PUT ON…PATIENCE

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 "patience" that the Colossians were to practice (*Colossians 3:12*).

The patience of God in Jesus

In Exodus 34:5-7, God passed in front of Moses and announced His identity. God's declaration of His identity occurs in connection to His anger over Israel's violation of their newly enacted covenant with Him (*Exodus 32:1-14*). Although His "wrath [burned] hot against them" and He announced His intention to "consume them" (*Exodus 32:10*), He "relented from the disaster that he had spoken of bringing on his people" as punishment for their idolatry (*Exodus 32:14*). The scene in Exodus 32-34 shows that, while God will punish the guilty, His slow-to-anger character overwhelmingly tips the scales of His justice in favor of forgiveness.

The patience Paul encouraged the Colossians to "put on" originates in Exodus 34:5-7. Consider:

- The phrase "slow to anger" (*Exodus 34:6, makrothymōs*), in the Greek translation of the Hebrew Bible, renders as an adjective the same noun that is translated as "patience" in Colossians 3:12 (*makrothymia*).
- The connection between Exodus 34:6 and Colossians 3:12 is not merely a coincidence caused by similar words. Instead, it shows a purposeful New Testament use of a pattern observed by its authors in the Hebrew Bible.
    - God's declaration of His identity in Exodus 34:6-7 is a key passage in the Bible that repeats throughout the Hebrew Bible (*cf. Numbers 14:18; Nehemiah 9:17; Psalm 103:8; Jonah 4:2*) – *it is the most quoted passage from the Hebrew Bible within the Hebrew Bible.*

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

    - God's character introduced in Exodus 34:6-7 provides the template that shapes the New Testament passages outlining the character that ought to define Christians (*cf. Galatians 5:22-23; Ephesians 4:1-3; Colossians 3:12-14*).
- Because God's "slow to anger" identity shapes the patience we should embody, our practice of patience must reflect His patience. For example:
    - God's patience seeks a relationship.
        - Paul wrote that God's patience "is meant to lead [people] to repentance" (*Romans 2:4; 2 Peter 3:9*). God patiently endures human failings for a reason; He wants a relationship with us.
        - Our patience must not passively endure but actively pursue relationships.
    - God's patience does not stand alone.
        - God's declaration of His identity reveals that His patience combines with mercy, grace, love, faithfulness, and forgiveness (*Exodus 34:6-7*).
        - To "put on" patience, we must also actively cultivate its partner characteristics and use them in our relationships (*cf. 1 Corinthians 13:4*).
    - God's patience is costly.
        - God's patience carried a tremendous cost; He endured Israel's rebellions for nearly two millennia before commissioning Jesus to resolve it through his death and resurrection.
        - Our practice of patience must also willingly endure the costs it places on our time and resources.

Applications

Even though the Bible depicts God through images like 'father' and 'husband,' I want to apply His patience to mothers in honor of Mother's Day.

- Genesis 3 describes the rebellion of the woman and man in Eden. God's response to their disobedience included telling the woman He would "surely multiply [her] pain in childbearing" (*Genesis 3:16*). Two points should be noted:
    - "Pain" translates a Hebrew word that means 'hurt, worry, grief, anxiety' (*cf. Genesis 6:6*). It refers to psychological more than physical pain.
    - "Childbearing" renders a Hebrew word meaning 'conception, pregnancy' (*cf. Genesis 4:1*). The word includes the entirety of motherhood, not just childbirth.
- God's punishment of the woman combined the joy of motherhood with a reality we all know – tension, frustration, fear, worry, and heartbreak often mark the relationships between mothers and their children. A parallel appears—the relationships between mothers and their children mirror those between God and His people.
- Therefore, a mother's patience with her children ought to:
    - Focuses them on their relationship with God before their relationship with her.
    - Cultivate mercy, grace, love, faithfulness, and forgiveness; patience that does not intentionally develop the full set of God's characteristics will be easily disturbed.
    - Willingly bear the costs of the relationship because it has intrinsic value worthy of Jesus' sacrifice.