

Ingratitude

by Mark Schindler

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On December 1, 2000, the hotel in which I work shut down for a \$50 million renovation, causing about 250 employees to lose their jobs. Only a few managers and a skeleton engineering crew remained.

Months beforehand, the hotel's Human Resources Director and the General Manager devised a plan to provide jobs for all those who were good employees and wanted to continue to work. Working diligently over several months and trying to keep the employee's best interests at heart, they were able to place most of our staff with our other eleven Chicago hotels. To the rest, even those who were not very good employees, they gave handsome severance packages, as well as help to find other employment. These two men labored diligently to insure that everybody who wanted to work received jobs.

A fellow who works for me expressed a bit of a bad attitude a couple of weeks before the closing, and it worsened to the point that I finally had to call him into the office and talk to him about it. For my department, I had to develop a plan, budget, and justification for a skeleton crew to be maintained during the renovation, and this fellow was not one of those who could be kept. His particular job was unnecessary to the operation of the hotel during the shutdown. However, he is an excellent member of the department, and I had already told him that, when we reopened, he would be offered a job in a different classification making a substantially increased wage.

Because of his particular job description and pay, it was difficult to place him with one of the other hotel properties, but I had been able to work out some options for him and a few others who would be let go. One was to move him and two others to another property for less money initially but more chance for advancement, if they chose to go that route.

The other option was to take \$5,800 in severance pay plus his accrued six weeks vacation pay and sit out the three months until we could rehire him. Under this plan, he could even collect unemployment compensation! In addition, upon his return to work, we would reinstate his seniority and full benefits, including his five weeks of vacation.

I had given him a number of very fine options, especially under the circumstances. However, here he was in a snit because, as he said, he felt like an orphan that nobody wanted. He believed that I had made sure to get some of the people in my department jobs during the renovation but not him.

I had to remind him how much negotiating I had to do with the corporate office to justify the small staff that was staying. I also repeated that he was getting one of the best severance packages of anyone and that he would be coming back in a much better-paying job with all his seniority and vacation benefits completely reinstated. It took quite a bit of time to show him that I was not rejecting him out of hand, but that many people had worked very hard to help him through an ordeal that could have been much worse.

By the end of the conversation, he still thought he was getting the short end of the stick, but his attitude had improved. He saw what the hotel faced in shutting down and renovating a property that would make no money for the company for six months to a year.

Nevertheless, this fellow was being given enough money to cover his salary for the three months he would be off plus unemployment. He would not be paying for transportation to and from work. Because he is very handy, he could pick up extra money doing side jobs during that time, and he would come back to a career-advancing, higher-paying job—but all he could see was what he was not getting and others were!

I Deserve Better!

Is this not how we look at things in this life, more often than not? We see how much we lack, as opposed to how much we have. Our glass is always half-empty rather than half-full. We see ourselves as a "have-not" rather than a "have."

When I looked at this man during our conversation, I saw one of my best employees, a good worker, one for whom I had tried very hard to do what was right—and he turned my best intentions around, saying it was not enough! He deserved better! Looking at him, I was disappointed and disgusted because I knew I was looking in the mirror!

How many of us really thank God for what we have and what He is doing to create us in His image (Genesis 1:26)? How many of us thank Him for every breath we take and for every action He takes for our benefit? How many of us gratefully sing His praises and glorify His holy name when He answers our prayers—or for that matter, even when He "seemingly" does not?

For instance, we are often encouraged to pray for the ill among us. God not only hears our prayers, but He also frequently acts upon them, giving the afflicted strength and healing. Do we sound His praises and thank Him with the same fervor in which we requested His aid? Could this be a reason why more of our brethren are not healed completely? Could we possibly be demonstrating ingratitude in our hearts toward God?

We all think that we esteem God highly and are grateful to Him for everything, but how true is that? Ingratitude will separate us from God and what we were to become. We see this in Jesus' first beatitude, "Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven" (Matthew 5:3). Being poor in spirit is an attitude of poverty in all respects, one that is so poor that every little favor warrants joyous thanksgiving!

Do we believe that God owes us nothing except death? Do we believe that everything we have and are is a gift worthy of praise to the Eternal God?

Or do we think that, because we prayed hard for it, God owes it to us? Because we work hard, God owes us blessings? Because He called us into His church, He owes us? Because we have endured the persecution of this world for His sake, He owes us?

Maybe we do not think we are this way, but, then again, maybe our actions betray us. Maybe God sees our heart because the mouth does not speak the words of thankful praise, "for out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaks" (Matthew 12:34).

Korah and Satan

Two biblical examples will illustrate this attitude of ingratitude. The first appears in Numbers 16:1-2: "Now Korah the son of Izhar, the son of Kohath, the son of Levi, with Dathan and Abiram the sons of Eliab, and On the son of Peleth, sons of Reuben, took *men*; and they rose up before Moses. . . ." Notice that *men* is written in italics. The translators, not knowing what to do with the verb *took* at the end of the clause, supplied it to finish the thought. *Men* is plural, but *took* is in the singular, so it cannot apply to all these men. *Took* expresses the action of the singular subject of the sentence, *Korah*. *Young's Literal Translation* says, "Korah . . . takes both Dathan and Abiram. . . ." Interestingly, the New American Standard version renders it, "Korah . . . took action." The sense, however, is the same: Korah took these men against Moses.

They gathered together against Moses and Aaron, and said to them, "You take too much upon yourselves, for all the congregation is holy, every one of them, and the Lord is among them. Why then do you exalt yourselves above the congregation of the Lord?" . . . Then Moses said to Korah, "Hear now, you sons of Levi: Is it a small thing to you that the God of Israel has separated you from the congregation of Israel, to bring you near to Himself, to do the work of the tabernacle of the Lord, and to stand before the congregation to serve them; and that He has brought you near to Himself, you and all your brethren, the sons of Levi, with you? And are you seeking the priesthood also? Therefore you and all your company are gathered together against the Lord." (Numbers 16:3, 8-11)

This is an example of a person who is dissatisfied with what he has and stirs up others because of his ingratitude for what God had given him already.

The consequences of Korah's "taking action" are clear: God destroyed all these who rose up against Moses and Aaron—against Him. Does this pattern look familiar? It should. It is the age-old and oft-repeated sin of pride manifesting itself in ingratitude. Satan did the same thing (Isaiah 14:12-15; Ezekiel 28:14-17). It was not enough for him to be a covering cherub at God's throne. It was not enough to have the lordship over the earth and one-third of the angels (Revelation 12:3). No, he wanted to resemble or compare to the Most High (Isaiah 14:14)! His pride led him to go to war against God, a battle he soundly lost (Luke 10:18). Revelation 12:7-10 prophesies that his pride will drive him to attempt another coup d'état before Christ's return.

This is where ingratitude can ultimately lead a person: into total rebellion against God. It lends to an individual feeling a false sense of worth, that he deserves more. If not checked, it becomes a plague of discontent that soon infects others, as Satan's ingratitude spread to other angels.

If this kind of attitude lands us in trouble, just what should our attitude be? A truly humble and grateful person will never rebel against God because he knows that even the very breath he breathes is a gift and calls for praiseful thanksgiving to the Father. Sharing this thanksgiving with others in the church works like soothing oil that helps to heal the body.

Paul in Philippi

Acts 16 contains a clear example of what God expects from us. As the chapter opens, Paul and his companions are traveling through the cities of Asia Minor, delivering the Word of God, and the people heartily receive them (verse 4). They establish new churches in the faith, and the number of

converts increases daily (verse 5). God's Holy Spirit directly leads them in the work (verses 6-7), keeping them from certain areas that were Peter's responsibility (see I Peter 1:1).

In Acts 16:9-10, Paul has a vision in which a Macedonian pleads with him for help, and Paul and his companions conclude that God wants them to preach the gospel there. Macedonia, a Roman province, lay north of Greece. Paul began preaching first to those there who kept the Sabbath, and Lydia became his first convert (verses 13-15). He seemed to be making good but labored progress.

However, a woman possessed by a demon begins to follow Paul and his party, calling them "servants of the Most High God" (verses 16-17). Though this is true, it greatly distresses Paul because the Jews might conclude that he consorted with soothsayers, unlawful according to Leviticus 19:31; 20:6; and Deuteronomy 18:9-14. From their point of view, the Gentiles might consider the religion Paul preached to be as pagan as all the other religions of the time. Thus, Paul commands the demon to leave the woman in the name of Jesus Christ (Acts 16:18).

Her employers, who made quite a profit by her fortune telling, are not pleased because her supernatural abilities disappeared with the demon. So they haul Paul and Silas before the city courts (verse 18), saying:

"These men, being Jews, exceedingly trouble our city; and they teach customs which are not lawful for us, being Romans, to receive or observe." Then the multitude rose up together against them; and the magistrates tore off their clothes and commanded them to be beaten with rods. And when they had laid many stripes on them, they threw them into prison, commanding the jailer to keep them securely. Having received such a charge, he put them into the inner prison and fastened their feet in the stocks. (verses 20-24)

Unlike the Jews, the Romans were not limited to 39 stripes, so the beating Paul and Silas took was severe. The stocks they had to endure afterward were two large pieces of wood pierced with holes at different distances, designed to restrain the feet and produce pain.

Confined to the pitch-dark bowels of the prison, Paul and Silas now lie on a filthy floor on their bloody, shredded backs, their legs painfully distended. One might think they would have every right to complain about how unfairly the Philippians had treated them—or at least to spend all their time beseeching God to relieve them of their pain. Notice verse 25, however: "But at midnight Paul and Silas were praying and singing hymns to God, and the prisoners were listening to them"!

Not only were they singing praises of thanksgiving to God, but they were also doing it loud enough for the other prisoners to hear them! Just as James says in James 5:13: "Is anyone among you suffering? Let him pray. Is anyone cheerful? Let him sing psalms." They were praying for their affliction, but they were also singing songs of praise to God from hearts filled with thanksgiving!

Gratitude Is a Gift

Are we willing to do this, or will we just thank God when we think He deserves it? We need to make it a sincere habit to thank God fervently every day for all His benefits, glorifying His holy will and purpose for us. He is *never* undeserving of our praise and thanks—indeed, we cannot thank Him enough.

It hurt me when my employee griped and grumbled about my best efforts to give him something good. Even after I sat down and explained to him what he could have and why things had been done the way they were, he only expressed a qualified thanks to me. I had done the best I possibly could, but it rated only a qualified "thank you" from him.

How does our heavenly Father feel when we only express a qualified "thank you" occasionally or not at all? How does He feel, knowing that He has done what is absolutely, perfectly the best for us for now and all eternity?

Ingratitude, whether passive or active, is a tool that Satan uses to recruit us to join him against God's Family. By this means, we can allow him to plant us as a tare within Christ's field and spread our ingratitude to others (Matthew 13:24-25, *cf.* verse 33). On the other hand, a constant attitude of praiseful thanksgiving, no matter what the circumstances, is a gift of God to us. Gratitude spreads a healing balm among those with whom we fellowship, and it will speed us on the path to God's Kingdom!