



The Cud...a little something to chew on.

July 28, 1997

Defensive or Defended

Moments after my flight pulled back from the gate, I found myself embroiled in a border dispute. The arms and legs occupying seat 16B were conducting unauthorized and illegal raids into seat 16C. Which just so happened to be my seat. My *sanctuary*. Such territorial violations called for immediate and decisive action.

I commenced maneuvers with a robust chest expansion followed by a discreet elbow jab. Establishing upper body boundaries proved easier than relocating the Cordovan Wing Tips now sneaking across the lowlands. There I had to employ the classic "Carry-on Cram", a move designed to shut off blood flow to the insurgent's extremities, simultaneously accompanied by a smile and an apology.

And before the first serving of peanuts could raise even a single passenger's cholesterol, my adversary had retreated to the confines of his assigned space. Victory won, territory reclaimed.

Still basking in my triumph, I decided to read my Bible. But I was too embarrassed to remove it from my briefcase. I wasn't embarrassed by my beliefs; I was embarrassed by my behavior. I couldn't bring myself to pull out the book that would immediately reveal both my allegiances and my hypocrisy. It was bad enough that I'd spent twenty minutes fighting for a few cubic inches of personal space; I couldn't turn around and identify myself with a God who gave up more than a little legroom in order to rescue those who hated Him. Only then did I begin to value the discreetness of having a computer version of the Bible.

The perverse lesson from my airline seat scuffle is that no personal comfort is out of reach for the individual willing to sacrifice his Christian witness. "Get all you can, can all you get, and poison the rest" – that's how to protect your interests. But as Paul reminds us, "we did not learn Christ in this way" (Ephesians 4:20). In fact, on the single occasion Jesus Christ described His own disposition, He specified only two qualities: humility and meekness (Matthew 11:28-29).

Meekness is a trait I can discuss more easily than I can display. To most people meekness conjures images of the spineless and the weak. But biblically, meekness (or gentleness, as it's sometimes translated), is a mark of monumental strength.

Meekness describes the strength necessary to restrain a defensive spirit. Solomon said, "He who is slow to anger is better than the mighty, and he who rules his spirit, is better than he who captures a city" ([Proverbs 16:32](#)). Any wimp can retaliate. The toughest muscle to exercise is the one that turns the other cheek.

Meek people have disabled the drive for self-protection, self-assertion and self-justification. They won't be provoked and they don't get even. They will defend others, but never themselves. Of course this raises the question, what do meek people do with all that extra time on their hands?

When the Lord described Himself as meek, He was at the time, extending an invitation to the weary and heavy laden. I think it's axiomatic - the meek are eminently approachable. And while meekness fosters approachability, with it also comes vulnerability. There are bound to be some people who, when they encounter a meek and gentle spirit, see a "Kick Me" sign. Just thinking about the risk makes me want to cover up and take cover.

But I'm called to love friend and enemy, and pure love can only flow from an unguarded well. I can't love someone and protect myself from them at the same time. C.S. Lewis wrote: "The only place outside Heaven where you can be perfectly safe from all the dangers and perturbations of love is Hell".

Love and defensiveness cannot coexist.

Self-defense is costly. The mental and emotional expenditures necessary to assert, defend and justify ourselves is considerable. But the good news is, canceling our "defense spending" doesn't result in disarmament. God commands us to give up self-defense, not self-interest. Our interests are important; but our interests are no longer our responsibility.

Meekness is not a condition of defenselessness; it's a commitment to a new Defender. God Almighty takes up my cause. He defends me before the kings of the earth and the Department of Motor Vehicles. He promises to protect my interests - those in the marketplace and those around the kitchen table.

Jesus Christ could have ordered 72,000 angels to kick you-know-what as He was being hauled off to Pilate's kangaroo court ([Matthew 26:53](#)). Instead, He trusted the Father to manage and coordinate His defense. And the Father let

Him die. God the Father defended His Son up to and *through* the cross, but not *from* the cross. Therein lies our defense Contractor's small print.

Our divine defense *may* result in deliverance from unfairness and pain; but more often it results in deliverance through unfairness and pain. The Father's management style isn't always immediately gratifying, but His management objectives are always eternally satisfying. He manages our defense with perfect love, perfect power and perfect purpose.

"For you have been called for this purpose, since Christ also suffered for you, leaving you an example for you to follow in His steps, who committed no sin, nor was any deceit found in His mouth; and while being reviled, He did not revile in return; while suffering, He uttered no threats, but kept entrusting Himself to Him who judges righteously" (1 Peter 2:21-23).

Until they inherit the earth, the meek will have to entrust themselves to "Him who judges righteously".

That is unless 16B managed to use up all the overhead space – then you call the flight attendant.

Not always on the Cudding edge,

David