12, You who judge righteously testing the mind and heart. I, the Lord, search the heart. You who search the heart. I Samuel 16:7, For man looks at the outward appearance, but the Lord looks at the hearts. I Chronicles 28:9 and 29:17, For the Lord searches all hearts and understands all the intent of the thoughts. My God, You test the heart.

Psalm 7:9, God tests the heart. Revelation 2:23, I am He who searches the hearts, and I will give to each of you according to your works. And as Jesus adds in Matthew 5:8, Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God.

One final one, there is a warning in Matthew 18:35, Jesus warns of *severe punishment* to anyone who from his heart does not forgive his brother his trespasses.

Our heart is what God measures, brethren. And as we approach the Passover, our heart is what we are to be examining.

God is more concerned about our underlying heart, our attitude, our intent, our complete submission to His will, as opposed to just mere outward obedience to the letter of the law. Again, obedience is required to even have a relationship with God, but what God wants more than anything is our submission to His will and our heart. We know the Pharisees were puffed up by their strict obedience to the letter of the law, and we are warned, this can happen to all of us.

Satan can use anything against us, and he will use our evil hearts to get us to think we are actually deserving of something because we are better than most, and that we are actually knowledgeable in keeping the letter of the law. The Pharisees were obsessed solely on the negative of avoiding evil at all costs. This caused them to judge and separate themselves from anyone that they decided was a sinner, and this self-righteous evil heart made them fall far short of God's standard of measurement against God's heart, which we will see here in a minute.

Please turn with me to Matthew 5. We are going to pick up the very beginning of Jesus Christ's ministry where He lays out God's measurement system for our hearts. And as Brother Clyde reminded us in his sermon, "Children of the Light," the Beatitudes are eight individual attitudes or mental states that overlap in our linked characteristics. When we put them together, they describe the proper mindset, the proper hearts that leads to eternal life. These mental attributes are required in order to be truly blessed by God because they enable us to have the right perspective, the right foundation to both act and react properly to all of life's circumstances.

**Matthew 5:2-3** Then He opened His mouth and taught them, saying, "Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven."

So Jesus chooses this to start His ministry. It is kind of interesting. It is the most critical attitude of our hearts that must come before anything else. It is a precursor, a prerequisite attitude, the most essential element that opens the door to our relationship with God.

Only those who are poor in spirit will be in God's Kingdom. But being poor in spirit is maybe not what we would think on the surface. It has nothing to do with finances. Jesus uses a play on words here with an adjective most often associated with the physical to describe something spiritual.

He uses the Greek adjective to describe our underlying spirit that is translated rather poorly as poor, pun intended. It is *Strong's* #4434, *ptochos*, and it carries a much more severe meaning than the English word poor, and that is why I say it was poorly translated. The real meaning here is someone that is a beggar, a pauper, completely destitute, helpless, wretched, powerless, much more significant than just being poor.

Jesus is saying, "Blessed are those who understand they are spiritually bankrupt and spiritually destitute. Blessed are they who come to understand that we have earned nothing of spiritual value."

Spiritual bankruptcy is not a characteristic of the carnal man. Our carnal hearts are evil. We like to think we are not too bad off. We like to compare ourselves to others and say, "Oh, we don't do that, we don't make that mistake, we're better." Our carnal mind is actually—get this—rich in spirit because it wants to think that we have earned something when we outwardly obey the commandments. A carnal mind that is rich in spirit is full of pride and self-righteousness. As it compares itself to others, it judges others and loves to talk about others' mistakes.

In fact, anyone who opens their mouth and speaks evil about someone else is doing it because they are just like the Pharisees, rich in spirit, not realizing God despises that underlying evil heart that would ever motivate us to speak evil of someone else.

Let us plunge forward in the Book to Luke chapter 17. To be poor in spirit is a product of God's Spirit working in those He has called and those He is creating in Christ Jesus.

Reading Jesus' words now recorded in,

**Luke 17:10** "So likewise you, when you have done all those things which you are commanded, say, 'We are unprofitable servants. We have done what was our duty to do.'"

When we are poor in spirit, we know that we never come even close to doing everything God commands. Every single day we fall short in our heart, brethren. The poor in spirit know that we are unprofitable servants in the eyes of God.

Yes, we have to work out our own salvation and do daily work of sacrifice in our burnt offerings in obedience and service to God. Yes, we have to work out our daily sacrifices, our grain offerings in the service to man, but our works of sacrifice never, ever earn or make us deserve something from God. When we compare our heart to God's holiness, we become very poor real quick, bankrupt, destitute in spirit, and this creates an underlying heart of humility.

It all starts with a proper comparison between our hearts and God's heart, and this underlying attitude of failing to measure up flows over to our relationship with everyone else. When we are poor in spirit, we are restrained from thinking badly about anyone else. When we are poor in spirit, we esteem others better than ourselves.

Jesus kicks off His ministry in Luke 4:18, I have been "anointed to preach the gospel to the poor. . . to heal the brokenhearted." Again in Matthew 11:5, Jesus states, "the poor have the gospel preached to them."

Turn with me to Matthew chapter 11 as we continue to explore God's tape measure, or might I say, heart measure.

**Matthew 11:29** "Take My yoke upon you and learn from Me, . . .

Let us stop here for a minute. Jesus tells us to take His yoke and learn of Me. What is He saying? Well, a yoke was used to control the power of an animal. Horses, oxen, donkeys, all have a lot of power, but without a yoke to guide them and control that power, they were downright useless.

Jesus is telling us to take *His* yoke. Take the yoke of God's Holy Spirit so that we can learn to restrain and control our powerful minds and put them to work to become just like Him. Remember, being poor in spirit is unnatural to the human mind. The carnal mind is self-focused and wants to consider itself rich in spirit, just like the Laodicean. It is only through God's Holy Spirit that we can develop a heart that is restrained and under control at all times.

Let us reread now the beginning and the rest of Matthew 11, verse 29.

**Matthew 11:29** "Take My yoke upon you and learn from Me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls."

As we examine our hearts, we must use God's heart measure as we compare it to His holy righteous standard, God's very own heart.

And now get this, brethren, because this is very significant. God is now describing His own heart to us. And He starts with the "I am" preface, and I do not think that is an accident. He is trying to get our attention. He is trying to draw us in here.

He uses two words then to describe His heart. He says, "I am meek and lowly in heart." God's heart is meek. *Strong's #4239, praus*, an adjective form used only here, meaning gentle, humble, meek. It is a form of a primary Greek word, *praos*, *Strong's #4239*, meaning mild, humble, gentle.

Now get this: Meek is *not* weak. It carries with it the meaning of great power, enormous power that is held back in restraint, and the image here is of a father so angry with their son because they did something so stupid and wrong. They rear back to give their son a massive whipping, and just as they are coming down, they see his eyes and the tears and the sorrow, and they hold back the hand. And they give him a mild slap on the bottom, a mild correction.

God tells us His heart is meek, and wow, we should be so thankful that God's heart is meek because we deserve a massive whooping all the time and He is very gentle in His correction, and we should be thankful for that.

And God's heart is lowly. *Strong's #5011, tapeinos*, an adjective used 18 times in the New Testament to mean depressed, base, cast down, humble, of low degree, lowly. *Thayer* adds, lowly in spirit, humble, lowering oneself to serve others. It might be difficult for us at times to think about God as lowly, but did He not lower Himself into the form of human flesh to serve us to the point of death?

We are here in Matthew, so let us move to Matthew 21. And when Jesus, the King, makes His grand entry in Jerusalem, we probably expect Him to be riding a majestic horse.

**Matthew 21:5** "Tell the daughter of Zion, 'Behold, your King is coming to you, lowly and sitting on a donkey, a colt, the foal of a donkey.'"

The Greek adjective form here translated lowly in the New King James or meek in the King James is *Strong's #4239, praus*, meaning mild, meek, humble, gentle. Again, Jesus the King describes Himself as meek.

Back to chapter 5 now where we will see the same Greek word used again. Back to the Beatitudes. This time we will read verse 5.

**Matthew 5:5** "Blessed are the meek, for they shall inherit the earth."

Pretty much says it all, does it not?

Pushing now over to I Peter the third chapter where we will read verse 4.

**I Peter 3:4** (KJV) But let it be the hidden man of the heart, in that which is not corruptible, even the ornament of a meek and quiet spirit, which is in the sight of God of great price.

Peter is defining the attributes of someone who has a heart that is meek. It is a quiet spirit, which in the sight of God is of great price. God places great value on His people who choose to be like Him. Meek, lowly, quiet in heart. Those who have a heart, as Peter describes, that is not corruptible. Those who are poor in spirit, meek, and lowly in heart do not corrupt themselves with evil communications. (Jot down I Corinthians 15:33.) They put off the former conversation of the old carnal man, which is corrupt, speaking evil of others, and they let no corrupt communication proceed out of their mouth (Ephesians 4:22-29 KJV). Because, as Jesus tells us, out of the heart the mouth speaks. When our heart is right, our mouth is right.

We can tie this to Titus 3:2. No need to turn there, where Paul states, speak evil of no man.

**Titus 3:2** (KJV) Speak evil of no man, never be a fighter, but gentle, showing all meekness unto all men.

We could add in Galatians 6:1. We all know this one. This is where we are warned the only way we are to help someone who has a spiritual fault is we are to restore them quietly. He says, in the spirit of meekness, one on one. In gentleness as we remember first and foremost our own spiritual bankruptcy, lest we be tempted to become self-righteous and rich in the spirit and be too harsh in our correction to them.

Being meek is not being weak. We remain uncompromising in the truth, but restrain from correcting others harshly. Instead, we approach them with a meek, a kind, a very gentle spirit to sit down and talk through and encourage them to change. That is how we help someone that has a spiritual fault. We do not do it publicly. We take them aside privately, one on one, and we have a conversation that starts first and foremost with our own spiritual bankruptcy.

When we are poor in spirit, meek, humble, and lowly in heart, we have come to understand that we really have nothing, are nothing, and can do nothing good spiritually on our own. We have come to fully realize that without God we are worthless, no better than a worm, as Job would call himself. We are

poor in spirit. Poor in spirit and humility are attitudes in our heart that constrain our self-focus and promote an other-focused attitude that drives us to want to submit to them, to esteem them better than ourselves.

Human nature drives us to be competitive, and wow, do I know this one! To want to win, to want to fight, to want to talk badly about others in order to lift ourselves up. But those who have a heart like God are restrained at all times. They do not easily anger. They do not retaliate any wrongdoing. They do not harshly correct others. Those who are poor in the spirit readily and easily forgive any offense done to them. They are kind, easily approached, easy to get along with. They are not argumentative, and they are not quick to anger.

Being poor in spirit, humble, meek, and lowly in heart are interconnected sequential attitudes that stem from first recognizing our spiritual destitution before God. Poor in spirit is the foundation, it is internal between us and God. And while meekness then is the outward expression of that, it is gentleness, kindness, patience toward others.

First, we must become poor in spirit. Poor in our hearts. God in His mercy calls us, the unworthy sinner, and we know that we are unworthy. And so, this is between us and God. And we must first recognize our complete and utter spiritual bankruptcy, our total dependence on God's mercy as we put on His yoke and His enabling Holy Spirit.

Second, that poverty of spirit between us and God then fuels our humility or lowliness in our internal state of our heart. It is an accurate but very low estimate of ourselves in comparison to God's greatness, and this then spills over into our relationships with each other.

Meekness is a fruit of God's Holy Spirit listed in Galatians 5:23. It is an outward expression of our inner humble, poor in spirit attitude. Meekness is not weak in any way. It is significant power that is under consistent self-control and restraint, gentle, teachable, patient, someone who forbears and forgives.

As we examine our hearts, if we are poor in spirit, merciful, meek, humble, and lowly, we are filled with God's Spirit which enables us to sacrifice ourselves for God and others.

Please turn with me to Ephesians 4.

**Ephesians 4:1-3** I, therefore, the prisoner of the Lord, beseech you to walk worthy of the calling with which you were called, with all lowliness and gentleness [meekness in the King James Version], with longsuffering, bearing with one another in love, endeavoring to keep the unity of the spirit in the bond of peace.

Here we see a related noun form of the Greek word meek Jesus uses to describe Himself. In the New King James it is translated gentleness, but in the King James it is meekness. And Paul is admonishing us to walk worthy of our calling with *all*, that is, with every possible amount of lowliness and meekness, every possible amount in all situations, at all times, regardless of what was done or not done, endeavoring to keep the Spirit in the bond of peace.

Please flip to Philippians 2, verse 3. You probably knew I was coming to this one. I do find myself coming here quite a bit.

**Philippians 2:3-8** Let nothing be done through selfish ambition or conceit [so that is the contrast there Paul starts with, nothing done like that], but in lowliness of mind let each esteem others better than himself. Let each of you look out not only for his own interests, but also for the interests of others. Let this mind be in you which was also in Christ Jesus, who, being in the form of God, did not consider it robbery to be equal with God, but made Himself of no reputation, taking the form of a bondservant, and coming in the likeness of men. And being found in appearance as a man, He humbled Himself and became obedient to the point of death, even the death of the cross.

Jesus Christ was meek and lowly in heart. He *is* meek and lowly in heart.

Please push to I Peter 5, verse 5. And as you turn, I want us to recall the Passover event recorded in John 13, when Jesus rose from supper, laid aside His outer garments, and took a towel, girded Himself, and then literally lowered Himself to serve as He washed His disciples' feet, knowing of His imminent death that was just a few hours ahead. This event is top of mind as we read I Peter 5, verse 5.

**I Peter 5:5** Likewise you younger people, submit yourselves to your elders. Yes, all of you be submissive to one another, and be clothed with humility, for "God resists the proud, and gives grace to the humble."

Can we see the reference to the Passover there that Peter is making? It was top of mind for him to be clothed with humility. He is thinking about how Christ took off that outer garment and put on that garment and then washed the disciples' feet.

Now Paul was not there at that Passover, but no doubt he heard about this event many, many times, and we can be assured that he had this in mind when he wrote Colossians 3:12. So let us turn there for our final scripture. And then we actually see Paul use this word quite a bit when he starts something saying, put on or be clothed, and I believe each time he uses that he is thinking back to that Passover event when Christ put on that apron, lowered Himself, and served His disciples by washing their feet.

**Colossians 3:12** Therefore, as the elect of God, holy and beloved, put on tender mercies, kindness, humility, meekness, longsuffering.

Brethren, our outward obedience to the letter of the law is absolutely required. It is required to even have a relationship with God. But it is our inner heart that God is measuring to see if we measure up to His standard.

As we examine our hearts during this pre-Passover time, we must use God's holy heart as our comparison. Jesus tells us, "For I am meek and lowly in heart," and we must approach the Passover in our spiritual bankruptcy, recognizing we are nothing and we can do nothing, earn nothing without Jesus Christ's enabling Spirit. And we earn nothing, right? It is His imputed righteousness that He brings to us. We always fall short.

We must repent for both the sins we see and the many that we cannot yet see. And we must take Jesus Christ's yoke and Holy Spirit to always control our heart in a spirit of meekness, lowliness, gentleness, ready to suffer wrong, ready to forgive and forbear. For this is our high calling.