

✠ In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen. ✠

We're familiar with the healing of the ten lepers. The Lord Jesus Christ heals them, but does not tell them that he has healed them. He tells them only to go and show themselves to the priests. As they go, they discover that they have been healed. One then returns, worshiping Christ, praising him with a loud voice, and thanking him. And Jesus then condemns the nine who did not return.

The problem was not simply general ingratitude. The problem was that they did not recognize Jesus as the Messiah, and therefore they did not worship him. We must learn to watch for this in our own lives, that we would not become complacent or entitled or focused on the wrong things, that we do not become grateful for creation while taking forgiveness and salvation for granted. We need to keep our eyes on the one thing, needful, we belong to Jesus Christ. Ingratitude implies a rejection of God. This hardness leads to further sin and eventual judgment. St. Paul teaches that unbelievers are without excuse.

The invisible attributes of God are evident in creation, so that all human beings know there is a God until they talk themselves out of it. But not all human beings glorify God, nor are they thankful. Professing to be wise, they become fools and change the glory of the incorruptible God into an image made like corruptible man and birds and four-footed animals and creeping things. They design a God after their own image who teaches what they think is right. It sounds harsh to say that they are unthankful,

But the reality is what Paul means here is that it doesn't matter how much the pagans say thank you to their false gods, because they do not know the forgiveness of sins in the cross and do not worship Jesus, their gratitude is as fake as their idols. True thankfulness is rooted in the gospel. And so it is that in another place, Paul teaches that giving thanks to God is the status quo of Christianity. He writes, Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly in all wisdom, teaching and admonishing one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing with grace in your hearts to the Lord. And whatever you do, in word or deed, do all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him. All of our life in Christ, whether in worship, at meals, or otherwise, should be thanksgiving. And not simply a general or generic gratitude. To be sure, even the pagans ought to be thankful for the beauty and bounty of creation. All Americans should be thankful for constitutional rights, and everyone in the world, pagan or otherwise, ought to be able to see the goodness of penicillin and the like. But that is not faith, and while it seems, It is not, in fact, pleasing to God. Because without faith, nothing is pleasing to God.

Consider the case of Simon the Pharisee. He might well have been thankful that Jesus was teaching in his house and that he was receiving some reflected honor because of it. But he treated Jesus poorly. He did not recognize him as the Messiah. He did not worship him. Meanwhile, a woman

who was a sinner brought an alabaster flask of costly oil. She washed our Lord's feet with her tears and her hair and then anointed those feet with oil. Simon found the display unsettling. He judged the woman to be a sinner and Jesus to be less than a prophet. And Jesus then told the parable.

There was a certain creditor who had two debtors. One owed 500 denarii, the other 50. And when they had nothing with which to repay, he freely forgave them both. He then asked Simon, who loved the creditor more? And Simon answered, the one whom he forgave more. And Jesus then applies the parable directly to forgiveness. The woman has been forgiven much, so she loves much. Whereas Simon is too self-righteous to be forgiven, so he loves not enough, if at all. And then Jesus says the same thing to this woman that he says to the Samaritan leper. Your faith has saved you. The Samaritan leper returned because he recognized that Jesus was the great high priest that mattered, the antitype, the fulfillment to all of the temple and the ceremonial law. He healed the Samaritan of more than simply a terminal illness of the body. He healed him of eternal death, of sin. And it doesn't matter then what the other nine think of him.

For not being a Jew, for seeming to ignore Jesus' instructions about showing himself to the priest, about overreacting and nerding out about how great Jesus is, for recognizing that Christ Himself is the great High Priest. He is forgiven and he is healed. He has been brought into Jesus' family. He is now his own beloved. So even if he relapses into leprosy, even if he is judged harshly by the world, rejected by his family. All is well because Jesus lives and Jesus receives him, and no one who believes in Jesus ever dies. A great temptation of our age is to not embarrass the pagans or in any way make them uncomfortable. Outward acts of polite piety seem like a reasonable solution.

Let's not draw too much attention to the exclusivity of Christianity, or to the doctrine of original sin, or to the fate of this world and those who do not believe in Jesus. Why go upsetting the Jews, or Simon, or academia? Why annoy the journalists or those who tell us that we should be good? The devil says we can have the best of both worlds. We can belong loosely to Jesus and to the world at the same time, getting all of the benefits of Christianity and none of the cross. Of course, that's just a lie. It's a misleading dream.

Our Lord Jesus Christ wants more than simply outward acts. He wants everything that he has bought. Heart, mind, and soul. Take the risk. Suffer the embarrassment. Love much, for you have been forgiven much. Praise Jesus with a loud voice, thanking him. You belong to him, and nothing else really matters.

✠ In Jesus' name. Amen. ✠