

Civility and Courtesy

Good Manners are Godly

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Have you ever seen on television a session of the British Parliament, particularly the House of Commons? It can be almost hilarious. The speakers there are constantly interrupted with hissing, and booing, and other forms of dissention. But through it all, there is a kind of strange (and I dare say hypocritical) courtesy and civility from those not speaking. One Member of Parliament might blister another's ideas up and down, tearing him to the ground, and all the while calling him, "Our Distinguished Colleague from Kent," or, "The Learned Gentleman from York," or some other such thing.

It is a strange mixture of courtesy and near hatred.

Now, across the pond in New York City, we have the appropriately named trash-radio personality Howard Stern. He makes a living being crass, speaking trash, and cutting people down. Yet he is so popular that he is syndicated in many markets currently across this nation. In fact, he came to Charlotte, North Carolina, a couple of weeks ago. There was quite a big hubbub in the papers, and on talk radio locally about whether Charlotte, North Carolina—conservative Bible belt Charlotte—should have somebody like Howard Stern on our radio.

His book has sold millions, and his movie made a huge splash. How could such a vulgar gross man be so popular?

Then, there is talk radio in general. Depending on the host, it ranges from amiable, to civil, to virtual shouting matches. I do not know if you hear people like that on your local radio stations. Every once in a while, you might hear somebody really upset on talk radio—and the venom just pours out, and the host scrambles to get things under control. If they were in a ring, it would be a boxing match.

On talk radio, liberals hate conservatives, gays hate straights, one race hates another, the Yankees hate the Orioles, and pro-business hates the anti-business, etc., ad nauseam. Everybody hates something, and feels they need to vent it out in the public arena. It seems that the entire world has to hear that they hate something; they do not like the way that things are going, and they do not care who hears them. It is refreshing to hear the rare caller who respectfully pitches his side of the argument, and then gets off the phone to let someone else have a turn.

What about America's bi-yearly mudslinging in their politicking, dragging us through this sort of thing every election? They always begin by declaring that they are only going to campaign on the issues this time. It always ends up (and it never fails) that we have to hear about Mr. X's extramarital affairs, or Miss Y's involvement in some shady financial deal. As it all comes out, they end up shouting at each other. The electorate ends up picking the candidate who has the lesser amount of mud still sticking on them.

About two weeks ago in Charlotte, North Carolina, a city council member assaulted a leading business leader in a cafeteria over a difference of opinion. Two grown men who knew better slugged it out over just a difference of opinion like two kids in a schoolyard. The business leader pressed charges against the council member, but later dropped them when the councilman publicly apologized.

Actually they were both on the same side politically. I think that their people must have gotten them together and said, "Look, if you have any more of this strife, here, we will not be able to get ahead in our politics, so you guys had better smooth things over."

This sort of thing happens all of the time.

When was the last time a kid other than your own (giving you the benefit of the doubt) said, "Yes, ma'am," or, "No, sir?" When was the last time you saw a young person give up their place, or their seat to an older person? Have you ever seen a younger person rise to honor an elder person when they came through the door? When was the last time you noticed a young person not sullen, or disrespectful to any authority figure like a policeman? They usually call them derogatory names, rather than Mr. Policeman.

It has become so bad that the April 26, 1996 issue of the *US News and World Report* had a cover story entitled, "The American Un-civil War." Its subtitle reads, "How crude, rude, and obnoxious behavior has replaced good manners, and why it hurts our politics and culture."

I want to read to you a portion of this article so you can get the flavor of what many people, other than myself, have noticed about this country. The author is Mr. John Marks.

We live in a time when schools use metal detectors to keep out guns and knives; and universities insist on speech and behavior codes to stem the tide of hatred and disrespect; legal cases become shouting matches; the internet is littered with raunch and menace; political campaigns resemble food-fights; back-talk, and head-butts are idioms of sports; and the popular culture accosts itself from week to week with displays of violence, sex, and foul language.

At best, it is a bad time to be enveloped with decorum, at worst, anarchy lurks just around the corner.

According to a new poll conducted in February by *US News*, and *Bosell Worldwide*, reveals that a vast majority of Americans feel their country has reached an ill mannered watershed. Nine out of ten Americans think incivility is a serious problem. And nearly half think that it is extremely serious. Seventy-eight percent say that the problem has worsened in the past ten years, their concern goes beyond annoyance with rudeness. Respondents see incivility as evidence of a profound social breakdown.

More than ninety percent of those polled believe that it contributes to the increase of violence in the country; eighty-five percent believe that

it divides the national community; and the same number see it as eroding healthy values like respect for others.

Talk to Americans, and a picture emerges of a nation addicted to the pleasures of an unruly society with emphasis on individual expression, flouting convention, and its free vent of emotion, but shocked at the effect of this unruliness. Americans feel embattled in their personal and professional lives by a rising tide of nastiness.

Says Martin Marti, a philosopher of religion who has written on this subject, 'The alternative to civility is first incivility, and then war.'

That is why they have entitled this article, "The American Uncivil War." They see that once incivility begins in the populace, it will continue to fracture the culture until it breaks out in open war.

Now, unfortunately, a similar breakdown has happened in the church. It has already broken out into war between the members who have broken up into camps, and incivility between these camps has risen in the past several years.

It is good to remember the principle, "If it happens in the world, it will eventually find its way into the church." We have been out there in it, and it tends to rub off on us if we are not very, very careful. Some kids in the church are only slightly better mannered at times than those out in the world. They often do not use, "sir," or "ma'am," and sometimes they do not even say, "please," and "thank you." I have seen young boys at the Feast of Tabernacles, and at other times, nearly run over elderly people trying to get out the door. Such things ought not to be in the church of God.

The ministry, and rightly so in some cases, has lost much of the respect of the members. You know, God says that ministers are to be helpers of your joy. Many see the ministry by another title, "the enemy." There is even a strong movement afoot among some groups to get rid of the ministry altogether.

I have seen many members treat each other pretty sadly. The present condition of the church has not helped a bit when it comes to this subject. If member "A" decides to attend church "X," then member "B" who is in church "Y," will not talk to member "A" any more, even if they meet in the grocery store or gas station. Maybe, member "C" who works for member "D" assumes he can do shoddy work because member "D" will forgive him. "Well, is he not in the church? He is supposed to forgive me for my faults!" Or, member "E" never paid back the generous loan that member "F" gave him when he was in a bit of trouble.

These things ought not to happen in the church of God. It is just human nature rearing its ugly head.

What I am talking about is difficult to put under one header. I have titled this sermon, "Civility and Courtesy," but what I have covered so far is incivility, discourtesy, bad manners, disrespect, an in-your-face attitude, argumentativeness, and so on.

Whatever it is called, the way things have become in the world, and as it has crept into the

church, it is wrong, it is mean-spirited, and it is certainly unchristian.

In fact, these bad attitudes are found among the works of the flesh.

Galatians 5:19-21 Now the works of the flesh are evident, which are: adultery, fornication, uncleanness, lewdness, idolatry, sorcery, hatred, contentions, jealousies, outbursts of wrath, selfish ambitions, dissensions, heresies, envy, murders, drunkenness, revelries, and the like; of which I tell you beforehand, just as I also told you in time past, that those who practice such things will not inherit the kingdom of God.

This is pretty serious.

Now, most of those that touch closely to our subject today are in verse 20. I want to define a few of these so that we can really get an idea of what we are talking about.

The first one is "hatred." The King James Version, and the New King James Version both use "hatred." The definitions—actually descriptions—I am going to use here are from William Barclay in his Daily Bible Study Series on Galatians.

He says here about hatred:

The idea is that of a man who is characteristically hostile to his fellow man. It is the precise opposite of the Christian virtue 'love for the brethren.'

Here we have hatred, which is the exact opposite of philadelphia love—love of the brethren. Already, we are beginning to see just how serious this is. Hatred is exactly the opposite of what God wants us to show in our lives.

The second term is "contention." The King James Version has "variance." Barclay says,

More commonly, it means the rivalry, which has found its outcome in contentions and quarrellings, and wrangling.

So, really, what it comes down to is that competitive arguing, where you have got to fight somebody verbally to see who is best, who gets the upper hand, or who has the last word in everything you talk about. He just will not shut up until you either leave, or give in. This is what we often hear on talk radio every day.

The third term is "outbursts of wrath." I believe the King James Version has just "wrath." Barclay writes,

This could be translated, 'uncontrolled temper.' The word that Paul uses means, 'bursts and blazes of temper.' It does not describe an anger which lasts, but the anger that flames out and then dies.

This is interesting. I do not know how much you may use the Internet, but the Internet has its own vocabulary at times. If you respond strongly to someone in a forum, or in an email message, it is called "flaming." Someone may write to you and say, "You really flamed so-and-so, and I do not think that he will recover." It is an outburst of wrath just like Paul says right here.

The fourth term is "dissentions." This one the King James Version translated as "seditions." Barclay writes,

Literally, the word means, 'A standing apart.' Dissention describes a society where the members fly apart instead of coming together.

This word describes a person who goes off on his own, because he has a different opinion than the group has. Therefore, the group, society, or church flies apart. Does that sound familiar? Have we not used the term "fly apart" to describe what has happened in the church of God over the past several years? Is that not what shattering, or scattering is all about? It is because of dissention, a work of the flesh.

The fifth term is "heresies." Barclay writes,

This might be described as 'crystallized dissention.' A tragedy of life is that people who hold different views very often finish off by disliking not each other's views, but each other. It should be possible to differ with a man, and yet remain friends.

What have we seen in the church? Have we not seen crystallized dissention, where people hold different views and end up not hating the person's views, but him? I have seen it happen where one person will not ever talk to that person again because he does not believe in the postponements, or keeping the new moons, or some small point of doctrine and/or belief. Therefore, they go over to a corner, suck their thumb, and will not ever talk to him about it again. Unfortunately, this really does happen.

What this word has come down to mean in Greek is "factions," or "party spirit." It is hardened and unbending. It is like the feud between the Hatfields, and the McCoys. Or it is like my team versus your team. Or it is like our group versus your group. It is where we are so split over something that there is never any possibility again of coming back together. It has crystallized.

Oftentimes, this goes so far that no one can remember what caused the split in the first place, because things have gone beyond that now. It has become hatred for the people; that group against our group. "Who cares what caused it? We will just remain in this camp, and never the two meet again."

Here are some more bad attitudes and works of the flesh.

II Timothy 3:1-5 But know this, that in the last days perilous times

will come: For men will be lovers of themselves, lovers of money, boasters, proud, blasphemers, disobedient to parents, unthankful, unholy, unloving, unforgiving, slanderers, without self-control, brutal, despisers of good, traitors, headstrong, haughty, lovers of pleasure rather than lovers of God, having a form of godliness but denying its power. And from such people turn away!

Do not have anything to do with people with these kinds of attitudes!

Now, I came to these verses to show once again that these attitudes of instability and uncaring self-absorption are a hallmark of this generation and these last days.

When I was going through these verses preparing this sermon, do you know which person came to mind? Dennis Rodman [a basketball player for Chicago]. I do not know why for sure. Maybe I was listening to a sports-talk show, and they were talking about some of the antics of Dennis Rodman throughout the playoffs. He just seems to embody everything bad about this generation.

I do not know about you, but do you remember last winter when he kicked a photographer? I mean, that is incivility. He did not even check to see if the guy was okay. He just lashed out at him in total selfishness.

I just thought that maybe making an example of him might give you an idea of some of the attitudes that come out, and how they come out.

I do not know for how many years, but he is been kicked out more than any other person in the league—many technical fouls, and many ejections. It is just sad. The guy is making millions with the Chicago Bulls, and he is making many times more in endorsements of products. His uncaring attitude unfortunately is a big seller. It attracts people to a product.

It may be an act on his part. I do not know if he really is that way all of the time, but you must think that if he acts that way, he is like that. He is a terrible example for people, especially children and young people.

All right, it is time to look at the other side of this. We have dwelt long enough on incivility. It is time to talk about civility and courtesy—what it is we should be doing.

I Corinthians 13:4-8 Love suffers long and is kind; love does not envy; love does not parade itself, is not puffed up; does not behave rudely, does not seek its own, is not provoked, thinks no evil; does not rejoice in iniquity, but rejoices in the truth; bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things. Love never fails.

This sermon sprang from my dad's sermon a few weeks ago when he was going through and explaining I Corinthians 13. I thought it might be a good idea to just take one of these and explain it, expand on it, expound on it, through a whole sermon. I found when I finally concentrated on civility and courtesy, several of these touch on this subject, particularly, "Love suffers long," "Is kind," "Does not behave rudely." That one especially can be translated as "Is

not disrespectful," or "Is not discourteous." In addition, "Is not provoked," "Thinks no evil," "Bears all things." They all have a little bit of this idea of being civil, and courteous—respectful, honoring those to whom honor is due.

So when you put it all together, is that bad manners, incivility, unkindness, discourtesy, disgraceful and shameful behavior, disrespect, dishonor for any other is simply a lack of love—*agape* love. These are the exact opposite of what we should be doing.

We do not need to go through all the meanings of all these words in I Corinthians 13, but I know that the current plague of incivility and discourtesy is simply the manifestation of what Jesus said in Matthew 14:12, "That in the last days, because lawlessness shall abound, the love of many will grow cold."

We often see the things like this manifest themselves out in the world a little bit before it shows up in the church, because we in the church have a little bit of resistance to those attitudes. However, it does eventually get into the church. If we can be aware of what is going on outside, maybe we can put up an even stronger resistance so that we manifest the love that we are supposed to have and show to all people in our actions.

When we are civil, when we are courteous to each other, we show love. When we do acts of kindness, we show love. When we show respect, or honor to another, whoever they happen to be, we show love. Even such things like etiquette and table manners are forms of showing love for each other.

We do not seem to have a big thing for table etiquette anymore. Most of the people in Europe probably think we are pretty crass in the way we eat, and things like that. However, even simple things like that are ways to show love to each other.

Now, these are not hard, or advanced things. They are not difficult to do. In fact, they are the fundamentals of moral behavior. They are things that we should instill in our children. We should keep on instilling them into our children until they do not have to think about them anymore. They just do them.

They will say, "Yes, sir," and "No, sir," and "Yes, ma'am," and "No, ma'am." They will say, "Please," and "Thank you." They will respond courteously when someone talks to them.

But this must first be habitual in us! We can tell our children until we are blue in the face, but if we do not do them ourselves, then they are not going to think that they are of much value; because the our example goes so much farther than just mere words. The parents need to be aware of these things and start doing them so that our children catch on. We can stem the tide of incivility.

I would like to give you a few quotations on manners and courtesy. I thought they would be helpful to show that the wise of this world understand the value of good manners of courtesy and civility. Some of these simple things we have seem to have forgotten, and deemed them unnecessary. That is wrong.

Listen to this English proverb, "Good manners are the small coin of virtue."

Virtue might be the hard currency like dollars, and good manners are the nickels and dimes.

And if you have enough nickels and dimes, they add up to be quite a lot.

This next one is similar by an English theologian named William Paley. He says, "Manners are minor morals."

From another theologian, Sidney Smith, he says, "Manners are the shadows of virtue. A momentary display of those qualities which our fellow creatures love and respect. If we strive to become, then, what we strive to appear, manners may often be rendered useful guides to the performance of our duties."

From yet another English clergyman, Robert Stout, "You must carry manners from the hand doing them to the heart to improve a ceremonial nicety into a substantial duty, and the modes of civility into the reality of religion."

He is saying that, "Pretty is, as pretty does."

Here is one from an American theologian, Cyrus Barthall, "Good manners, and good morals are sword friends and fast allies."

They go together. They should not be separated. One without the other ends up being vain.

Here is one from an English surgeon, named John Hunter, "Good manners are a part of good morals. It is as much as it is our duty, as our interest, to practice both."

The next one is from Horace Mann, an American educator near the turn of the century, he says, "Manners easily and rapidly mature empty morals."

These people are all saying the same thing. They are all fundamentals of what later in adulthood become morals.

Here is one from the German philosopher, Goethe, "There is no outward sign of true courtesy that does not rest on a deep moral foundation."

If you are a deeply courteous person, then you are probably a deeply moral person too.

This is more than enough to reconsider the modern notion that manners and courtesies are dated, and old-fashioned. They are not. They are eternal necessities, and starting points on the road to lifelong kindness and respect for other people. They are the fundamentals of love for brother, and then love for God.

If we cannot even be courteous to each other, how can we really love our neighbor? It is impossible. Jesus says that it is easy to love your friends, but what about loving your enemies? If you do not have courtesy it is a good bet you do not have morals either—immoral.

Now, the fact that manners, courtesy, and civility have gone out of fashion these days tells me that they are part of nurture, not nature. Good morals, good courtesies, and good manners must be learned either by direct teaching, or by good examples of someone that we respect.

Colossians 3:12-14 agrees. This passage is about what the new man must put on.

Colossians 3:12-14 Therefore, as the elect of God, holy and beloved, put on [listen to this list] tender mercies, kindness, humility [of mind],

meekness, longsuffering [all of these deal with courtesies and showing basic love]; bearing with one another [not being frustrated with their weaknesses], and forgiving one another, if anyone has a complaint against another; even as Christ forgave you, so you also must do. But above all these things put on love, which is the bond of perfection [which binds together in perfect harmony].

If we have true love for each other, there is going to be harmony and, these dissensions and heresies mentioned earlier will not happen. The dissension will be overcome and will not degrade into a crystallized form where you cannot get back together anymore because you have begun to hate each other, rather than just disagreeing over some opinion.

This tells me that the idea of put on, like putting on a pair of pants, has to be learned. Putting on these attributes has to be cultivated. They are not a part of us just because we have been baptized and given the Holy Spirit. When we are given the Holy Spirit, along with that does not come treating each other nicely. They have to be learned. If you do not actually cultivate them, even though you may have the Holy Spirit, they will never become a part of our character. And then, I wonder will we be in the Kingdom of God if such things do not become a part of our character?

This next passage is the famous section about being united through the humility that Christ had, and the mind that we are supposed to put on.

Philippians 2:3-4 Let nothing be done through selfish ambition or conceit, but in lowliness of mind let each esteem others better than himself. Let each of you look out not only for his own interests, but also for the interests of others.

This is the proper attitude we have to begin with in order to start cultivating courtesy and good manners. It is not just enough to consider ourselves equal with other people; we have to think of everybody else as our superior. Now this may be difficult. All of us have all kinds of pride. Nevertheless, Paul says here, through the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, that we have to think of others, respect them, and honor them as better, as superior to us.

James talks about do not take the best seat, but take the cheap seat in back. It is so much better if someone says, "Why do not you come and sit up here in the nicer seats." See? That is lowliness of mind. Consider others more worthy than you out of respect.

I have a few more quotations for you, and they will all show humility—debasement, sacrificing some of our pride— is the basis for good manners.

This first one is from the long ago archbishop of Dublin, Ireland, by the name of Richard Whatley. He said, "To be always thinking about your manners is not the way to make them good. The very perfection of manners is not to think about yourself."

Do not think about how you are going to appear. Think about how you can help the other person.

The second one is from an American philosopher, Ralph Waldo Emerson, "Good manners are made up of sacrifices. The essence of love is sacrifice."

If you are not sacrificing, then you do not love. You are not giving a part of yourselves, or giving up a little bit of something, whether it is your place, or your pride, then we are probably not showing love to the other person.

Sir Joshua Reynolds gave this third quote. He was an English portrait painter. He, if you go to some of the museums of England, or some of the royal living spaces of the past, you will find Sir Joshua Reynolds paintings there. He moved among the upper crust. He moved among the kings and queens, and the nobility. And he had to learn how to be courteous. This is what he distilled from his full life about courtesy. "The general idea of showing respect is by making yourself less."

Those of you who are a bit more naturalistic may be able to understand this next example. Have you ever watched a program on wolves and their behavior? There is usually a leader of the pack. And this leader is the majordomo. Nobody is more than he is. All the other dogs, male or female, must respect that leader. They usually do this by hanging their heads lower than the leader's head; also other submissive manners like rolling over exposing their soft underbelly, or neck to the leader to show they are not being aggressive. This is a way of making themselves less.

I am not saying that we should do that when somebody important comes to the door, but you get the idea. God put it as a lesson from the animal kingdom to show what attitude we must show in response to one another. In our case, it is not just the leader of the pack, but for each other also. We are supposed to esteem everybody in our pack greater than ourselves.

Over at the Ford's house last night, he was telling us about his dog. His dog does just this thing to him. Mike is the leader of the pack at his house! If he scolds his dog, she humbles herself. If Mike tells her to do something, she does it right away, because she is not the leader of the pack. I thought that was neat to see that. It gave me a great illustration for this sermon.

If we do not have the attitude of looking out for the other person, and considering his welfare above ours, our manners, our courtesies will be vain and self-serving, and a perversion of what we really should be doing.

I think this also shows that the common courtesies and good manners we are expected to have are very simple. If we can distill it down to something like Joshua Reynolds said, "Simply making our self less." Or like Emerson said, "Making petty sacrifices for someone else to be honored above us," it is not hard to make ourselves a little bit less.

We do not need to have a large volume of "Miss Manners" material. We know what to do because everybody else you treat with respect as though they are better than you. It is very simple.

Now, if you are talking about table manners, and what you are supposed to do when the President of the United States comes over for dinner, then you might want that thick book of "Miss Manners." However, in most situations, simple courtesy always means your giving up something for the other person. It does not have to be great—your seat on the bus, or your place at the table, or the front row at church—it is very simple.

As Paul said in Philippians 2, "Esteem others better than yourself, and look out for his interest before yours." It is easy. It all comes down to that.

I am going to share some scripture references—pointers of the things we can do to teach our children, or ourselves, beginning with the common courtesies.

We should say "Please" when asking for something. We should say "Thank you" when it is received to whomever it is, even to a child. Also, to our superiors, or elders, we should say, and teach our children to say, "Yes, sir," or "Yes, ma'am." It is just a common courtesy. It is a good habit to get into. This is the very least we can do to show respect and esteem for another and look out for his best interests. If we cannot do these, we have got an awful long way to go.

I must say that we must insist these things from our children. Remember what all those men said earlier, these good manners, these common courtesies are the foundation for good morals. Therefore, we should lay that good foundation in our children. Make them understand that when they first learn to talk, that they learn, "Yes, Ma'am," or "No, Sir!" They should call people by Mr. and Mrs. It is hard for them to learn, but they can understand it, and they can learn it. We just have to be persistent, and continually expect it. They will do it. Good manners are the minor morals, and you teach them the minor morals when you can. It will show fruit later on in good morals, respecting their elders, and parents, and doing what is right.

This next passage is about Jacob and Joseph. Joseph may be about 40 years old, here. Remember who Joseph became. He was second in command in the Egyptian Empire. Egypt was also the only nation with grain at that time. They had the power; Joseph had the power. He was second only to Pharaoh in the entire kingdom. Now, watch how he treats his father.

Genesis 48:8-12 Then Israel saw Joseph's sons, and said, "Who are these?" And Joseph said to his father, "They are my sons, whom God has given me in this place." And he said, "Please bring them to me, and I will bless them." Now the eyes of Israel were dim with age, so that he could not see. Then Joseph brought them near him, and he kissed them and embraced them. And Israel said to Joseph, "I had not thought to see your face; but in fact, God has also shown me your offspring!" So Joseph brought them from beside his knees, and he bowed down with his face to the earth.

Look at the respect Joseph showed his father, an old man. He brought his children before his father, and then he himself bowed down with his face to the earth.

I am not saying that we should do this to our parents, but it is the attitude and example here. He was second in all Egypt, and yet he gave respect to his father for his place, and his age.

Then, here is Pharaoh doing this to Jacob, too!

Genesis 47:7 Then Joseph brought in his father Jacob and set him before Pharaoh; and Jacob blessed Pharaoh.

Always the greater blesses the lesser. So, what did Pharaoh do here? He must have abased himself before Jacob. It was surely different times. When the ruler of the known world, basically, bowed himself in respect to this old man for his years, and probably because he respected Joseph as well for what Joseph had done to bring Egypt through this famine.

Here, you see a bit of humility on Pharaoh's part because he bowed himself to Jacob.

Genesis 47:10 So Jacob blessed Pharaoh, and went out from before Pharaoh.

This was certainly different times indeed!

The next passage is in Proverbs, speaking to children:

Proverbs 23:22 Listen to your father who begot you, and do not despise your mother when she is old.

This is the same sort of thing. Even though you may be an adult, even though you may have your own family, even though you may be financially secure, and maybe even in a different class than your parents, even when they are old, you are to show respect that is due unto them.

Leviticus 19:32 You shall rise before the gray headed and honor the presence of an old man, and fear your God: I am the LORD.

Did you notice what He did here? He links respecting the elderly with fearing God. That is how serious it is. If we do not fear the elderly among us, what sort of respect and fear are we going to have before God the Father and before His Son Jesus Christ?

So, all older people, no matter what their state, should be respected. Everything should be done to make him comfortable, and honored. Children should never go before their elders, even in a potluck line. I have seen that happen a lot. All the young kids will rush to the front of a line, there is some widow trying to get her food, and they just bowl her over, and get the chow first. That happens way too often.

The door should always be held for an older person as you are entering, or leaving a place. They should always be given the pick of the seats in a car, or at church, or wherever you happen to be. They deserve a little payback for all the years they have logged on this evil earth, as well as the contributions they have made, and the wisdom that they have. It just should be a given to honor and respect the elderly.

Leviticus 19:14 You shall not curse the deaf, nor put a stumbling block before the blind, but shall fear your God: I am the LORD.

Here God does it again! He compares showing respect and concern for those who are handicapped, or ill, or infirm in some way, with fearing Him. Do not ever do a disabled person

any more harm. He is already in bad straights enough. This should be simple common sense.

I want to show you an extension to these things.

Matthew 25:34-41 Then the King will say to those on His right hand, 'Come, you blessed of My Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world: for I was hungry and you gave Me food; I was thirsty and you gave Me drink; I was a stranger and you took Me in; I was naked and you clothed Me; I was sick and you visited Me; I was in prison and you came to Me.' Then the righteous will answer Him, saying, 'Lord, when did we see You hungry and feed You, or thirsty and give You drink? When did we see You a stranger and take You in, or naked and clothe You? Or when did we see You sick, or in prison, and come to You?' And the King will answer and say to them, 'Assuredly, I say to you, inasmuch as you did it to one of the least of these My brethren, you did it to Me.' Then He will also say to those on the left hand, 'Depart from Me, you cursed, into the everlasting fire prepared for the devil and his angels:

And He goes through and tells us that these people never did show the courtesy, respect, love, and the concern for those people who were less fortunate than themselves.

Do you see what He is getting at here? This is how serious it is. If we do not show these little bits of love and compassion, and kindness, and courtesy to people, it may spell the difference between the Lake of Fire, and the Kingdom of God. That is why He links doing these things with the fear of the Eternal. If you do not learn them amongst your fellow men, then you will not learn them properly in your response to God. It is a very important principle.

James 1:27 Pure and undefiled religion before God and the Father is this: to visit orphans and widows in their trouble, and to keep oneself unspotted from the world.

This is the same idea.

rom an 15:1-6 We then who are strong ought to bear with the scruples [infirmities] of the weak, and not to please ourselves [Philippians 2]. Let each of us please his neighbor for his good, leading to edification [building up, harmony, good relations]. For even Christ [who should receive every honor and respect] did not please Himself; but as it is written, "The reproaches of those who reproached You fell on Me." For whatever things were written before were written for our learning [from examples], that we through the patience and comfort of the Scriptures might have hope. Now may the God of patience and comfort grant you to be like-minded toward one another, according to Christ Jesus, that you may with one mind and one mouth glorify the God and Father of

our Lord Jesus Christ.

This repeats several things. Treating your neighbors better than yourself. It also repeats that our kindnesses cannot be self-serving. If they are, they become worthless, and vain. It also adds a few points, such as when we do these things, we are following the examples set by our Savior, and His life.

Do you remember in the last sermon I gave, I went to Acts 10: 38 where it says,

Acts 10:38 ...how God anointed Jesus of Nazareth with the Holy Spirit and with power, who went about doing good and healing all who were oppressed by the devil, for God was with Him.

That is how Jesus Christ showed courtesy, and love for His fellow man. And then,

Romans 15:6 that you may with one mind and one mouth glorify the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ.

We do not do this to be self-serving and vain, or to get something, but we do it to glorify God.

I Corinthians 10:31 Therefore, whether you eat or drink, or whatever you do, do all to the glory of God.

Every little bit of our conduct should have this in mind. Our kindnesses cannot be pure if we seek some honor or advantage for ourselves.

I Timothy 1:5 Now the purpose of the commandment is love from a pure heart, from a good conscience, and from sincere faith,

If we are showing these courtesies not from a pure heart, not from a good conscience, and not from sincere faith, then it is not the right kind of love.

Christ says on the Sermon on the Mount,

Luke 6:27-30 But I say to you who hear: Love your enemies, do good to those who hate you, bless those who curse you, and pray for those who spitefully use you. To him who strikes you on the one cheek, offer the other also. And from him who takes away your cloak, do not withhold your tunic either. Give to everyone who asks of you. And from him who takes away your goods do not ask them back.

These are fantastically high standards!

Luke 6:31-34 And just as you want men to do to you, you also do to them likewise [The Golden Rule]. But if you love those who love you, what credit is that to you? For even sinners love those who love them. And if you do good to those who do good to you, what credit is that to you? For even sinners do the same. And if you lend to those from whom you hope to receive back, what credit is that to you? For even sinners lend to sinners to receive as much back.

Are you growing in character in any of these things?

Luke 6:35-36 But love your enemies, do good, and lend, hoping for nothing in return; and your reward will be great, and you will be sons of the Most High. For He is kind to the unthankful and evil. Therefore be merciful, just as your Father also is merciful.

What Christ is saying in a nutshell is that when we show kindness, mercy, and courtesy to others, we are imitating God Himself! And, some of that character is being built within us.

We are going to let Peter finish up today, where he has left off talking to husbands and wives,

I Peter 3:8-12 Finally, all of you be of one mind, having compassion for one another; love as brothers, be tenderhearted, be courteous; not returning evil for evil or reviling for reviling, but on the contrary blessing [heap coals of fire on their heads], knowing that you were called to this [showing His character], that you may inherit a blessing [which could be lost if we do not]. For, He who would love life and see good days, let him refrain his tongue from evil, and his lips from speaking deceit. Let him turn away from evil and do good; let him seek peace and pursue it. For the eyes of the LORD are on the righteous [who do good and do right], and His ears are open to their prayers...

This throws in another thing: If we are not doing good to others, if we are not showing them this kindness and courtesy, then maybe God is not hearing our prayers. Peter said in the previous verse 7 above that we must dwell with understanding, and give honor to the weaker vessel, so that our prayers will not be hindered. He was talking about the specific relationship between husband and wife. However, this same sort of thing does happen between brethren. Your prayers may be hindered if you are not treating the other with more esteem than yourself.

I Peter 3:12 But the face of the LORD is against those who do evil.

Do you want the face of God to shine upon you, and His ear open to your prayers? Or, would you like to have His face turn away from you when you are doing evil?

It is your choice.

Like the *US World and News Report* said, "We live in a time when civility and courtesy are increasingly rare." This world has lost all love. Nothing is done with a pure motive anymore, out of a kind heart. Everything is done for gain and climbing the ladder. "I am going to get mine, before someone else does!"

We in God's church cannot be sucked into this attitude. We have to buck this trend, and totally reverse it. And not only among ourselves, but in our witness to the world.

Our salvation may depend on it.

As the bumper sticker says, "Do random acts of kindness." And, make it a life-long habit!