

Step 24 on Meekness, Simplicity, Guilelessness Which Come Not From Nature but From Habit, and About Malice

by St. John Climacus

St. John Climacus emphasizes the importance of meekness, simplicity, and guilelessness as essential virtues for spiritual growth and a closer relationship with God.

Scripture: Psalm 10:8, Psalm 25:9, Psalm 36:2, Psalm 36:9, Psalm 37:11, Matthew 5:5, Matthew 6:13, Matthew 11:29

Topics: "Christian Humility", "Spiritual Growth"

Description

St. John Climacus preaches on the virtues of meekness, highlighting its importance as a precursor to humility. Meekness is described as an unchangeable state of mind that remains calm in all situations, including praying for troublesome neighbors and being a rock against irritability. It is a key element in fostering forgiveness, boldness in prayer, and the guidance of the Holy Spirit. Meekness is also emphasized as a necessary quality for obedience, brotherhood, and discernment, ultimately leading to rest in the Lord and inheritance of the earth.

Transcript

1. The morning light precedes the sun, and the precursor of all humility is meekness. Therefore let us hear in what order the Light arranges these virtues, for He says: Learn of Me, for I am meek and humble in heart.⁴ So then before looking at the sun, which is humility, we must be illumined by the light, which is meekness, and then we can look with a clear gaze at the sun. For it is impossible, absolutely impossible, to gaze upon the sun before we have experienced that light, as we have learnt from the order in which the Lord has put these virtues.

2. Meekness is an unchangeable state of mind, which remains the same in honour and dishonour.

⁴ St. Matthew xi, 29.

3. Meekness consists in praying calmly and sincerely for a troublesome neighbour.

4. Meekness is a rock overlooking the sea of irritability, which breaks all the waves that dash against it yet remains completely unmoved.

5. Meekness is the buttress of patience, the door, or rather, the mother of love, and the foundations of discernment, for it is said: The Lord will teach the meek His way.¹ It prepares us for the forgiveness of sins; it is boldness in prayer, an abode of the Holy Spirit. But to whom shall I look? Even to him that is meek and quiet.²

6. Meekness is the fellow-worker of obedience, the guide of the brotherhood, a curb for the furious, a check to the irritable, a minister of joy, the imitation of Christ, something proper to angels, shackles for demons, a shield against peevishness.

7. In meek hearts the Lord finds rest, but a turbulent soul is a seat of the devil.

8. The meek shall inherit the earth,³ or rather shall exercise dominion over it, but bad-tempered folk will be harried out of their land.

9. A meek soul is a throne of simplicity, but an angry mind is a creator of evil.

10. A quiet soul makes room for words of wisdom, for the Lord will guide the meek in judgment,⁴ or rather, in discretion.

11. An upright soul is a fellow lodger with humility, but an evil one is a daughter of pride.

12. The souls of the meek are filled with knowledge, but an angry mind is a denizen of darkness and ignorance.

13. An angry man and an imposter met one another, and it was impossible to find a true word in their conversation. Unveiling the heart of the former you will find frenzy; looking into the soul of the other you will see malice.

14. Simplicity is a constant habit of soul that has become immune to evil thinking.

15. Evil is a science, or rather, a diabolical deformity, bereft of truth and thinking it can hide that fact from public notice.⁵

16. Hypocrisy is a contrary state of body and soul interwoven with every kind of subterfuge.

17. Guilelessness is a joyous state of soul far removed from all ulterior motive.

18. Honesty is unmeddling thought, sincere character, frank and unpremeditated speech.

19. Innocent is he whose soul is in its natural purity as it was created, and who makes intercession for all.

20. Malice is a perversion of honesty, a deceitful way of thinking, falsely screened by affability, false oaths, ambiguous words, dissimulation of heart, an abyss of cunning, deceit that has become a habit, conceit turned into nature, a foe to humility, a pretence of penitence, diminution of mourning, hostility to confession, wilfulness, an agent of falls, a hindrance to resurrection, a smiling at offences, affected frowning, false reverence, diabolical life.

1 Psalm xxiv, 9.

2 Isaiah lxvi, 2.

3 St. Matthew v, 5.

4 Psalm xxiv, 9.

5 From this paragraph till the end of the step there is much dislocation of the text, and the order varies in different manuscripts

21. An evil person is a namesake and companion of the devil; that is why the Lord taught us so to name the devil, saying: Deliver us from the evil one.¹

22. Let us run from the precipice of hypocrisy and from the pit of duplicity, hearing him who said: Evil-doers shall be destroyed,² as the green herb they shall quickly wither,³ for such folk are food for demons.

23. God is called love, and also justice. That is why the wise man⁴ in the Song of Songs says to the pure heart: Justice has loved thee.⁵ Also the father of the wise man says: Good and just is the Lord.⁶ And of those who are His namesakes He says that they are saved: Who saves the upright of heart;⁷ and again: His countenance sees and visits those who are honest and just.⁸

24. The first property of the age of childhood is uniform simplicity, and as long as Adam had it, he did not see the nakedness of his soul, or the indecency of his flesh.

25. Excellent too is that simplicity which is in some by nature, yes, and blessed, but not as much as that which is grafted in with toil and trouble after repenting from sin. For the former is sheltered and protected from much affectation and passion, but the latter leads to the highest humility and meekness. The former has not much reward, but the latter--infinite, infinite.

26. Let all of us who wish to attract the Lord to ourselves draw near to Him as disciples to the Master, simply, without hypocrisy, without duplicity or guile, not out of idle curiosity. He Himself is simple and absolute, and He wants souls that come to Him to be simple and innocent. For you will surely never see simplicity separated from humility.

27. The evil man is a false prophet who thinks that from words he can catch thoughts, and from outward appearance, dispositions of the heart.

28. I have seen honest souls who learnt to be evil from evil people, and I wondered how they could lose their natural disposition and superiority so soon. But it is as easy for the honest to fall from grace, as it is difficult to change the dishonest. But true exile, obedience and guarding of the lips have often had great power, and have wonderfully restored the incurable.

29. If knowledge puffs up many people, simplicity and lack of learning can perhaps in the same measure humble them. All the same there are here and there people who pride themselves on their ignorance.

30. The thrice-blessed and most simple Paul was a clear example for us, for he was the rule and type of blessed simplicity, for no one, absolutely no one, has ever seen or heard or could see so much progress made in so short a time.

31. A simple-hearted monk is like a rational dumb animal, who lays his burden on his director. An animal does not answer back his master who yokes him, nor does an honest soul do this with his superior, but follows wherever he is led; though sent to the slaughter, he could make no protest.

32. It is hard for the rich to enter the Kingdom of Heaven⁹ and equally hard for those who are foolishly wise to enter simplicity.

33. A fall has often corrected the clever, giving them salvation and innocence in spite of themselves.

1 St. Matthew vi, 13. 2 Psalm xxxvi, 9.

3 Psalm xxxvi, 2.

4 I.e. Solomon.

5 Song of Songs, i, 3. 6 Psalm xxiv, 8.

7 Psalm vii, 11.

8 Cf. Psalm x, 8.

9 St. Matthew xix, 23.

34. Struggle to elude your own prudence and by so doing you will find salvation and honesty through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

He who has the strength for this step, let him take courage; for he has become an imitator of Christ his Master and has been saved.

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