

Conley Memorial Presbyterian Church, 17<sup>th</sup> Sunday after Pentecost, Sept. 11, 2016

**The Patient Grace of God**

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1 Timothy 1:12-17

If you have ever flown on an airplane and experienced a delay or a layover, then you may have had to practice patience. If you have ever been stuck in extended traffic then you have surely had to practice patience. Maybe right this moment you are engaging in the practice of patience as you listen to me preach this message. In all these scenarios, we have had or currently are having to practice patience. As humans we are imperfect and therefore are imperfect in our patience. While we may lack in this area, God is supremely perfect in His patience. This morning we will be exploring God's patience through the Testimony of Paul and the grace that God gave to him.

The passage for today is from the book of 1 Timothy. 1 Timothy is known as one of the Pastoral Epistles in the New Testament of the Bible. What this title given means is that 1 Timothy was a letter written with pastoral concern in dealing with matters in the church and how to pastor. Paul is accredited with writing this letter to Timothy. While there is some debate on who the author of the letter is, it is largely credited to Paul through a scribe. When the letter of 1 Timothy was written, Paul would have just recently been released from imprisonment and had left Timothy to handle some problems with false teaching in Ephesus. The city of Ephesus at this time was full of wizardry, sorcery, idolatry, and false teaching among the many evils. For this reason, Timothy had been left behind. Paul's letter to Timothy was meant to encourage him in his pastoral work and help him in dealing with the people of Ephesus.

The passage from this letter that we will be spending most our time in is 1 Timothy 1:12-17 however, it is very important that we understand the literary context of this passage by looking at the verses that follow. In verses 18-20 Paul gives Timothy a call to engage in battle with those who are full of false teaching and blasphemy. Understanding this is huge in understanding verses 12-17 as verses 12-17 give the

testimony of Paul in which he was previously a blasphemer himself. It is as if Paul is instructing and encouraging Timothy in how to deal with people who are similar to how he used to be himself.

As we move back to verse 12 we see that Paul begins with a thanks to Christ for appointing him to the ministry. Something noticeable here is that Paul writes that God “appointed me to His service”. Matthew Henry, in his commentary on this verse writes, “Ministers can’t make ministers...this was solely due to God’s grace”.<sup>1</sup> As seen in this quote, Paul understood that he was solely subject to God’s grace in his life. Paul continues on in verse 13 to write, “even though I was once a blasphemer and a persecutor and a violent man” so to show that God appointed him despite his life of sin. Paul in verse 15 actually gives himself the title of “the worst of sinners”. What Paul keeps referring to is the former life that he lived before God opened his eyes. Paul was previously a Pharisee and in some ways what would be known today as a “religious terrorist” against followers of Christ. The reason why Paul emphasizes his past of sin so much is so that the character of God can be seen more clearly. In Paul’s testimony we are able to see God’s patience through His grace.

Paul continues to write in verse 16, “But for that very reason, I was shown mercy so that in me, the worst of sinners, Christ Jesus might display His immense patience as an example for those who would believe in Him and receive eternal life”. What Paul is alluding to here is that even though Paul was so full of sin, God still had enough mercy for him. The word “patience” used in this verse in its original Greek form is the word “makrothymia” which within this context means “long-suffering” or “slowness in avenging wrongs”.<sup>2</sup> What this word attributes to God is that He was even willing to withhold His vengeance on Paul despite all the sin and evil he had done in his life. God’s patience was displayed through His grace to Paul all the while Paul did not actually merit any patience from God whatsoever.

The remarkable story of Paul repeats itself every day as sinful, broken people all over the world are transformed by God’s saving grace in Jesus Christ. No matter the degree of our sin, God is more than patient enough with His grace for us. There is no

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<sup>1</sup> Zondervan NIV, Matthew Henry Commentary

<sup>2</sup> Blueletterbible.com

sin that the grace of God was not able to cover when Christ died on the cross. This is the gospel and this is why it is called good news. It is important that we constantly remind ourselves of the gospel story as it the central story of our lives *whether we believe it or not*.

This passage of scripture opens with Paul giving thanks and ends with Paul giving praise to God. Verse 17 writes, “Now to the King eternal, immortal, invisible, the only God, be honor and glory for ever and ever. Amen”. Due to the grace of God, we should be overflowing with praise of God. It is also notable that in verse 14 Paul writes “The grace of our Lord was poured out on me abundantly, along with the faith and love that are in Christ Jesus”. What this verse describes is that faith and love are essentially the inward and outward manifestations of the bestowal and realization of the grace that comes from Christ Jesus. In other terms, our lives should be overflowing with praise, faith, and love for Christ as well as love for others due to the extraordinary grace of God that affects every aspect of our lives both now and forever.

**Amen.**

Note: Scripture quotations are from the New International Version of the Bible, 2011.