

Are Good Manners Obsolete?

God says in I Peter 1:15, "*But as he which hath called you is holy, so be ye holy in all manner of conversation.*" The Greek word for manner in this verse is: *ethos*, which means a custom, usage, morals, or character. Our Lord is saying, I want your demeanor and behavior to reflect a Christ-likeness which is unmistakably holy. The Lord says further on this subject in I Corinthians 15:33, "*Be not deceived: evil communications corrupt good manners.*" Our Lord explains that the communion with the wrong crowd will corrupt good manners, conduct, and character. God, through His prophet warns in Ezekiel 11:12, "*And ye shall know that I am the LORD: for ye have not walked in my statutes, neither executed my judgments, but have done after the manners of the heathen that are round about you.*" The Hebrew word for manners is *mishpat* which is also translated: justice, right, privilege, due (legal), proper, fitting, measure, fitness, custom, manner, and plan. God makes a clear line of demarcation between the conduct of heathen verses godly individuals.

When polled, over half the population of the Untied States believes that Americans were more conscious of proper manners thirty or forty years ago than they are today. Had I been polled, I would have agreed with the consensus on this point. Although the primary meaning of the above verses refers to God's people not taking on the customs of the heathen in the areas which violate the nature of holiness, there is a sense in which improper behavior in day-to-day conduct has become at least inappropriate, if not in some cases, sinful. I am concerned when I see social skills diminish to the point that many say, "It doesn't matter how I act." I am concerned that with many in the youth culture of America, good manners almost seem a thing of the past. Let me give a short list of what I am talking about:

(1) We should look people in the eyes and give them our attention when talking to them. The Florida State University Career Center says: "Eye contact increases trust, shows confidence and good interpersonal skills, and shows respect for the person and business situation." We should not allow the cell phones to interrupt our conversations at tables or public events such as church services, weddings, and funerals. It is rude to invite someone out to eat then disgrace their presence by allowing a cell phone to control your attention. How sad to see a guest staring aimlessly into the air while their host is guffawing with some unseen entity on the end of a cellular line. There was a time when cell phones were not available and we managed just fine.

(2) Say please and thank you. From *Parenting For Dummies*, 2nd Edition, a great point has been made: "Don't underestimate the importance of good manners. Your children will grow up to be kinder and more considerate of others if you teach them how to be that way when they're young. You can do that by setting a good example. You must always say "please" and "thank you" to your kids. Even when you are saying, 'Please get your bicycle off my foot,' or 'Thank you for the dead slug.'"

(3) Be a gentleman; be a lady. A gentleman stands when a lady enters the room. And if there are no more seats available, he offers his. He also opens the door for her and walks on the street side of the sidewalk. This is an old custom when the streets were not paved and the mud would splatter from the horse's hooves. The gentleman would protect the lady, which sadly is a too-often forgotten point in and of it self.

A woman acts like a lady, dresses like a lady in public, sits like a lady, and walks like a lady, and should be able to take for granted that a man will act like a gentleman. In this respect it will not be long before a man starts opening doors for the ladies if our female companions would stand before the door refusing to touch it. It may take patience, but make him do it, girls!

A gentleman takes his hat or cap off when in doors. He also removes it in worship, prayer, at meals or during the National Anthem. A lady is not publicly boisterous. "*...even the ornament of a meek*

and quiet spirit, which is in the sight of God of great price" (I Peter 3:4). When eating, always sit up straight in your chair, never leaning backward or forward. Don't let your elbows touch the table, hands are permitted on the table. When eating, do not bring your face toward the plate, (a la a pig's trough), but bring the utensil up to you. You be the master!

From *Parenting For Dummies, 2nd Edition*, on the subject of mannerly conduct the authors say, "Everyone tends to be a little too relaxed at the dinner table when it comes to proper behavior. Maybe you think it's funny when Daddy balances a spoon on the end of his nose or one of the kids makes a hat out of his napkin and wears it on his head all during dinner. If you don't mind this kind of monkeying around, even when you're dining out, ignore this advice. But, if you don't think it's appropriate to do this kind of stuff in public, then teach your kids what you think is acceptable and what isn't acceptable, and then make sure that you're consistent about the rules. Kids have a hard time remembering household rules. They have an even harder time remembering rules for dining out, if those aren't the same rules at home." Some general table manners and all round good manners even when away from the table are: no throwing food, do not yell to be heard, do not interrupt people when they are talking, don't talk with food in your mouth (we don't need the "see food" jokes) and we certainly don't need to be sprayed with your half-eaten food! Don't shove to be first in line, and most definitely no bodily function noises of any kind. Joking around about other cultures who burp after their meals is not acceptable. We are not going to move to some foreign country to acquiesce for your rudeness! If someone allows a burp to slip out, he is to quietly say, "Excuse me." No reply is necessary or appropriate. If it is not alright, then don't lie by saying, "Oh, that's okay." If we laugh about it, then you can be fairly certain that your kids will burp at a friend's house or public restaurant and laugh about it at that time. I know it will be tempting to burst out in laughter, but if we want our kids to be disciplined then it is important that we be disciplined enough to withhold our approving jest.

In summation, why have good manners?

A. It pleases God.

"Whether therefore ye eat, or drink, or whatsoever ye do, do all to the glory of God" (I Corinthians 10:31). Can we be disrespectful, rude, and crude to the glory of God? We know we cannot. An old pastor of ours, now with the Lord used to say, "I don't mind if people are upset with me because of my position, but not because of my disposition." If we stand for the Lord and others get offended, then we can live with that, but not because of a personal unmannerly quirk that offends due to carelessness and lack of thoughtfulness toward others. Another good reason to have and hold good manners is:

B. To Maintain a Good Testimony With All Men.

"...I am made all things to all men, that I might by all means save some" (I Corinthians 9:22). Our testimony before others is far more important than our creature comforts and desires being satisfied. We live in a culture that does what they please often times to only satisfy themselves. Manners are a great way to show you care. This leads us naturally to this next reason we should have good manners:

C. Because it Exemplifies the Golden Rule.

Jesus said, *"And as ye would that men should do to you, do ye also to them likewise"* (Luke 6:31). Acting with good manners tells the person with whom you are interacting that they are valuable to you. If you treat them like barnyard creatures, you haven't obeyed the golden rule! Men are not animals; they are created in God's likeness. Before the Lord Jesus won the woman at the well to Himself, He first treated her with the utmost respect (John 4).

We should all follow the advice of a simple, but well-advised children's poem:

We say, "Thank you."

We say, "Please."
We don't interrupt or tease.
We don't argue. We don't fuss.
We listen when folks talk to us.
We share our toys and take our turn.
Good manners aren't too hard to learn.
It's really easy, when you find.
Good manners mean
JUST BEING KIND!

Let us all follow the southern colloquial advice given to us by our mothers, "Be sweet!"

- Pastor Pope -

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