***Gratitude***

**Faith Practices, Luke 17:11-19; Colossians 3:15-17 October 9, 2022**

***“Was no one found to return and give praise to God except this foreigner?”*Luke 6:5**

**Gratitude in poetry, epistle, law, and narrative (see *Faith Practices*)**

*1 Give thanks to the Lord, call on his name;*

*make known among the nations what he has done.*

*2 Sing to him, sing praise to him;*

*tell of all his wonderful acts.*

*3 Glory in his holy name;*

*let the hearts of those who seek the Lord rejoice.*

*4 Look to the Lord and his strength;*

*seek his face always.*

Psalm 105

*15 Let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, since as members of one body you were called to peace. And be thankful. 16 Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly as you teach and admonish one another with all wisdom, and as you sing psalms, hymns and spiritual songs with gratitude in your hearts to God. 17 And whatever you do, whether in word or deed, do it all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him.*

Colossians 3:15-17

*29 “When you sacrifice a thank offering to the Lord, sacrifice it in such a way that it will be accepted on your behalf. 30 It must be eaten that same day; leave none of it till morning. I am the Lord.*

*31 “Keep my commands and follow them. I am the Lord. 32 Do not profane my holy name. I must be acknowledged as holy by the Israelites. I am the Lord, who makes you holy 33 and who brought you out of Egypt to be your God. I am the Lord.”*

Leviticus 22

*11 Now on his way to Jerusalem, Jesus traveled along the border between Samaria and Galilee. 12 As he was going into a village, ten men who had leprosy met him. They stood at a distance 13 and called out in a loud voice, “Jesus, Master, have pity on us!”*

*14 When he saw them, he said, “Go, show yourselves to the priests.” And as they went, they were cleansed.*

*15 One of them, when he saw he was healed, came back, praising God in a loud voice. 16 He threw himself at Jesus’ feet and thanked him—and he was a Samaritan.*

Luke 17

1. The language and genre of the Bible connect gratitude with praise, blessing and grace

2. Gratitude is always a response – sometimes from surprising places!

**Gratitude and Faith**

*Jesus said to his disciples: “Things that cause people to sin are bound to come, but woe to that person through whom they come. 2 It would be better for him to be thrown into the sea with a millstone tied around his neck than for him to cause one of these little ones to sin. 3 So watch yourselves.*

*“If your brother sins, rebuke him, and if he repents, forgive him. 4 If he sins against you seven times in a day, and seven times comes back to you and says, ‘I repent,’ forgive him.”*

*5 The apostles said to the Lord, “Increase our faith!”*

*6 He replied, “If you have faith as small as a mustard seed, you can say to this mulberry tree, ‘Be uprooted and planted in the sea,’ and it will obey you.*

*7 “Suppose one of you had a servant plowing or looking after the sheep. Would he say to the servant when he comes in from the field, ‘Come along now and sit down to eat’? 8 Would he not rather say, ‘Prepare my supper, get yourself ready and wait on me while I eat and drink; after that you may eat and drink’? 9 Would he thank the servant because he did what he was told to do? 10 So you also, when you have done everything you were told to do, should say, ‘We are unworthy servants; we have only done our duty.’ ”*

*11 Now on his way to Jerusalem, Jesus traveled along the border between Samaria and Galilee. As he was gong into a village, ten men who had leprosy met him . . . .*

*17 Jesus asked, “Were not all ten cleansed? Where are the other nine? 18 Was no one found to return and give praise to God except this foreigner?” 19 Then he said to him, “Rise and go; your faith has made you well.”*

Luke 17:17-19

*6 So then, just as you received Christ Jesus as Lord, continue to live in him, 7 rooted and built up in him, strengthened in the faith as you were taught, and overflowing with thankfulness.*

Colossians 2 (see Ephesians 5:15-20; 1 Thessalonians 5:16-17)

*15 For this reason, ever since I heard about your faith in the Lord Jesus and your love for all the saints, 16 I have not stopped giving thanks for you, remembering you in my prayers. 17 I keep asking that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the glorious Father, may give you the Spirit of wisdom and revelation, so that you may know him better. 18 I pray also that the eyes of your heart may be enlightened in order that you may know the hope to which he has called you, the riches of his glorious inheritance in the saints, 19 and his incomparably great power for us who believe. That power is like the working of his mighty strength, 20 which he exerted in Christ when he raised him from the dead and seated him at his right hand in the heavenly realms, 21 far above all rule and authority, power and dominion, and every title that can be given, not only in the present age but also in the one to come.*

Ephesians 2:15-16

1. Luke’ central story about thankfulness happens under the shadow of the cross (like the other
“good Samaritan” story in Luke 15)

2. The answer to the “increase our faith” request is a meeting with a thankful Samaritan

3. Thankfulness is one of the most important (THE most important??) sign of strengthened faith

**The benefits of gratitude**

1. Gratitude is the first step in addressing the tension in Scripture between faith and works

#### Heidelberg Catechism, Section III: Gratitude, Lord’s Day 32

Q 86. Since we have been delivered from our misery
 by grace through Christ
 without any merit of our own,
 why then should we do good works?

A. Because Christ, having redeemed us by his blood,
 is also restoring us by his Spirit into his image,
 so that with our whole lives we may show that we are thankful to God for his benefits,1
 so that he may be praised through us,2
 so that we may be assured of our faith by its fruits,3
 and so that by our godly living our neighbors may be won over to Christ.4

1 [Rom. 6:13](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Rom.%206:13&version=nrsv); [12:1-2](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Rom.%2012:1-2&version=nrsv); [1 Pet. 2:5-10](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=1%20Pet.%202:5-10&version=nrsv) 2 [Matt. 5:16](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Matt.%205:16&version=nrsv); [1 Cor. 6:19-20](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=1%20Cor.%206:19-20&version=nrsv)
3 [Matt. 7:17-18](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Matt.%207:17-18&version=nrsv); [Gal. 5:22-24](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Gal.%205:22-24&version=nrsv); [2 Pet. 1:10-11](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=2%20Pet.%201:10-11&version=nrsv) 4 [Matt. 5:14-16](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Matt.%205:14-16&version=nrsv); [Rom. 14:17-19](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Rom.%2014:17-19&version=nrsv); [1 Pet. 2:12](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=1%20Pet.%202:12&version=nrsv); [3:1-2](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=1%20Pet.%203:1-2&version=nrsv)

2. Thankfulness opens our eyes to God’s work

*21 For although they knew God, they neither glorified him as God nor gave thanks to him, but their thinking became futile and their foolish hearts were darkened.*

Romans 1 (See Romans 5:1-8; Doug also likes Piper on this passage at
[*https://www.desiringgod.org/messages/proud-people-dont-say-thanks*](https://www.desiringgod.org/messages/proud-people-dont-say-thanks))

3. Gratitude is the spiritual antidote against pride

*10 When you have eaten and are satisfied, praise the Lord your God for the good land he has given you. 11 Be careful that you do not forget the Lord your God, failing to observe his commands, his laws and his decrees that I am giving you this day. 12 Otherwise, when you eat and are satisfied, when you build fine houses and settle down, 13 and when your herds and flocks grow large and your silver and gold increase and all you have is multiplied, 14 then your heart will become proud and you will forget the Lord your God, who brought you out of Egypt, out of the land of slavery . . . . 17 You may say to yourself, “My power and the strength of my hands have produced this wealth for me.” 18 But remember the Lord your God, for it is he who gives you the ability to produce wealth, and so confirms his covenant, which he swore to your forefathers, as it is today.*

*19 If you ever forget the Lord your God and follow other gods and worship and bow down to them, I testify against you today that you will surely be destroyed.*

Deuteronomy 8

**Resources for further studies in faith practices**

The “Faith Practices” booklet is available at church and from Faith Alive Resources: [*https://www.faithaliveresources.org/Products/810786/faith-practices.aspx*](https://www.faithaliveresources.org/Products/810786/faith-practices.aspx)

Spurgeon has a “How To Read the Bible” sermon at [*http://www.bible-researcher.com/spurgeon2.html*](http://www.bible-researcher.com/spurgeon2.html)

Ryle has commentary on the Luke 6 text at [*https://www.gracegems.org/Ryle/l06.htm*](https://www.gracegems.org/Ryle/l06.htm)

Tom Schwanda has a helpful definition of Reformed disciplines at [*http://www.biblicalstudies.org.uk/pdf/ref-rev/10-1/10-1\_schwanda.pdf*](http://www.biblicalstudies.org.uk/pdf/ref-rev/10-1/10-1_schwanda.pdf)

Eugene Peterson’s “Eat This Book” seminar is the best description of *lectio divina* that I have heard. Available From Regent at [*https://www.regentaudio.com/products/eat-this-book-the-holy-community-at-table-with-holy-scripture?\_pos=1&\_sid=88952cbbf&\_ss=r*](https://www.regentaudio.com/products/eat-this-book-the-holy-community-at-table-with-holy-scripture?_pos=1&_sid=88952cbbf&_ss=r)

Two classics on spiritual disciplines: Richard Foster’s *Celebration of Discipline* (Harper and Row, 1978, with a new 40th anniversary edition out) and Dalla Willard’s *The Spirit of the Disciplines* (HarperOne, 1990).

Michael Horton has a good reminder of the limits of spiritual disciplines at [*https://www.monergism.com
/following-jesus-what%E2%80%99s-wrong-and-right-about-imitation-christ*](https://www.monergism.com/following-jesus-what%E2%80%99s-wrong-and-right-about-imitation-christ)

Kevin DeYoung has a wonderful blog on thanksgiving and the glory of God at [*https://www.thegospelcoalition.org/blogs/kevin-deyoung/glory-of-god-gratitude-to-gods-glory/*](https://www.thegospelcoalition.org/blogs/kevin-deyoung/glory-of-god-gratitude-to-gods-glory/)

[*getpocket.com*](getpocket.com) has some secular articles on the very real physical benefits of gratitude at [*https://getpocket.com/collections/how-to-be-grateful?utm\_source=pocket-newtab*](https://getpocket.com/collections/how-to-be-grateful?utm_source=pocket-newtab)

John Piper on Romans 1-2 at [*https://www.desiringgod.org/messages/proud-people-dont-say-thanks*](https://www.desiringgod.org/messages/proud-people-dont-say-thanks)

Two sermons I found helpful were Deffinbaugh at [*https://bible.org/seriespage/putting-faith-perspective-luke-175-19*](https://bible.org/seriespage/putting-faith-perspective-luke-175-19) and Spurgeon at <https://www.spurgeon.org/resource-library/sermons/the-necessity-of-increased-faith/> and on the “other nine” at [*https://www.google.com/url?sa=t&rct=j&q=&esrc=s&source=web&cd=&cad=rja&uact=8&ved=2ahUKEwjkqNraj9L6AhWnMDQIHfFjCKMQFnoECCkQAQ&url=https%3A%2F%2Fwww.spurgeongems.org%2Fsermon%2Fchs1935.pdf&usg=AOvVaw25iHOeJsvdLUnkQaY0w-z0*](https://www.google.com/url?sa=t&rct=j&q=&esrc=s&source=web&cd=&cad=rja&uact=8&ved=2ahUKEwjkqNraj9L6AhWnMDQIHfFjCKMQFnoECCkQAQ&url=https%3A%2F%2Fwww.spurgeongems.org%2Fsermon%2Fchs1935.pdf&usg=AOvVaw25iHOeJsvdLUnkQaY0w-z0)

# Putting Faith In Perspective (Luke 17:5-19)

# Deffinbaugh at [*https://bible.org/seriespage/putting-faith-perspective-luke-175-19*](https://bible.org/seriespage/putting-faith-perspective-luke-175-19)

*And the apostles said to the Lord, “Increase our faith!” And the Lord said, “If you had faith like a mustard seed, you would say to this mulberry tree,’ Be uprooted and be planted in the sea’; and it would obey you.*

*But which of you, having a slave plowing or tending sheep, will say to him when he has come in from the field, ‘Come immediately and sit down to eat’? But will he not say to him, ‘Prepare something for me to eat, and properly clothe yourself and serve me until I have eaten and drunk; and afterward you will eat and drink’? He does not thank the slave because he did the things which were commanded, does he? So you too, when you do all the things which are commanded you, say, ‘We are unworthy slaves; we have done only that which we ought to have done.’”*

*And it came about while He was on the way to Jerusalem, that He was passing between Samaria and Galilee. And as He entered a certain village, there met Him ten leprous men, who stood at a distance; and they raised their voices, saying, “Jesus, Master, have mercy on us!” And when He saw them, He said to them, “Go and show yourselves to the priests.” And it came about that as they were going, they were cleansed.*

*Now one of them, when he saw that he had been healed, turned back, glorifying God with a loud voice, and he fell on his face at His feet, giving thanks to Him. And he was a Samaritan. And Jesus answered and said, “Were there not ten cleansed? But the nine—where are they? Were none found who turned back to give glory to God, except this foreigner?” And He said to him, “Rise, and go your way; your faith has made you well.”*

### Introduction

Jesus’ words seem to be too much for the disciples. Sin, Jesus has made very clear in the first four verses of chapter 17, is to be taken most seriously. We are, in addition, our brother’s keeper. For these reasons, we dare not become a stumbling block to our brother. If this were particularly true of the Pharisees, it is also true for disciples. Furthermore, the disciple of Jesus must not only actively seek to avoid being a hindrance to others (verses 1-2), he must aggressively seek to restore one who has fallen into sin (verses 3-4).He must, Jesus said, rebuke the fallen one. The goal is repentance and reconciliation. Thus, even though a brother has repeatedly sinned against us, we must forgive when he comes with a statement of repentance. This, after all, is all that God requires of us for forgiveness.

The apostles are seemingly taken back by what they hear. How can they possibly be expected to do this? Should they repeatedly forgive a habitual sinner, solely on their profession of repentance? It seems like an impossibility to them. Such a miracle would require great faith, they conclude, much more faith than they possess. If they are to obey Jesus, He must increase their faith, and so they all ask for greater faith. Jesus’ reply is indeed puzzling. One would hardly think that Jesus would be opposed to men seeking great faith, but that is exactly what it appears He does.

How many times I have thought that the reason why I could or would not obey a command of our Lord was that I had too little faith. Concluding that our problem is one of insufficient faith, we seem to have but two options. First, we can conclude that faith is God’s problem, and thus we are not responsible until He provides it. That almost seems to be the mindset of the apostles in our text. The second approach is to try to conjure up the faith, on our own. This is virtually futile. Nowhere does Jesus teach us how to build faith in the way we try to build our bodies. In this text, Jesus will teach His disciples and us that it is not a problem with the quantity of their faith, but a failure to grasp the nature of faith, and to act accordingly. Let us look, then, to our text, to see what it is about faith that we need to learn, along with the apostles.

### Structure of the Text

(1) Being your brother’s keeper—verses 1-4

(2) Not causing him to stumble—verses 1-2

(3) Seeking, rebuking, and forgiving when he falls—verses 3-4

(4) Faith in the disciple’s life—verses 5-10

(5) Request for faith—verse 5

(6) The power of a little faith—verse 6

(7) A word about obedience and gratitude—verses 7-10

(8) Faith, Cleansing, and Gratitude—verses 11-19

### Context

Verses 1-4 of chapter 17 can be viewed under the caption: “You are your brother’s keeper.” These verses especially emphasize the responsibility of a disciple in the context of sin, which we are to take very seriously. Verses 1 and 2 instruct the disciple to beware of causing a brother or sister to stumble. Verses 3 and 4 instruct the disciple concerning his responsibility to seek out, to rebuke, and to forgive the brother who has sinned. The goal of these actions is to bring the sinning brother to repentance, and to be reconciled with him as quickly as possible. The forgiveness for which our Lord calls is to be granted …

(1) To the one who sins against us.

(2) To the one who repeatedly sins against us.

(3) To the one who sins against us and (only) says he has repented.

Such forgiveness is difficult to grant. How easy it would be to protest that granting forgiveness to one only on the basis of a verbal “I’m sorry” may be wasted, for the “repentance” may not be sincere. Jesus does not instruct the disciple to “test” the sincerity of one’s repentance, but to respond to it. We might say, in the light of the following words of our Lord, that the disciple must accept an offending brother’s repentance on faith.

As I understand our text, it is Jesus’ words about forgiveness which precipitate the apostles’ petition for more faith. They seem to understand that forgiveness must be granted by faith. They also appear to believe that such forgiveness would require more faith than they possessed. Thus, they petitioned the Lord to give them greater faith, with the implied commitment to obey His instructions when such faith was theirs.

### The Themes of our Text

Before we begin to deal with the problems and interpretations of our text, let us be certain that we identify the major themes of this passage. These themes are skillfully woven together by Luke to convey a message to the reader. We cannot understand the relationship between these themes or their message until we first identify them. The themes, as I understand them are these:

(1) [Jesus’] Authority (position: masterhood and slavehood)

(2) Forgiveness

(3) Faith

(4) Gratitude/thanks (cf. vv. 9, 16)

(5) Worthiness

(6) Obedience

I do not wish to imply that I fully understand any one of these themes, nor the way in which Luke wove them together to form a message. I do wish, however, to make some suggestions, which hopefully will prove helpful to you in your continued study of this text.

### The Tensions of our Text

The difficulties which our text presents the student are many. Some scholars, as indicated in the last lesson, have come to despair of their being any connection between the various segments of our chapter, and even question that these segments relate to the surrounding context. I do not question the unity of these segments, that is, that there is a logical argument being developed here. The biggest problem for me is to determine what that argument is. In addition, there are several other nagging questions which spur me on to a more careful consideration of these verses.

First, what is the relationship between the forgiveness which Jesus required above, the faith for which the disciples asked, and the concept of our unworthiness as disciples below? Second, why the change from “disciples” in verse 1 to “apostles” in verse 5? Third, what is the relationship between the Lord’s teaching on the unworthy slave (verses 7-10) and the story of the 10 lepers, only of whom returned (verses 11-19)? Fourth, did the nine lepers actually manifest faith? Fifth, was that healing (or salvation) which the one returning leper received different from or greater than that which the other nine received? If so, how, and why?

### A Plea For Faith and a Puzzling Response (17:5-10)

And the apostles said to the Lord, “Increase our faith!” And the Lord said, “If you had faith like a mustard seed, you would say to this mulberry tree,’ Be uprooted and be planted in the sea’; and it would obey you.

But which of you, having a slave plowing or tending sheep, will say to him when he has come in from the field, ‘Come immediately and sit down to eat’? But will he not say to him, ‘Prepare something for me to eat, and properly clothe yourself and serve me until I have eaten and drunk; and afterward you will eat and drink’? He does not thank the slave because he did the things which were commanded, does he? So you too, when you do all the things which are commanded you, say, ‘We are unworthy slaves; we have done only that which we ought to have done.’”

I understand that this petition for more faith is the direct result of Jesus’ commands above pertaining to rebuking wayward brethren and the granting of forgiveness, under circumstances which would be extremely difficult. Note the change, here, from the term disciples (verse 1) to apostles (verse 5). I understand the “disciples” to be that larger group of followers of our Lord, those who truly believed in Him, as contrasted with the unbelieving Pharisees (cf. 8:1-3). The “apostles” on the other hand were the twelve, the smaller group of disciples. This group was much more informed because Jesus had spoken many things to them which the larger group did not hear (cf. Mark 4:33-34; 9:28; John 2:24-25).

But why are we told that the apostles (plural) petitioned Jesus for greater faith? Often we may not be told who among the apostles spoke. At other times, we are informed as to who the speaker (or spokesman) was. But here we are given the impression that many, if not all, of the apostles spoke, asking for greater faith. I believe that they may all have spoken at once, or perhaps one after the other, but that all (or most) of the disciples spoke because they strongly sensed the need for faith. They thought that in and of themselves they could not do what Jesus had commanded.

For some time I had the impression that this was a very pious petition. How could one be more spiritual than to ask for more faith? This has the same pious look that Solomon’s request for wisdom has (cf. 1 Kings 3). I am no longer convinced that this was such a spiritual request. Indeed, I am inclined to view it as a camouflage. I think that the apostles were sincere in their request, but that something must have been wrong with it. It does not seem to me that faith is what was lacking here, but simple obedience. Think this matter through with me as we consider our Lord’s puzzling response.

First, Jesus’ response, as recorded in verses 6 through 10, has a certain proportion which should be instructive to us. Only one verse, verse 6, is positive in nature, while the next four verses are more negative, that is, they are more corrective in nature, as is indicated by the first word of verse 7, “but.” This would suggest, when taken with other facts, that Jesus is not affirming their response as much as He is correcting it.

Second, Jesus seems to be teaching that very little faith is required in order to accomplish incredible things. The apostles’ request implies that what Jesus required necessitated great faith, and that their supply was deficient. Thus, they asked Jesus for more faith, assuming that they did not have enough. Jesus’ answer was that it took only a very little quantity of faith to achieve much. With the quantity of faith equivalent to that of a mustard seed—a very small seed indeed—they could uproot a tree and transplant it into the sea. Did they then need more faith—really? Jesus’ answer seems to question their premise that they had too little faith.

Third, Jesus purposely used an illustration of the power of faith which did not relate directly to forgiveness. When “faith-brokers” today speak to men about exercising faith, the do so with the most “tempting” illustrations, illustrations which incite the gullible listener to action. They tell a person, for example, if you have the faith to send in $10, God will bless you with $100. If Jesus wanted His disciples (apostles) to exercise faith, would He not have used an illustration which showed that faith would produce incredible forgiveness? Instead, Jesus taught them that faith in the quantity of a mustard seed would enable them to command a tree to be uprooted and to be transplanted to the sea. Who cares? Who is interested in transplanting trees in this way? Jesus used this illustration to prove His point, but not to motivate them to exercise faith in the area of forgiveness.

A friend of mine pointed out that this request of the apostles is most interesting in the light of the power and authority already granted them by our Lord. They had been sent out to preach the kingdom of God, with the power and authority to heal and to cast out demons (Luke 9:1ff.). In spite of such great power, some of which seems to abide with them on an on-going basis, they found that they did not have sufficient “faith” to forgive. Now this is truly an amazing thing. In the following verses, Jesus is going to sharpen the focus of the apostles, so that what they really lack will become evident. There is a deficiency, I believe, but it is not in the quantity of the apostles’ faith.

Fourth, and most significantly, we should note that while the disciples made a very clear request for increased faith, Jesus is not said to have granted it. This is such an obvious fact that we hardly even notice it, and yet it is very crucial to understanding our passage. The disciples asked Jesus for more faith, but Jesus did not grant it. A lack of faith must therefore not be the problem.

### Lessons on Gratitude (17:7-19)

In verses 7-19 Luke provides us with two lessons on gratitude. The first lesson is taught by our Lord to the apostles. He compares His relationship to them to the relationship between a master and his slave (verses 7-9). He then applies this to the attitude of His disciples toward their obedience (verse 10). The second lesson comes to us from an incident which happened sometime in the ministry of our Lord, which Luke records at this point because of its contribution to the subject of gratitude. Ten lepers call upon Jesus to have mercy, and all ten are healed, but only one returns to thank the Lord Jesus, and this man is a Samaritan. In the first instance, it is the master who is not obligated to have gratitude towards the obedience of his slave; in the second, it is the recipient of God’s grace who is to have gratitude toward God. Let us consider these two lessons on gratitude, and then seek to discover how they relate to faith and forgiveness.

### The Hard-Working Slave (17:7-10)

But which of you, having a slave plowing or tending sheep, will say to him when he has come in from the field, ‘Come immediately and sit down to eat’? But will he not say to him, ‘Prepare something for me to eat, and properly clothe yourself and serve me until I have eaten and drunk; and afterward you will eat and drink’? He does not thank the slave because he did the things which were commanded, does he? So you too, when you do all the things which are commanded you, say, ‘We are unworthy slaves; we have done only that which we ought to have done.’”

As was often the case, Jesus began to teach with a story. He speaks from the vantage point of a culture which practices, understands, and to some degree accepts slavery. We will find this lesson very strange indeed, even distasteful. Remember, however, that the slave belonged to his master. He belonged completely to him. Thus, the master could be very severe in his demands, especially in comparison to our culture. Jesus’ words indicate that what He was about to say was something with which all would agree, given that culture. He begins, “Which one of you.…” This is very similar to the first two stories Jesus told of “lost things” in chapter 15. There, it was Jesus’ opponents, the Pharisees, who were represented by the “you” (cf. Luke 15:4, 8). He will make His point, then, based upon the attitudes and value systems represented by His apostles.

Any of the apostles would understand the relationship between a master and his slave. None of them, if they had a slave who had either been out all day plowing or tending sheep, would be welcomed home that night with a hot meal. Instead, the master would rightly expect his slave to clean up, change his clothes, and then fix him his meal.Only after this would the slave be free to care for his own needs. And when the slave had perfectly carried out all of his duties for the day, no one would expect the master to come to him, put an arm around his shoulder, and tell him how good a job he had done. Masters felt no obligation to pamper their slaves, nor to praise them.

In our society, our Lord might have told the story of the man who filled out his income tax form. The form was neatly filled out, with all the supporting facts and figures. Along with the form, mailed before April 15th, there was a check for the taxes which were due. Surely, Jesus might say, this man would not expect a call or a thank you note from the IRS or from the President of the United States, expressing the government’s gratitude for obedience to the laws of the land. Paying taxes is our duty, one for which we expect no gratitude if we obey exactly as required, but one which we expect punishment for failing to perform.

Nobody among the apostles would have argued this point with the Master. But why was this true? Why was it granted that the master need not pamper or praise his slave, but expect him to serve him sacrificially and faithfully? I think that there is one principle reason, and it is almost too simple to repeat: because the master was the master, and the slave was a slave. The underlying principle might therefore be summarized: MASTERS HAVE EVERY RIGHT TO DEMAND COMPLETE OBEDIENCE FROM THEIR SLAVES, BUT SLAVES HAVE NO RIGHT TO DEMAND ANYTHING FROM THEIR MASTERS.

Put in different terms, PRAISE AND SERVICE ARE PURELY A MATTER OF POSITION.

The Lord, in verse 10, puts the principle into very practical terms, applying it to His disciples. It is apparent that the Lord is to be viewed as the Master, and the disciples, His slaves. They, like slaves, are to see themselves as under obligation to obey the Lord completely. Having done so, they are not to expect praise or reward, either. Instead, they are to look upon themselves as “unworthy slaves.”

Our Lord’s words raise two important questions. The first is raised by another text of Scripture; the second, by a very popular contemporary emphasis. This first question is this: WHY DOES JESUS SPEAK OF HIS DISCIPLES AS SLAVES HERE, WHEN HE SEEMS TO REVERSE THIS IN THE GOSPEL OF JOHN?

You will recall these words, spoken by our Lord in the 15th chapter of John’s gospel:

“You are My friends, if you do what I command you. No longer do I call you slaves; for the slave does not know what his master is doing; but I have called you friends, for all things that I have heard from My Father I have made known to you” (John 15:14-15, NASB).

Note, in the first place, that regardless of whether or not one is a “slave” or a “friend,” they must obey in either case. A slave, by his position, must obey; a friend, by Jesus’ definition, must obey, His commands. Obedience is not set aside, but reaffirmed. Second, Jesus is not saying that the role of a slave is set aside altogether, but only that it is set aside in the matter of being informed of what the Master is doing. A slave is not told the master’s plans and purposes, but is only given instructions. A friend, on the other hand, is privy to the purposes of his friend. Jesus is therefore setting aside the role of a slave in this dimension, but not in every dimension. That is why Paul and others can so frequently (and accurately) refer to themselves as the Lord’s slaves (cf. Romans 1:1).

The second question is one that is culturally necessitated: WHY DOES JESUS INSTRUCT HIS DISCIPLES TO THINK OF THEMSELVES AS UNWORTHY SLAVES, WHEN OUR CULTURE IS TELLING US THAT MEN NEED A BETTER SENSE OF THEIR SELF-WORTH?

Frankly, this is a good question. I will leave it to those who advocate a “good self image” to explain. I cannot. Jesus’ words, in my estimation, are too clear to brush aside. It is the Pharisees who had a “good self-image” and were destined for hell. It was those who knew themselves “unworthy” who came to Jesus and found grace and forgiveness.

Our Lord’s words in this text teach us a vitally important principle, which can be summed up in this way: FAITH ALWAYS OPERATES IN THE ARENA OF GRACE AND MERCY, AND IS EXERCISED BY THOSE WHO KNOW THEMSELVES TO BE UNWORTHY.

I believe that Jesus’ words here in verses 6-10 serve as a corrective to the erroneous thinking of the apostles, who asked for greater faith. The important thing, Jesus says, is not the amount of faith, but the attributes of faith. Faith is not here a matter of quantity, but of quality. The disciples’ thinking was that they lacked sufficient faith. Jesus’ answer was that they lacked an accurate understanding of the nature of faith. I believe that Jesus is, in these verses, condemning what we might call Pharisaical faith, a “faith” which is based more upon the possessor of it than its object, a faith which is based more on one’s performance than on God’s character.

Jesus would have us learn that while a master has every right to demand total obedience from his slaves, and the slave has every obligation to obey his master completely, the master has no obligation to be grateful to his slave, even though he obeys him completely. Pharisaical faith becomes a kind of “work” which obligates God to respond. Biblical faith requires obedience to God, without any demands on Him at all. Biblical faith thinks in terms of duty; Pharisaical faith thinks in terms of benefits, obligated by faithfulness.

The Pharisees really believed that by their outward compliance with the Law—that is, their interpretation of it—that they could merit God’s favor. They saw, for example, that their prosperity was the logical and necessary outcome of their piety. Thus, they felt little gratitude toward God, for what they got, they deserved (in their minds). Gratitude, to them, was an obligation which fell more on God, than upon them.

God warned the Israelites of this danger, even before they entered the promised land. In the early chapters of the book of Deuteronomy, God reminded His people of His blessings, all of which were a matter of grace, in spite of their disobedience, grumbling, and all around nastiness. He also warned them that when they entered the promised land they would, once again, partake of the fruits of His grace, but that they would be inclined to credit themselves for these blessings. In other words, Israel would look upon God as obligated to bless them, rather than to be grateful for His grace.

Be careful that you do not forget the Lord your God, failing to observe his commands, his laws and his decrees that I am giving you this day. Otherwise, when you eat and are satisfied, when you build fine houses and settle down, and when your herds and flocks grow large and your silver and gold increase and all you have is multiplied, then your heart will become proud and you will forget the Lord your God, who brought you out of Egypt, out of the land of slavery. He led you through the vast and dreadful desert, that thirsty and waterless land, with its venomous snakes and scorpions. He brought you water out of hard rock. He gave you manna to eat in the desert, something your fathers had never known, to humble and to test you so that in the end it might go well with you. You may say to yourself, “My power and the strength of my hands have produced this wealth for me.” But remember the Lord your God, for it is he who gives you the ability to produce wealth, and so confirms his covenant, which he swore to your forefathers, as it is today. If you ever forget the Lord your God and follow other gods and worship and bow down to them, I testify against you today that you will surely be destroyed. Like the nations the Lord destroyed before you, so you will be destroyed for not obeying the Lord your God (Deuteronomy 8:11-20, NIV).

But what does all this have to do with faith and forgiveness? Everything! First, I believe that Jesus is teaching us that faith always operates in the realm of grace and mercy. If the Pharisees thought that God owed them His blessings, Jesus taught just the opposite. Jesus taught that those who would have faith must first recognize their own unworthiness, and must approach Him on the basis of His grace, not on the basis of our merits.

I decided to track the subject of faith through the gospel of Luke, and learned something very interesting. Faith, in Luke, is closely associated with a sense of unworthiness. The first instance of “faith” which is mentioned in Luke is the healing of the paralytic man, who was lowered through the roof of the house in which Jesus was teaching. Luke tells us that it was upon seeing the faith of the stretcher-bearers that Jesus responded to the paralytic, “Friend, your sins are forgiven you” (Luke 5:20, NASB). Why did Jesus say this, rather than to first heal the man? And why did the man not ask Jesus to be healed? He could speak, we would assume. I think the man felt a deep sense of unworthiness to approach Jesus and to ask for healing. Jesus therefore dealt with that which hindered the man most—his sin. It was this man’s sin which made him conscious of his unworthiness, and so Jesus first pronounced forgiveness. And then He healed him.

The second instance of faith is much clearer. In Luke chapter 7, we are told of the great faith of the Centurion, who begged Jesus to heal his slave, but not to bother to come to his house. I always viewed the great faith of this man in terms of his request for a “long distance” healing. But I now believe that a part of the greatness of his faith was his awareness of his unworthiness. Faith begins with a knowledge of our unworthiness, and thus appeals to God on the basis of His grace and mercy, rather than on the basis of our merit. Incidentally, Luke (alone) informs us that while this centurion knew he was unworthy, the Jewish elders specifically appealed to Jesus to grant his request because he was worthy (Luke 7:3).

The third instance of faith in Luke is found in the same chapter (7:36-50). Our Lord was eating a meal in the home of one of the Pharisees. During the meal a woman with a tainted reputation came, and from behind the Lord, washed His feet with her tears, kissed them, and anointed them with an expensive perfume—the most costly thing she had. When the host Pharisee

saw this, he thought that Jesus must not have known of her past. How could a true prophet allow this woman to touch Him? Jesus contrasted this woman’s hospitality with the reception (or lack of it) He had been given by His host. But the important thing to note in this text is that the woman, by her actions, revealed that she felt utterly unworthy of the Lord. The Pharisees, on the other hand, felt too worthy, but by the treatment they gave the Lord Jesus, did not consider Him worthy of the normal social graces. Jesus sent this woman away with the reassuring words, “Your faith has saved you; go in peace” (7:50).

In Luke 8 we find the next instance of faith. When the disciples were fearful because of the storm, Jesus rebuked them for their lack of faith (8:25). Then, a woman with a hemorrhage (of 12 years) came to Jesus from behind and “stole,” as it were, a healing from Him. Jesus would not allow this healing to be a clandestine one, and thus He called the woman forward to confess her faith and actions, and to make known the fact that she had been cleansed. He sent this woman away with words very similar to those spoken to the woman who anointed His feet, “Daughter, your faith has made you well; go in peace” (8:48).

Why did this woman not ask Jesus for a healing? Why did she try to “steal” it unnoticed? To have pressed her way through that crowd was an incredible feat. She surely could have called out for help and healing, but she did not. I think that the woman’s actions are explained by the fact that she did not wish to draw attention to herself, or to “bother” the Master. It is my opinion that she, like the others, did what she did out of a deep sense of unworthiness. She knew she was unworthy (she was unclean, you will recall), but she also believed that merely a touch of Jesus’ garment would heal her.

The next reference to faith is in chapter 12, verse 28, only here it is not the presence of faith, but the lack of it which is stressed. Having little faith, Jesus taught, was the source of worry about food and clothing. This text does not directly bear upon our text.

In chapter 17, the portion of Luke with which we are presently concerned, faith is mentioned three times (verses 5, 6, & 19). In the next chapter, we have the story of the self-righteous Pharisee and the tax-gatherer (18:9-14). The verse which immediately precedes this story reads as follows:

“I tell you that He will bring about justice from them speedily. However, when the Son of Man comes, will He find faith on the earth?” (Luke 18:8).

I believe that the story of the self-righteous Pharisee and the penitent sinner has a direct connection to this verse, in which our Lord spoke of finding faith on the earth. I believe that one of the characteristics of faith is a sense of unworthiness on the part of the one who beseeches or approaches God. I believe that unbelief, on the other hand, is betrayed by a sense of self-confidence, which foolishly supposes that one is really worthy of God.

In the last part of chapter 18 (verses 35-43) we read of the blind man who persists in calling out to Jesus, pleading for mercy (cf. v. 38). Some who were in the crowd tried to silence him. Obviously, they did not think that he was worthy of the Master’s attention. This man did not think so either, but he did not request justice, but mercy. Only the unworthy petition God for mercy, and that is just what this man did.

The final occurrence of the term “faith” is found in chapter 22 (verse 32). Here, Jesus is speaking to Peter, who, like the Pharisee above, is brimming with self-confidence. When Jesus spoke to Peter about his failure, he assured His Lord that he most certainly would not do so (22:33). Jesus told Peter that while Satan had demanded to “sift him like wheat” (v. 31), He had prayed for him, that his faith would not fail (v. 32). What might cause Peter’s faith to fail? Was his failure to come so great that he might feel so utterly unworthy that he might despair of ever being used of God again. If faith is rooted in a sense of unworthiness, then his faith need not fail, for he was unworthy, but faith looks to God when we really are unworthy. Thus, he faith would not fail, his faith would work in the knowledge of his unworthiness and seek God’s grace.

The use of “faith” in the gospel of Luke (and the other gospels as well, I suspect) leads me to this conclusion: FAITH FUNCTIONS ONLY THE CONTEXT OF MERCY AND GRACE, AND THUS IT IS EXERCISED ONLY BY THOSE WHO KNOW THEMSELVES TO BE UNWORTHY. FAITH NEVER LOOKS TO GOD TO RESPOND TO US IN GRATITUDE, BUT ALWAYS RESPONDS TO HIM WITH GRATITUDE.

Consider with me how this conclusion makes sense of our text. Jesus commanded His disciples to forgive those who sin against them, even if that person sins and repents seven times a day. The disciples, like us, are going to wonder whether of not this makes sense. How do we forgive someone who is not worthy of it?

Jesus’ answer is as follows. First, if He is the Master and we are His slaves, we are obligated to obey Him fully, whether we understand why or not. His demands are never to great, for He is the Master, and we are His slaves. Second, while it may take faith to forgive as Jesus has said, it is not just the quantity of it which is the problem, but the quality of it. Faith is that system on which those who are unworthy of God’s favor approach him and live for Him. Would we suppose that those who sin against us are unworthy of our forgiveness? Let us not forget that we are unworthy of God’s forgiveness, along with all of the rest of His blessings. The forgiveness which we are commanded to show to others is a matter of grace, and is thus unmerited. We who live by grace must also manifest that same grace to others, as God manifests it to us.

This is why our Lord stresses the subject of gratitude in these verses. The slave is not to expect gratitude from the master; the slave is to show gratitude toward the master. It is our gratitude, based upon the grace of God in our lives, which is the fuel for the forgiveness which we are to manifest toward others. Thus, Jesus has turned the subject. Faith is an issue here, but it is not the need for more faith on the part of the disciples as it is to remember the basic principles on which faith operates. Faith operates in the realm of grace, and grace should produce gratitude. This gratitude is the disciple’s motive for forgiving others. Those who are forgiven much are expected (on the basis of grace) to forgive.

### The Grateful Leper (17:11-19)

Just as gratitude is the key to understanding the first half of our text, so it is likewise the key to the last half. Let us now consider the story of the ten lepers, only one of which demonstrated gratitude.

And it came about while He was on the way to Jerusalem, that He was passing between Samaria and Galilee. And as He entered a certain village, there met Him ten leprous men, who stood at a distance; and they raised their voices, saying, “Jesus, Master, have mercy on us!” And when He saw them, He said to them, “Go and show yourselves to the priests.” And it came about that as they were going, they were cleansed.

Now one of them, when he saw that he had been healed, turned back, glorifying God with a loud voice, and he fell on his face at His feet, giving thanks to Him. And he was a Samaritan. And Jesus answered and said, “Were there not ten cleansed? But the nine—where are they? Were none found who turned back to give glory to God, except this foreigner?” And He said to him, “Rise, and go your way; your faith has made you well.”

The time and the place may have changed, but the subject of gratitude has not. Once again, it seems, Luke reveals that his unifying principle is not chronology or geography, but the logical development of his argument(s). At some point in time, Jesus was passing near Samaria. Coming upon a certain village, He encountered ten lepers. They kept their distance, as was prescribed, but they did not keep quiet. They cried out for mercy, and Jesus was more than willing to heal them.

Jesus chose to heal the lepers in a different way, however. Rather than to reach out and touch them (which Jesus had done before, Luke 5:13), He instructed the men to go to their respective priests. They were not yet healed. They were to go in obedience, and if they thought about it, they would probably have reasoned that Jesus must intend to heal them, for they were to go to the priest to be pronounced clean (cf. Leviticus 14). All ten lepers departed in obedience to the Lord’s instructions. On the way, they were all healed.

We know from Jesus’ words that all ten lepers were healed (verse 17), and yet only one of the ten returned, and this one man was a Samaritan. It is implied that the other nine were Israelites. The one who returned did so in order to thank Jesus and to praise God for his healing. Since this man “glorified God” (v. 15) and “thanked Jesus” (v. 16), it would seem that he had come to recognize, to some degree, the deity of our Lord. At least he regarded his healing as having come from God through Jesus.

It was true, of course, that Jesus had commanded the ten to go to their priests. In this sense, the nine who did not return were only being obedient to what Jesus had commanded. Jesus had something to say about this, however. He asked several questions. Whether these were addressed to His disciples or to the one man is not clear. What is clear is that Jesus commended the gratitude of this one leper, and criticized the failure of the others to do likewise.

Luke, of course, has a special message in this, for the one man was not a Jew at all, but a Samaritan. Jesus made a point of referring to this one grateful leper as a “foreigner” (v. 18). Once again, we are being prepared for the gospel to be proclaimed and accepted by the Gentiles, while spurned by the Jews. These nine ungrateful recipients of God’s grace are typical of the nation Israel, while this one grateful Gentile is a prototype of the many Gentiles who will believe and will praise God.

Jesus’ words to this man sound very similar to those which He has spoken before: “Rise, and go your way; your faith has made you well” (verse 19).

Once we become aware of the fact that the term rendered, “has made you well” literally means “saved,” there is a question which must be asked and answered: “Is Jesus pronouncing a special blessing upon this one man, which is above and beyond that received by the other 9?” All ten men were healed, so in what sense is this one leper “saved”? In the New Testament, the term “saved” is used to refer to eternal salvation and to physical healing. Which way does Luke (and the Holy Spirit)n intend for us to understand it here?

Luke appears to use the term “save” in three primary ways. First, the term can describe a physical healing and even an exorcism (cf. 8:36, 48, 50). Second, the term can refer to the saving of one’s physical life, as when Jesus was challenged to come down from the cross and save Himself (23:35, 37, 39; cf. 9:24). Third, the term is used, perhaps most often, of eternal salvation (7:48, 50; 8:12; 18:25-26; 19:10). In some cases, it would appear that there is a blending of the first and third uses, so that physical healing and spiritual salvation are both depicted by the term “saved” (e.g. 8:36, 48).

How, then, does Luke use the term “save” here? It is my opinion that Luke uses it with the added sense of spiritual salvation. In the sense of being healed, all ten lepers were “saved.” But in the sense of recognizing Jesus as the Messiah, the Son of God, and in giving thanks to Him as such, only this one leper did so. I believe that his “salvation” goes beyond the cleansing of his leprosy to the cleansing of his sin.

### Conclusion

The central issue in our passage is forgiveness. The focus of the disciples was on faith. Jesus did not minimize the need for faith, but neither did He affirm that a lack of faith was their problem, and thus that granting more faith was the solution. Jesus’ response in verses 7-10 and the account of the one grateful leper focus on obedience and gratitude. The slave of verses 7-10 is to faithfully obey his master, but not to expect him to show gratitude, for the master has the right to expect obedience of a slave, and has no obligation to be thankful for it. So, too, when the disciple is obedient to Christ, he does not see it as meriting anything from God, nor does he equate his worthiness with it, for all men, even the most obedient of them, are unworthy of divine favor.

If this is true, as it must be, then what we need is not a system of rules to keep, for in keeping them there is no merit, no reward. If we are unworthy even at our best—even when we keep all of God’s commandments—then what we need is not Law, but grace. Grace is God’s favor bestowed upon us because we are unworthy, not because we are worthy. Grace and mercy are prompted by our unworthiness, while God’s gratitude cannot even be prompted by our best efforts.

How foolish, then, were the efforts of the Pharisees, and all other legalists, then and now, to try to earn God’s favor. We will never favorably impress God. We can never put Him under obligation to us. If we would gain anything from God it will be on the basis of our unworthiness and on the basis of His grace. And the way that these things are obtained is not by our works, but by His grace, through faith. Faith, Jesus is saying, is operative only in the arena of grace and mercy, which is bestowed only on the unworthy.

It is the grace of God, poured out freely upon sinners, which produces gratitude, and it is this gratitude which serves to motivate the recipient of grace to also bestow it on others. Thus, just as God has forgiven us of our sins against Him, solely on the basis of our confession of sin and repentance, so we are to forgive others on the same basis. It is not a greater faith that is required for us to do this, but a better understanding of what faith is and how it works.

The second story reminds us that the grace of God should not only be manifested in our freely forgiving others, but also should be seen in our worship and praise of God. Loving God and loving men are the two great commandments of our Lord, and of the Law. If gratitude for God’s grace should prompt us to forgive our fellow man, so it should motivate us to worship and praise God. The 9 lepers obeyed God and were cleansed, but they never recognized Jesus for who He was, nor did they every worship and praise Him. They were the recipients of God’s grace, and didn’t respond to it in faith, worship, and praise.

What a perfect picture of the nation Israel. Over the centuries God had poured out His grace upon the nation. His blessings can be found throughout the Old Testament. And yet, for all the blessings of God on Israel, and for all their attention to obeying the law (feeble and failing as it was) the nation never, as a whole, came to worship and adore God, and when God was manifested in the flesh, they did not know it was Him. The nine ungrateful, unbelieving, unsaved lepers, while outwardly cleaned up, were still inwardly unclean. How sad to come so close to God and yet not know or worship Him.

The one Samaritan leper differed little from the other nine, but in a very important area. He recognized that his healing was from God, through Jesus. He not only obeyed Jesus’ command, but He returned to worship and adore Him, to give Him thanks, because He had come to recognize Him as God’s salvation. Because of this, he was saved.

This man is a picture, a prototype of all of those Gentiles who were to be saved by recognizing Jesus to be God’s salvation. This man did not have all of the benefits which the Jewish lepers did, all of the background, all of the exposure to the Scriptures, but He did come into contact with Jesus, and when He did he not only obeyed Him, He trusted in Him as the Messiah. And because of his faith, he was saved. The Jewish lepers obeyed and were blessed, but they were not saved. This man obeyed Jesus, too, but his salvation came as the result of his faith, not his works. So it is with all who find eternal life in Christ.

While the disciples preferred to think in terms of increasing their faith, Jesus chose to emphasize the arena of faith, and especially the grace of God and the gratitude which should result. It is God’s grace, received with gratitude, which should motivate our forgiving others (and all other ministry to men) and our worship of God.

While legalism seeks to motivate men on the basis of fear and guilt, Christ motivates us on the basis of grace and gratitude. It is no accident that Paul introduces the applicational portion of the book of Romans with these words,

I URGE YOU THEREFORE, BRETHREN, BY THE MERCIES OF GOD, TO PRESENT YOUR BODIES A LIVING AND HOLY SACRIFICE, ACCEPTABLE TO GOD, WHICH IS YOUR SPIRITUAL SERVICE OF WORSHIP (Romans 12:1).

Here, my friend, is the basis for all that we do in the Christian life—it is the grace and mercy of God, granted to those who are unworthy of it, which produces gratitude. It is on the basis of this grace and the resulting gratitude which we are to live, both in our service to men and in our worship of God.

It occurred to me as I have reflected on the Lord’s command to forgive and the apostles’ petition for greater faith that the key to our obedience is not only in petition, but in praise. How often, when we pray, we ask God for something, rather than to praise Him for what He has given. How often we assume that the reason we have not acted in obedience is because we lack the faith to do so. Many times, I believe that we lack the gratitude to act, rather than the faith to act. Often, it is not that we lack the means to obey God, but that we lack the motivation to obey Him. Peter tells us in his second epistle that God has given us all that is necessary for life and godliness (2 Peter 1:3), and this through the knowledge of Him. Let us therefore take praise much more seriously. Let us not seek petitioning God for that which we truly lack, but let us also grow in our grasp of all that He has given, and give thanks to Him.

I challenge you to search the Scriptures and to study the subject of gratitude, looking up such words as “thanks,” “thanksgiving,” “thankful,” and “praise.”

In our church, we observe the Lord’s Table (communion) every week. Some think that this is too frequent, even though the churches of the New Testament did it no less frequently. Some think it can become meaningless and repetitious. I believe that a remembrance of our Lord’s death for us, a remembrance of His grace showered upon us by means of the cross, is the basis for our gratitude, and that this gratitude thus becomes the motivation for our loving both God and men. Let us never cease to recall our unworthiness and His grace, and thus to become people marked out by their gratitude.