**A Meek and Quiet Spirit**

James Buchanan, 1840

"The ornament of a meek and quiet spirit, which is very precious in the sight of God" 1 Peter 3:4

The character which is so exquisitely delineated in these few simple words, is not the result of mere natural temperament or constitution — but the product of ripe and mature Christian experience. It is formed by slow degrees, under the teaching of God's Word and Spirit, and the long-continued discipline of his providence. It is lamentably defective in many, whose personal religion cannot be charitably doubted — and is seldom acquired in the earlier stages of the Christian course. It resembles the mellow flavor and sweetness of fruit which has been fully matured, and is ready to be gathered.

Let me *describe*and *illustrate*the spirit which is here commended; *contrasting*it, as we proceed, with the various dispositions to which it is opposed; and then adduce some reasons and motives fitted to persuade you to the acquirement and cultivation of it.

The spirit here described may be regarded under two distinct aspects:  
first, as it has reference to our *piety*towards God;  
secondly, as it relates to our *charity* towards fellow-men.

In the one respect, it ranks under our *religious*duty — in the other, under our *relative*duty.

**1. It is obviously a part of our religious duty to cherish at all times a meek and quiet spirit towards *God*.**His *Character*should secure our heartfelt reverence, and his *Will*should secure our quiet and unquestioning submission. We should be as little children in God's hands, regarding him as our Father in Heaven, and feeling towards him as a confiding child feels towards a kind parent, whose worth he reveres, whose love he cannot question, and whose will he would not resist for the world.

More particularly, the believer is called to exercise a meek and quiet spirit in reference to **God's Teaching**. He may find, assuredly he shall find, in reading that Word which contains the revelation of God's mind and will, many truths which are too apt, on their being first proposed, to excite his angry opposition, and to raise questions in his mind, such as that of our Lord's followers, "This is a hard saying, who can hear it?" The Christian must learn many a hard lesson from the mouth of God — many a lesson which is intended for "casting down imaginations, and every high thing that exalts itself against the knowledge of God, and bringing into captivity every thought to the obedience of Christ." (2 Corinthians 10:5.)

And these lessons, including all the fundamental truths of his Word, never can be learned or received unless the mind is brought to yield itself up entirely to God's teaching — until the disciple becomes as a little child, and sits like Mary at the feet of Jesus, hearing his word.

In this respect, a meek and quiet spirit stands opposed to all pride of intellect, and especially to that rebellious temper which is disposed to raise questions and start objections — instead of simply hearing and believing whatever the Lord speaks.

Free inquiry after the truth of God is not forbidden — far from it; but it must be a calm, meek, and submissive thoughtfulness, such as befits the unerring wisdom of our Instructor, and our own ignorance and weakness; an inquiry, whose only object is to ascertain God's truth, and, on its being ascertained, to receive and embrace it — however different it may be from our preconceived opinions, or opposed to our natural prejudices.

Such an inquiry is best and most successfully conducted, when the spirit of a man is thoroughly subdued by a sense of God's majesty, and awed into quiet submission by the conviction of his unerring wisdom. Then, instead of exclaiming in the heat and violence of our exasperated feelings, "This is a hard saying, who can hear it?" or, "Who is the Lord that we should obey him?" — we shall be ready meekly and simply to ask, "What has the Lord said?" or, "Lord, what will you have me to do?"

The believer is called to exercise a meek and quiet spirit in reference to **God's Accusations and Rebukes**. When he reads the Word, and marks the language in which God reproves him of sin; when he considers the humbling view which is there presented of his own vileness, and the displeasure which God has expressed against him — his proud heart may be too often disposed to question the accuracy of such representations, or, at all events, their application to *himself*. The unrenewed mind cannot endure to have such accusations closely pressed upon it — it spurns with indignation at the charges which God has deliberately stated.

But the disciple, whose mind has been subdued by the grace of God, will listen even to these humbling portions of God's Word, with a meek and quiet spirit. He is satisfied on the one hand, that God, as he cannot err or be deceived, can have no disposition to inflict unnecessary pain; and on the other side, that, as his sin must be infinitely more heinous in God's sight than it can be in his own, so it is beneficial for him to know what God thinks of it; and wise to look on it in the same light.

When others rail at the Word of God — he is found meekly reading it. While others are loud in declaiming against the passages which are offensive to their taste — he is quietly digesting them, and imbibing their wholesome truth into the very frame of his spirit. While others seek to adapt and accommodate God's Word to their own likings — he is meekly and quietly seeking to conform his character to God's Word. In this respect, a meek and quiet spirit stands opposed to pride, to self-righteousness, to vain-glory; it begins in penitence, and ends in habitual humility of heart.

The believer is called to exercise a meek and quiet spirit, in reference to **God's Dispensations Towards Him**. In the course of God's providence, he may be raised to great prosperity — or reduced to deep poverty and distress. In either case, he sees no reason to change his state of mind — he is meek and quiet still.

When an unsanctified man is elevated, especially if it is suddenly and unexpectedly, to affluence, or honor, or rank — he is too apt to swell into self-importance, as if a little gold were sufficient to give him new dignity, or a little honor to add to his intrinsic worth: "they grow fat as the heifer at grass, and neigh like stallions," (Jeremiah 50:11.)

But the true disciple, while he undervalues none of God's mercies, will join trembling with his mirth. And while he is surrounded with prosperity, will remember chiefly the additional responsibilities which are thereby imposed on him: his own weakness for so great a trust, and the solemn account which he must sooner or later render. And on the very pinnacle of worldly joy, he will seek to cherish a meek and quiet spirit towards God.

But meekness is more peculiarly appropriate in the season of adversity and trial. Such seasons every Christian has experienced, and many yet expect. It is through great tribulation that we must enter the kingdom. If all men are born to trouble — the Christian is doubly sure of his share, for "whom the Lord loves he chastens, and scourges every son whom he receives." At such seasons, and especially if the trial is very severe, or suddenly sent, or long continued — the disciple is in God's school, learning a practical lesson of no easy attainment, even the lesson of meekness and quietness towards God. His clearest duty is that of resigned submission, of uncomplaining acquiescence in God's will.

But alas! the self-evident clearness of the *duty*is far from insuring the disposition to obey! Instead of meekness towards God — there is too often an ill-concealed and ever struggling rebellion against his will. And instead of quietness — there is too often a querulous complaining, a fretful utterance of impatient feelings, equally dishonoring to God and injurious to his own peace of mind. God may say of many a professing disciple as he did of Ephraim, "I have surely heard Ephraim bemoaning himself thus — you have chastised me and I was chastised — as a bullock unaccustomed to the yoke," (Jeremiah 31.18.) Or as he said of the Israelites, on another occasion, "Your sons have fainted, they lie at the head of all the streets, as a wild bull in a net!" (Isaiah 51:20.)

A bullock unaccustomed to the yoke, or a wild bull caught in a net — are but too faithful emblems of many when they are first seized with affliction. They struggle against, and would gladly burst the bands which God has laid upon them — and when they cannot extricate themselves by any violent effort, they are too apt to sink into the habit of grieving and murmuring under their trials.

It is not astonishing that this should be the case with *worldly*men — for they have no resource except what worldly peace and prosperity can afford. But it ought not to be the case with God's people, who know that every painful dispensation with which they are visited, proceeds from unerring wisdom and infinite love, and that it is a part of that discipline by which God is seeking to purify them, and prepare them for Heaven.

It is long, however, even in a Christian mind, before *the habit of unquestioning submission to God's will*is formed. In the earlier stages of his course, the believer is apt . . .  
to be impatient of the cross which he is appointed to bear;  
to question either the necessity or the wisdom of its being imposed upon him, and  
to doubt the love of God when it is manifested in the way of chastisement. But as he advances, and in proportion as he is suitably exercised by his affliction, his mind is subdued. He feels that God has taken the management of his case into His own hands, and by ways which seem hard or mysterious — but which are really beneficial, is seeking to "humble him, and to prove him, and to show him what is in his heart." He learns by experience — what he was slow to learn by the mere reading of the Word, however clearly it was there set before him. And thus he comes to cherish habitually a "meek and quiet spirit" — a spirit which neither disputes the necessity, nor questions the wisdom, nor doubts the love of God's dispensations towards him — but which leads him to place himself entirely in God's hands, to be dealt with according to His good pleasure, not doubting, that "all things shall work together for good to those who love Him, and are the called according to His purpose." He feels the pressure of affliction, and may even be stunned by its unexpected stroke — but still he says with the Psalmist, "I was silent; I would not open my mouth, for You are the one who has done this!" Psalm 39:9

Herein he resembles his blessed Lord, who was "meek and lowly in heart." "He was oppressed and he was afflicted — yet he opened not his mouth. He is brought as a lamb to the slaughter, and as a sheep before her shearers is dumb, so he opened not his mouth." (Isaiah 53:7.)

**2. The spirit which is here commended, may be viewed in another aspect, as it has respect to our *fellow-men*.**The same meek and quiet spirit which leads the believer to submit to God, as his Father, will also lead him to act towards his fellow-men as brethren, in such a way as to give no unjust *offence* — to do no real *injury* — or to occasion no unnecessary *uneasiness*to any one of them. I do not mean to say that any Christian ever did or ever will pass through the world without offending the prejudices, or exciting the enmity and opposition of worldly men. No, for then "the offence of the Cross had ceased;" "it is enough for the servant that he be as his Master, and the disciple as his Lord." If they were offended by the perfect Master, much more may they be offended in his weak followers, who "are as sheep in the midst of wolves."

But while they ought not to shrink from duty, by reason of the opposition which they must encounter in the discharge of it — they should seek to maintain throughout, not a restless, irritable, and clamorous temper — but a meek and quiet spirit; a spirit actuated not by hatred — but by love; not shrinking from opposition when it must be encountered — but still less courting it or stirring it up; not delighted with the world's noisy strife — but with the quiet delights of privacy and peace.

This meek and quiet spirit should pervade all our interactions with others. The believer is called to exercise it in reference to the dispositions and tempers of those with whom he associates. These may often be irritable and violent; he may be scorned and reviled; he may be regarded with jealousy, or envy, or malice. And even where no such malignant feelings are displayed, he may be annoyed by infirmities of temper, such as call for the exercise of unwearied patience. Still, if his own mind is thoroughly subdued, if he is truly humble — he may be able to preserve his peace of mind in the midst of external discord, and feel how sweet a thing it is to be meek and quiet within.

The storm that rages without, the falling rain, and roaring thunder, and tempestuous wind — only serve to make the humble cottager feel how sweet and comfortable is home. Just so, a meek and quiet spirit feels its own happiness the more, when it witnesses the fearful strife of ungoverned and unhallowed passion. The reason why we are so seldom able to maintain this meek and quiet spirit in such circumstances, is that our minds are not thoroughly subdued — there is still *the accursed root of pride in our hearts*, which embitters our feelings and supplies fuel for the fire of strife and contention.

If we were thoroughly meek, we would also be perfectly quiet. But we often speak unadvisedly, and one unguarded word leads to altercation, and altercation ends in strife. We reprove the temper of others, and often in such a way, as to ruffle our own! Oh! that we could remember the words of the apostle, "Let nothing be done through strife or vain-glory — but in lowliness of mind, let each esteem others better than themselves;" and the example of our blessed Lord, who "endured the contradiction of sinners against himself" — lest we should weary and faint in our minds!

The believer is called to exercise a meek and quiet spirit towards others, in reference to the *personal injuries*which they may have committed against himself. *Injury*provokes *resentment* — and resentment prompts *revenge*. The first impulse of every unsubdued mind, is to render evil for evil; and few minds are so thoroughly sanctified as to be exempted altogether from the temptation to *retaliate*. But the hour of trial is the Christian's time for duty — he must then feel and act as a new creature — as a child of God. If *pride*swells within him, it must be crushed. If *resentment*arises, it must be so checked as that he "shall be angry and yet sin not." If *revenge*prompts retaliation either by tongue or hand, it must be steadily restrained. His spirit is then tested whether it be meek and quiet or not.

Let him in such an hour remember his calm and kind Master, who, "when he was reviled, reviled not again — when he suffered he threatened not — but committed himself unto Him who judges righteously." And let him, with reverence towards God, and with pity towards his offending brother, remember that solemn declaration, "Vengeance is Mine — I will repay! says the Lord."

Many of our heaviest afflictions come to us through the *channel of human agency*. In such cases, as has been already observed, we are too prone to overlook the appointment of God — and to resent the injury that is done to us. And especially when we are insulted and opposed on account of our religion, we are too prone to cherish indignation under the *cloak of Christian zeal*. We think the cause of God and the good of our enemies themselves require that we should not tamely submit to injury, or fail to lift a bold and indignant testimony against error and sin. And it is unquestionably our duty to avouch the Lord as our God in the face of all opposition, and to "be zealous" in advancing his cause. But *the zeal which the Gospel enjoins is such as proceeds from love, and is united with humility and meekness*.

The zeal which many professing Christians display is too often the zeal of *party*or of *pride* — haughty, intemperate, clamorous. It is the zeal which our Lord rebuked, when he said to his disciples, "You know not what spirit you are of." *The pure flame of Christian love must not be mixed with the wildfire of human passion*, "the wrath of man works not the righteousness of God." The zeal of a proud professor makes him acrimonious and loud in condemning the infirmities of others; but a meek and quiet spirit will, like David, retire and weep, and pray for them, "Rivers of waters run down my eyes because they keep not your law."

Fervent zeal may well consist with a modest and humble estimate of ourselves, and a charitable and gentle spirit towards our neighbor. None can be more zealous than Christ — and yet none so meek and lowly as he.

Let me now very briefly adduce some *reasons*and *motives*fitted to persuade you to the acquirement and cultivation of this spirit. It is here described as a beautiful and lovely disposition of mind — it is called an *ornament*. Wherever a meek and quiet spirit is consistently exhibited in the character of a Christian — it is universally felt and owned to be most attractive and engaging. Those professors who lack it, or who are as yet greatly deficient in it, are on that account less esteemed — their society is often felt to be disagreeable rather than pleasing — their conversation is not so sweet or refreshing.

But a meek and quiet spirit, maintained under all changes of circumstances, and under every provocation, is felt even by unrenewed men to be the noblest proof of the power of practical religion. It is very precious in the sight of God. He regards it, not indeed as meritorious — but as agreeable to his will, and a copy taken from the pattern of his well-beloved Son. Accordingly, a very large portion of his Word is devoted to the inculcation of those principles by which this character is formed; and a large part of his providential discipline is designed to produce and strengthen it in our souls. "God resists the proud — but gives grace to the humble. To that man will he look, even to him that is humble and of a contrite spirit."

It is thus precious in God's sight, because it is closely connected with, and conducive to, the peace of our own minds, and the order of the Church, and of the world. Personal, domestic, and public peace is promoted by it; and he who is the God of *peace*and the God of *order*, delights in that whereby general happiness is advanced.

No one can estimate how much his own personal comfort depends on his possessing a meek and quiet spirit. Such a spirit easily endures much which frets and discomposes those who are less thoroughly subdued. An affront which exasperates a proud man — a meek man calmly suffers. An injury which revenge resents — meekness overlooks or forgets. And trials which scarcely ruffle the composure of a quiet and contented mind — are sufficient to toss the wicked as on the waves of a troubled and boisterous sea.

Whenever we find ourselves violently discomposed, fretful, impatient, or wretched — we may rest assured that our misery arises much more from the distempered state of our souls, than from any external cause. We should seek relief, by acquiring that meek and quiet spirit, which will raise us above the influence of external circumstances, or enable us calmly to endure them.

Finally, let it be remembered that this temper of mind is not natural to any of us — it must be acquired and cultivated. Nor is it a plant of easy and speedy growth — it is the gradual product of much discipline and of growing Christian experience. It seldom springs up, so as to reach maturity, until after many a storm has rooted and established it — nor even then, unless it be implanted and watered by the Spirit of God. "The fruit of the Spirit is meekness, gentleness, long-suffering." "Experience works patience." "The work of righteousness is peace: and the effect of righteousness, quietness and assurance forever." (Isaiah 32.17.)