PUT ON…MEEKNESS

Colossians 3:12-14

Several of our deacons have been meeting regularly over the past couple of years to develop plans for implementing our elders' vision through improved communication and collaboration. Part of their efforts involves choosing an annual theme to direct their activities. They selected the following theme for this year:

Equipped for the mission: every disciple, every place

Their theme motivates our current sermon series, which explores the question, **"What does it look like to be equipped for the mission?"** We are focusing our study on Paul's letter to the Colossians because it records his instruction to his audience to "put on"[1] certain attitudes and practices (*Colossians 3:12-14*), which, together, form the portrait of an equipped disciple. This lesson examines the "meekness" that the Colossians were to practice (*Colossians 3:12*).

The meekness of God and Moses

- English translations of the Bible use either "meekness" (ESV, NRSV, NKJV) or "gentleness" (NASB, NIV) to translate the Greek word *prautēs* in Colossians 3:12. In fact, English Bibles offer several translations for the Greek word, including "courtesy" (*Titus 3:2*, ESV), "gentleness" (*cf. Ephesians 4:2,* ESV), "meekness" (*Colossians 3:12*, ESV), and "humility" (*James 3:13*, NASB).
- The range of words used to translate the Greek term helps us understand its broader meaning: *prautēs* refers to **the ability to handle problems, hostility, and criticism without resorting to aggression, bluster, or self-defense.**
- While the Greek and Roman worlds Paul inhabited would have joined him in labeling *prautēs* – meekness/gentleness/humility – a virtue (*cf. Galatians 5:22-23*), they did not agree on its application.
    - Paul argued that meekness/gentleness/humility should be shown to all people, including opponents (*2 Timothy 2:24-25; Titus 3:1-2*).
    - Greek and Roman thinkers believed that people, especially leaders, should practice meekness/gentleness/humility, but that it needed a counterbalance (such as anger, harshness, brutality) to prevent it from becoming a flaw. For example, consider the following quote from a speech delivered by the Greek statesman Demosthenes to a group of fighting Athenian politicians:

> *"For it ought to have been the reverse, men of Athens; all your politicians should have trained you to be gentle and humane in the Assembly, for there you are dealing*

[1] All quotes from the Bible come from *The Holy Bible, English Standard Version* (ESV Permanent Text Edition, Crossway, 2016) unless otherwise noted.

> *WITH RIGHTS THAT CONCERN YOURSELVES AND YOUR ALLIES, BUT IN PREPARING FOR WAR THEY SHOULD HAVE MADE YOU THREATENING AND INTRACTABLE, BECAUSE THERE YOU ARE PITTED AGAINST YOUR ENEMIES AND RIVALS."*[2]

- Paul adopted an uncommon attitude towards meekness/gentleness/humility because of its prominent place in the Bible.
    - While the Bible does not apply "meekness" to God, it does depict Him acting in ways that embody it – He responds to human rebellion with gracious, generous mercy that seeks a relationship rather than punishment (*cf. Exodus 34:6-7; Psalm 103:6-14; Ezekiel 18:23, 32; James 5:11*).
    - God's gracious, generous mercy manifested itself in Moses, God's special prophet who uniquely represented Him in the Hebrew Bible (*Exodus 34:29-35; Numbers 12:6-7*). Moses represented God, in part, because he "was very meek, more than all people who were on the face of the earth" (*Numbers 12:3*), modeling God's generous and merciful relationship-seeking behavior in his relationships.
        - Moses intervened on behalf of those who attacked him and his authority, genuinely petitioning God to show them mercy (*Numbers 12:1-15*).
        - Moses offered his life to atone for the lives of those who rebelled against God (*Exodus 32:30-32*).
    - God's gentleness finds its fullest expression in Jesus, who fully embodied God's identity (*Colossians 2:9*).
        - Jesus is "**gentle** (*prautēs*) and lowly in heart," offering rest and relief for burdened people (*Matthew 11:28-29; cf. Matthew 21:5; Zechariah 9:9*).
        - Paul entreated the Corinthians "by the **meekness** and gentleness of Christ" (*2 Corinthians 10:1; cf. Philippians 2:1-8*).

Applications

Considering the examples of Moses and Jesus' meekness, we can begin to understand what it looks like when we "put on…meekness" (*Colossians 3:12*). Adopting a meek lifestyle involves:

- Recognizing that God's plan to reconcile people to Himself defines life, not the circumstances of our day-to-day lives.
- Recognizing that our value resides in complete submission to God's will rather than asserting our self-will.
- Recognizing that our submission to God's plan involves willingly enduring inconveniences, insults, and expenses for others' benefit in the same way Jesus' suffered for our benefit.

Remember, Jesus repeatedly focused his gentleness on those who humbled themselves before him while he censured those who failed to practice gentleness (*John 4:1-42; Matthew 23:1-36*).

[2] Demosthenes. (1930). *Demosthenes with an English translation by J. H. Vince, M.A.* Medford, MA: Cambridge, MA, Harvard University Press; London, William Heinemann Ltd.