

EXPRESSING GRATITUDE

Luke 17:11-19

Two of the most important words in the English language are please and thank-you. Most of us don't really notice so much when people use these terms as when they don't. I guess that we tend to think that *humility* and *gratitude* should be the norm in civilized society. The lack of the use of please and thank-you is indicative of the trend in our present day society of pride and an attitude of "Hey, I deserve this good thing you did for me!" When we encounter such an ungrateful attitude, it causes us to be less inclined to be helpful the next time. This may be why we see less and less of neighbors being neighborly. What we are seeing is less and less influence of the church and the teachings of the Bible on our society. Christian influence is being covered up because Christians are not setting the proper example. We are not being "salt and light" out in the world to the same extent as we used to be relative to the other influences that are affecting people today. One of the greatest influences on people is television and the majority of the writers for television are people who are not oriented toward the church and, in fact, tend to be very anti-Christian. As a consequence, we see less and less of the Golden Rule being applied in the interpersonal relationships that are depicted in the dramas and stories.

Jesus taught on the importance of gratitude and the fact that such an attitude is expected by God when He shows His grace and love toward us.

Now on his way to Jerusalem, Jesus traveled along the border between Samaria and Galilee. As he was going into a village, ten men who had leprosy met him. They stood at a distance LUKE 17:11-12

The description of the setting in which this event took place shows the plight of people with terrible diseases. Leprosy was such a disease that struck fear into the hearts of people in much the same way as AIDS affects people today. This skin disorder may have been different from Hanson's disease (what we commonly refer to as leprosy today). It was believed that leprosy of the Bible was contagious (it likely was) and, consequently, those who had the disease were outcasts from society. They typically lived on the outskirts of towns in small groups and they were required by law to warn people that came near them by crying out "Unclean, unclean." What a terrible way to live one's life.

This disease is also used as a physical metaphor of the spiritual condition of all of mankind in their sin. Mankind in his sinful condition lives outside of the community of God's people and their actions cry out to all around them and especially to God "Unclean, unclean."

and called out in a loud voice, "Jesus, Master, have pity on us!" When he saw them, he said, "Go, show yourselves to the priests." And as they went, they were cleansed. One of them, when he saw he was healed, came back, praising God in a loud voice. He threw himself at Jesus' feet and thanked him—and he was a Samaritan. LUKE 17:13-16

People with leprosy were not entirely cut off from society in that they knew what was happening in the world around them, they just couldn't participate in things. They had heard about Jesus and when they learned He was passing through their area they made a point to find Him. Many times, desperation is an element of people turning to God to get help. Here we see desperation in action. These men had no hope other than Jesus. For them, He was the only way. We also see humility in action in that their cry for help was one of a call for "mercy".

Again we see, in the situation of the lepers, a metaphor of mankind in his sin. There is no help available in the world system for what ailed them and their only hope was Jesus. The approach they took of crying out to Him for His mercy is also the approach that we must take as we come to God for salvation. It is by His mercy and grace that such help is available

Jesus was willing to help simply because they asked Him for help. There was not any "meritorious qualities" ascribed to these people. They merely had a need and asked for help. His response was immediate as He told them to do a simple thing: "Go show yourself to the priest." It was the responsibility of the priest to examine people who had been sick (and consequently separated from society) to see if they could resume normal interpersonal relationship with other people. These precautions were necessary to prevent disease from spreading and affecting large sections of the population.

We notice here that healing was almost instantaneous. As the men acted out the instructions Jesus gave them, they experienced healing. I think this is a key point -- we access the provision that God gives in His mercy and by His grace when we are obedient to His commands. This phenomenon is not just a New Testament one, it can be found also in the Old Testament.

The situation in the Old Testament that illustrates this point is one of a leper wanting to be healed. You remember the story of Naaman the Syria captain who had leprosy and came to Elisha for help. Elisha instructed him to go dip himself in the Jordan River seven times. At first, the man refused because he felt insulted to do such a trivial thing and besides the Jordan River was not a very great river. However, when he did carry out the instructions of the prophet, then he was healed. Many times in our sins we suffer the consequences of such sins and do not find any relief simply because we refuse to do the simple things that God would have us do.

As the ten lepers went, they experienced healing and they began to notice what was happening to them. I'm sure that they were elated and thrilled. Can't you imagine how happy they felt to be relieved of such a burden? Only one was moved with enough gratitude to return to Jesus and express that gratitude to Him. Luke told us that the man glorified God and thanked Jesus. This was a recognition that God was responsible for the great act that had occurred.

Luke pointed out that the one who returned to give thanks was a Samaritan. Most likely, the point Luke was trying to make was that the others were Jews and the Jews, in general, had a problem with pride. It is usually a feeling of pride and having an exalted opinion of ones self that results in a lack of gratitude. This kind of pride hurts our relationship with God. The Bible tells us that God resists the proud, but exalts the humble. You can believe that God notices our attitudes in these areas.

*Jesus asked, "Were not all ten cleansed? Where are the other nine? Was no one found to return and give praise to God except this foreigner?" Then he said to him, "Rise and go; your faith has made you well."
LUKE 17:17-19*

Jesus took note that only one returned. When we fail to be sensitive to the grace and mercy with which God blesses us we are, in effect, saying to God, "You don't really matter." Very few Christian would ever be guilty of thinking such a thought that God doesn't matter. None of us would say such a thing in so many words and, yet, do we, by our failure to be sensitive to the expressions of God's goodness, give the impression we think we deserve such blessings?

The Samaritan, by his gratitude, showed that he had the kind of faith that leads to salvation. Jesus told the man that his faith had made him whole. I would interpret this to mean that the healing the man experienced was more than physical healing of the skin disease, but included a spiritual wholeness.

When we have a physical disorder we can become very concerned with physical wholeness and yet we tend to just accept spiritual disorders with little or no concern. Yet in the final analysis, spiritual disorders are much more serious than the physical ones. We should take a spiritual inventory to determine where healing and restoration are needed and then be bold like the ten lepers and call out for help. Just as Jesus helped these men, He has promised to help us. When we do receive healing of a physical or spiritual nature, we should be most careful to direct our thanks in the right direction, to God, Who is the Source of every good and perfect gift.

EPILOGUE

Why did Jesus tell the ten lepers to go show themselves to the priests? In other words, what was going on in this exchange? Several points are noted below which gives us insight into what was happening:

The first thing (points 1 and 2) we see is the demonstration of the multiple roles that Jesus portrayed while he was here in the flesh. Next (point 3) is the benefit of obedience. We also see (points 4, 5, and 6) the danger of being caught up in religiosity and failure to recognize that it is not the form but the substance and it is not the ritual but the reality but that we must look to the Source. Finally, we see (points 7-10) the absolute necessity of faith in our relationship to God. We also see the universality of faith in that faith breaks through to God and reaps of the benefits (without regard to chronological time) of what was demonstrated (in time) by the rending of veil in the temple. It was always available since the crucifixion of Christ as the propitiation for our sins was a “done deal” even before it happened on the stage of history.

1. He had cleansed and healed them in His role of God Incarnate.
2. He recognized and submitted Himself to the Law (that He had given) when He instructed them to follow the prescriptions of the law and as such was operating in His role as “servant.”
3. Ten men received the benefit as they acted (in faith) on the word of Jesus.
4. One of the ten perceived and recognized the glory of God in what had happened. The others failed to recognize and give glory to God.
5. Nine were preoccupied with the form and power of institutions.
6. One ignored the form and returned to the Source - the flesh uses institutions to hide God. (Consider the veil in the Temple that hid the Holy of Holies.)
7. The faith of the one man was sufficient to go through the veil (the religious trappings of the day) and to arrive at the Source (God Himself).
8. Since he had made the “break through” it was no longer necessary for him to go through the motion of presenting himself to the priest (which was a fore-shadow of the real Priest -Jesus). He had accomplished what we have available to us today - faith made a way to come to God through Jesus Who is God manifest to us.
9. The Samaritan had already gone beyond the Temple and there was no reason to return and go through the motions prescribed by the law which is a fore-shadowing of spiritual reality; therefore, he was told to “Go thy way, thy faith hath made thee whole.”