

Perfect, Gentle Courtesy (Part 1)

Excellence in Character Produces Good Manners

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Many people are very concerned about what is going on in the Middle East, especially there in Israel and Lebanon, and rightly so. Events could escalate to any level at any time, and things are tenuous at best. The United Nations seems to be stepping in to give a "peace, peace" (when there is no peace) appearance to that area. Many are asking about what is happening in prophecy and where it is going from here. We are always concerned when these things happen.

When the first Gulf War started, someone asked me about coming back to church; they had not come in ten or twenty years. With this war starting, they thought it was the beginning of the end. Then, when that was over, they quickly went back to what they were doing in the world and forgot about it.

When this incident with Iraq began, that same person came to me and said the same thing; and again they have forgotten about that because the war has grown old. So, you see what happens with people that are only interested in prophecy. They tend to only be interested in prophecy, and want to know what is going to happen in their lives.

Believe it or not, that is not what the sermon is on today, but as an introduction I wanted to give that contrast.

As Christians we have to ask ourselves, "What should I be doing?" "What should I be interested in?" "What is important at this time when the world seems to be unraveling?"

Of course, one of the first things that we should be turning to, is what we can be doing in our own lives to improve our relationship with God and our relationship with each other? In my opinion, at this point—with events unraveling in the Middle East—what we need to do is to look at our own selves and say, "What can I do to improve my relationship with God and the brethren?"

I would like to encourage those of you who are in your 20s, those of you who are single, those of us who are husbands and fathers, those of you who are wives and mothers, widowers and widows, those who are part of a family. Most importantly, this sermon is meant to encourage all baptized members of God's church, to be more concerned about what we might think of as the little things.

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This sermon is what you might call a practical application sermon. That is, it is a subject we can take to heart and go do something of a more visible nature about.

I have noticed, over the years, that a lack of manners and common courtesy is quite often the cause of offenses, irritations and frustrations between people. We could also call it 'poor etiquette' or, more commonly 'poor manners.'

What are 'manners' anyway? According to *Webster's New Universal Unabridged Dictionary*, "manners" are:

1. "ways of social life; prevailing social conditions or customs."
2. "ways of social behavior; deportment, especially with reference to polite conventions; as, good manners, bad manners."
3. "polite ways of social behavior; deportment conforming with polite conventions; as, the child really has manners."

So basically, 'manners' are ways of behavior and ways of life. We in God's church have been working diligently to learn how to live God's way of life. That is what Christianity is all about! We try to imitate Jesus Christ, to conform to the way that He lived His life to God's most excellent way of life.

Emily Post, the American philosopher, lived between 1873 and 1960, and she wrote a book on *Etiquette* (copyright 1922). I found it interesting, and she offers this insight into "manners" as a way of living:

Manners are made up of trivialities of deportment [i.e., proper behavior] which can be easily learned if one does not happen to know them; manner is personality—the outward manifestation of one's innate character and attitude toward life.

Obviously, as Christians, we are interested in how our innate character and attitude are causing us to live.

Godly manners are about courtesy, politeness, etiquette, customs, correctness, respectability and a more excellent way of life within the church, within the Family of God, and eventually within the Kingdom of God.

Titus 3:1-2 (ESV) Remind them to be submissive to rulers and authorities, to

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be obedient, to be ready for every good work,

I would like to zero in on "*be ready for every good work.*"

Titus 3:2 to speak evil of no one, to avoid quarreling, to be gentle, and to show perfect courtesy toward all people.

The key word there for the sermon is "gentle." He says, "*to show perfect courtesy toward all people.*"

The Amplified Bible words this last phrase, "*show unqualified courtesy toward everybody.*"

The English word translated gentle is translated from the Greek word *eipieikeis* which means "gentle, appropriate, or by implication mild." You see the sense there that gentle has an application in our lives.

Although the English words *meekness*, which is used in the King James Version, *humility*, which is used in the New King James Version, and *courtesy*, which is used in the English Standard Version, are translated from the very hard to translate Greek word *prauteeta* in verse 2, it also carries the implied meaning '*courteous consideration.*'

The two similar thoughts combined, teach us that we are to be courteous toward one another in a gentle way. We must peaceably refrain from strife, and considerably exercise moderation in our interaction with one another. It is not enough just to be courteous with one another, there has to be the element of gentleness there.

We have a responsibility to treat everyone, even those in the world, with perfect, gentle courtesy. That means we must not insult or vilify anyone, we are to refrain from the common worldly practice of hurling harsh or inflammatory comments, or vicious nicknames at others. Remember, this is how we are to treat those in the church, and also those in the world.

This quality of 'courtesy' or 'courteous consideration' is perfectly reflected in the life of Jesus. Followers of Christ must always use appropriate conduct, remembering that Jesus did not revile, when He was reviled.

I Peter 2:23 ...who, when He was reviled, did not revile in return; when He

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suffered, He did not threaten, but committed Himself to Him who judges righteously;

Jesus refused to engage in quarrels and conflicts. And He never spoke with the intention of agitating others.

Remember when He threw the money changers out of the temple; you might call that righteous indignation. I am sure that He raised His voice and hurled them right out of there. But, in a general sense, and for the most part, He spoke and treated people very gently.

According to the apostle Paul, in his epistle to Titus, we should be considerate, gentle or compliant, not stubbornly insisting on our own rights, but acting in courtesy and patience. Just as important is that we have a responsibility to show true humility and perfect courtesy, an attitude of mind that is the opposite of self-assertiveness and harshness. I know that when we get tired quite often, irritable, maybe our blood sugar drops, and sometimes we will snap at someone. I actually apologized for snapping at someone this morning, for that very thing. I realize that we all do it and so this sermon is pointed directly at me, and if you would care to listen, feel free.

In Titus 3:2, Paul says "to show perfect courtesy toward all people." In the English Standard Version, it is "perfect courtesy." In the King James Version, it is "all meekness." In the New King James Version, it is "all humility." In the New International Version, it is "true humility" In the New American Standard, it is "every consideration." In the Revised Standard Version, it is "perfect courtesy."

So you see there, that if you take all of those terms together, you get a sense of what it is talking about. It is talking about courtesy, meekness, humility and consideration.

This not only stresses its genuineness, but the greatest possible manifestation of courtesy, meekness, and humility. Grammatically, the present participle rendered "to show" suggests a continuing demonstration of humility as an essential trait of Christian character. It is not something that you put on temporarily, and just use on occasion, but gentleness comes from within, it comes from the heart of an action.

It should not be exhibited only in dealing with other members of God's church, but must also be shown toward everyone on earth, including those who are hostile and morally perverse. It is a difficult test of Christian character, but one that effectively proves the genuineness of our attempt to live God's way of life.

Continuing on, in Titus 3, Paul explains the proper motives to us for such godly conduct.

Titus 3:3-8 For we ourselves were also once foolish, disobedient, deceived, serving various lusts and pleasures, living in malice and envy, hateful and hating one another. But when the kindness and the love of God our Savior toward man appeared, not by works of righteousness which we have done, but according to His mercy He saved us, through the washing of regeneration and renewing of the Holy Spirit, whom He poured out on us abundantly through Jesus Christ our Savior, that having been justified by His grace we should become heirs according to the hope of eternal life. This is a faithful saying, and these things I want you to affirm constantly, that those who have believed in God should be careful to maintain good works. These things are good and profitable to men.

This godly conduct is necessary and possible as a result of God's transforming work in our lives.

Here, in Titus 3, Paul highlights three motives that should help us show perfect, gentle courtesy toward others:

1. Our own pre-Christian past (verse 3);
2. God's plan and work of the salvation of those who believe in Him (verses 4-8);
3. The necessary connection between Christian truth and conduct (last half of verse 8).

1. The motive from our own past condition. That helps us to understand why everyone needs to be shown perfect gentle courtesy. The reason is because we have been there and received the harshness of the world and lived in that.

Remembering our own past, and what we have come out of, or overcome, should be a powerful motive for gentleness and consideration toward those outside the church—the uncalled. They are in the dismal state of mind we were in before God mercifully called us.

At the beginning of verse 3, Paul's phrase "For we ourselves were also," implies that

what was once true of us is still true of the unconverted. One of the reasons that Jesus came back to earth was so that He could relate to what we have to go through. Although He never sinned, He did suffer abuse, and suffer the aches and pains of physical life. He can go, on our behalf, to God the Father in an understanding way.

Paul describes a condition that he applies, in retrospect, to Titus and himself as well as to the Cretan Christians. In fact, it is true of all believers everywhere. It is important to remember, but not dwell on, our own past moral condition when dealing with the unconverted in their sinful condition. When we look at our own past, and how we were before being called, we can understand better how to communicate in an effective and gentle way with those in the world.

Paul's point is that we all were foolish, without spiritual understanding (lack of discernment) because of living in the spiritual darkness of sin.

Ephesians 4:18 ...having their understanding darkened, being alienated from the life of God, because of the ignorance that is in them, because of the blindness of their heart;

When we deal with people in the world, we can have a compassion and gentleness in our dealing with them.

As outward evidence of our alienation, we were disobedient, willfully disregarding authority, refusing obedience to God's law, and worrying under human authority. I realize that we have all lived different lives, and this varies in each of us.

The word "deceived" in Titus 3:3—"For we ourselves were also once foolish, disobedient, *deceived*, serving various lusts and pleasures, living in malice and envy, hateful and hating one another"—pictures active straying from the right course by following false teachers. Allowing ourselves to be persuaded by personal desires, the inevitable result was our enslavement to them. We look at the world, and understand that the world is enslaved not only to sin, but also to the false religious leaders of the world.

"Hateful and hating one another," pictures a state of degradation that fails to produce happiness. Even though they do not realize it, they are in a constant state of misery.

2. The motive from our present condition of having the process of salvation worked out in our lives helps us to understand why everyone needs to be shown the excellence of

perfect, gentle courtesy.

The word "But," in verse 4, of Titus 3 ("But when the kindness and the love of God our Savior toward man appeared"), indicates a contrast between what we once were, and what we are now as God works with us. The process of salvation in which the members of God's church now find hope and joy should motivate us in our dealings with non-members. The act of redeeming us was one of great kindness and goodness on God's part and our interaction with the world should be one and the same.

Paul summarizes the process of salvation in a converted person's life by pointing out four significant events there in those verses: (a) Christ's appearance, (b) God's mercy by which His salvation is continuing, (c) the means by which salvation is carried out, and (d) the results of the work of Christ. So, we can see there in Paul's writing that He maps out exactly the process of salvation.

(a) Christ's appearance is a significant element of the salvation process.

In verse 4, Paul said, "when the kindness and the love of God our Savior toward man appeared."

The word "appeared", in verse 4, looks back to the beginning of the process of salvation and all the necessary elements that were manifested in 'the made in the flesh Christ.' That is all of the things that Christ had to live, and go through, in His life in preparation so that we could receive salvation.

This means, that when God our Savior was manifested beginning the plan of salvation, He made possible a way of salvation for mankind. God our Savior appeared in order to show us how to live godly lives. His mercy is displayed in that He made it possible for us to be freed from the penalty for sin.

Along with Christ's appearance is the grace which He brought with Him.

Titus 2:11 For the grace of God that brings salvation has appeared to all men,

Jesus Christ, and the blessing and favor He brought, has been revealed, making salvation possible for all types and classes of humans. But, this is not the day of salvation for mankind as a whole. It is only being offered to a select few, who have the

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opportunity to be called by God, at this time, as potential firstfruits in God's Kingdom.

The sense there, in Titus 2:11, is that the gospel message of hope is in a limited way directed toward servants as well as some masters; subjects, as well as some leaders; the poor, as well as some wealthy; the ignorant, as well as some educated; the Israelites as well as some Gentiles. So, it is offered to a cross-section of mankind.

So, what we read here is that God's unmerited favor and blessing manifested in the form of Jesus came forward (or appeared) to make possible deliverance from sin and the eternal salvation for all mankind. That is part of what lies behind Paul's statement there about Christ's appearance.

(b) God's mercy, by which His salvation is continuing, is a significant element of the salvation process.

In Titus 3:5, "...according to His mercy He saved us..." simply shows the fact of salvation for all who have accepted salvation in Christ and diligently continue to live God's way of life. The past tense "saved" shows that the things necessary for us to receive salvation have already been done by Jesus Christ.

The negative clause, in verse 5, "not by works of righteousness which we have done," emphasizes that salvation is not by works. This verse literally says, "not out of works that we ourselves had performed in righteousness." As sinners, we did no such works, nor were we able to perform good works.

But, now we are called to produce positive works. Faith is not enough, because as James wrote, in James 2, "faith without works is dead."

James 2:18-20 But someone will say, "You have faith, and I have works." Show me your faith without your works, and I will show you my faith by my works. You believe that there is one God. You do well. Even the demons believe—and tremble! But do you want to know, O foolish man, that faith without works is dead?

James 2:26 For as the body without the spirit is dead, so faith without works is dead also.

The New Testament emphatically states that there is no way of attaining salvation by

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human effort or merit. But we know that we have a responsibility to live God's way of life. It is very clear in verse 5 about the order, "not by works of righteousness which we have done, but according to His mercy He saved us." The order eliminates any thought of salvation due to personal merit and magnifies God's sovereign grace.

God saved us "because of His mercy." Our part is to submit in obedience to His commandments and statutes. We must show Him in faith by the way we live our lives that we will be submissive citizens of His Kingdom and loving members of His Family. We show God that this is in our heart by how we treat one another. First, how we treat one another in the fellowship of God, and secondly, how we treat our fellow man in the world.

(c) The means by which His salvation is carried out is a significant element of the salvation process.

In the last part of verse 5, and verse 6, Paul explains that God's salvation is provided to us, "...through the washing of regeneration and renewing of the Holy Spirit."

The washing ends the old life and begins the new, while the work of renewal by the Spirit, beginning with the impartation of the new life, is a lifelong activity in the life of the converted person. It is not just one time of conversion, it is not just a calling and we answer it, and it is complete, but it is a process. It is a process that we really work hard at through our lives, and it takes an entire lifetime.

Romans 12:2 And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, that you may prove what is that good and acceptable and perfect will of God.

Part of the will of God is that we treat one another with gentleness and courtesy.

In Ephesians 5, the act of cleansing of the church is followed by the work of sanctification, till no spot or wrinkle remains. This is the process that we are going through now.

Ephesians 5:26-27 ...that He might sanctify and cleanse her with the washing of water by the word, that He might present her to Himself a glorious church, not having spot or wrinkle or any such thing, but that she should be holy and without blemish.

The process of renewal in the converted person is made possible through the power of the Holy Spirit and helps produce a new nature that lives an entirely new manner of life.

(d) The result of the work of Christ is a significant element of the salvation process.

The term that begins Titus 3:7, "that" or "so that" implies more than just purpose; it means that justification has already been accomplished.

Titus 3:7 ...that having been justified by His grace we should become heirs according to the hope of eternal life.

We see that the process of salvation is in full force, and is moving just as God has planned.

In our previous lives, prior to being called by God, we were guilty of sinful lives, but when we received Christ as our personal savior and were baptized, we are declared righteous and given a standing of acceptance before God the Father and Jesus Christ.

"Justified," in reference to us, is always passive; it is always the act of God, motivated by His grace. The grace of the Father is referred to here. His free unmerited pardon is bestowed on the basis of Christ's perfect work.

Another result mentioned here is our present standing in relation to the future. The phrase "should become heirs" does not only signify a future prospect but also a present guarantee. If we live God's way of life, and we are constantly working on overcoming, God guarantees that we will receive that salvation. We do not earn it; it is just that there is a minimum responsibility and duty that we have in even being considered for it. As members of God's family, we are now heirs to God's promise, but the receipt of our inheritance is yet in the future.

Our standing as heirs provides the hope of eternal life.

Titus 1:2 ...in hope of eternal life which God, who cannot lie, promised before time began,

God planned this way in advance, before we were born, even before the creation of Adam and Eve.

The only hope of salvation is in the promise of God. He has made a general promise that those who repent and believe will be saved; and that there will be evidence that we see that we have repented, and believe the gospel. That evidence is seen in a right attitude manifested in good works, and by producing the fruit of the Holy Spirit.

Titus 3:8 This is a faithful saying, and these things I want you to affirm constantly, that those who have believed in God should be careful to maintain good works. These things are good and profitable to men.

The phrase "those who have believed [or trusted] in God" pictures not only our initial acceptance of these truths but also our present personal faith relationship to God Himself. Because of this present relationship, we are obligated to be careful to devote ourselves to doing what is good; we should be taking the lead in performing excellent manners. Proper etiquette is common sense about how to treat your fellow man in a respectful and polite way.

3. Paul tells us of the motive of the necessary connection between God's truth and good conduct that helps us to understand why everyone needs to be shown the excellence of perfect gentle courtesy. This is really the practical side of what Paul is talking about here.

Paul summarized his instructions at the end of verse 8, "These things are good and profitable to men."

These things are excellent and beneficial for everyone. Paul emphasized that we must combine faith and practice regarding these things. He is primarily talking about true teachings and how to apply them correctly in our lives. By their very nature they are excellent, good, attractive, and praiseworthy.

They are also profitable for everyone, having a beneficial impact on mankind. Ethical standards and good manners should not only be directed toward members of God's church but to those outside as well. I keep emphasizing that so that we realize that as hard a time as we have with relationships with each other we have an even harder time with relationships in the world. We are constantly having the world come down on us, interfering with us, persecuting us in various ways, just one of which is verbally by passing laws, as we are seeing in the United Nations. It is hard to look favorably in the

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sense of courtesy and gentleness toward people in the world.

Good manners and proper etiquette fall under the principle of excellence in character. Character, not charisma, is the essential element of personal excellence.

The writer Walter Johnson is credited with saying, "To excel is to go beyond the average and at times to achieve the best! If non-Christians enlist so much energy and excellence, can Christians afford the luxury of anything less than their best?"

The writer Ted Engstrom, is credited with saying, "It takes action to achieve excellence—deliberate, careful, relentless action—there are no shortcuts to quality."

In Colossians 3:17 Paul said, "And whatever you do in word or deed, do all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through Him."

They are all similar principles there.

If excellence is going beyond the norm and sometimes achieving perfection, then we can understand excellence by considering what it means to be average. To be average is to be mediocre, which is defined as, "neither very good, nor very bad; a peak of middle quality, ordinary." I have added lukewarm to the list.

Revelation 3:16 So then, because you are lukewarm, and neither cold nor hot, I will vomit you out of My mouth.

That is a very powerful statement. So, we see there, that often times when we become lukewarm we overlook the little things. Good manners, proper etiquette and gentle courtesies are part of those little things.

In light of God's outlook toward those that He calls into His church but who later lose their first love and become lukewarm—what are some of the things that we can do to "polish" our character as we pursue excellence in character?

Here are seven ways we can fine tune our excellence in character:

(1) We should try to understand the other person's perspective.

Excellence in character displays itself when we try to get to know and understand

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others; to discover their interests and needs.

First, try to understand the other person, then, try to be understood by them. This requires such qualities as compassion, kindness, and consideration.

Proverbs 19:22 What is desired in a man is kindness, and a poor man is better than a liar.

Solomon is saying that what every human being desires from another person is kindness. Also, we in God's church always desire kindness from God the Father and Jesus Christ.

Paraphrasing an all but obsolete piece of wisdom: "Do not criticize some else until you have walked a mile in their shoes." Put yourself in their shoes.

Humans look at the outward appearance, but the Lord looks at the heart. We must look to their heart to really understand their motives.

Often we can understand how others feel by how we would feel in their situation. This is why we are told by Jesus:

Luke 6:31 And just as you want men to do to you, you also do to them likewise.

This is commonly called the golden rule.

(2) We should pay attention to little things in our interaction with others.

Let us compare, for example, those who are poor listeners and those who are incessant talkers. Both are ignoring the little things and the result is discourteousness and impoliteness. Everyone has probably had a problem with one or the other, or both.

Let us look at distracted listening first: Philip Dormer Stanhope, 4th Earl of Chesterfield and British Statesman, wrote the following statement in a letter to his son in 1752:

I have seen many people who, while you are speaking to them, instead of looking at and attending to you, fix their eyes upon the ceiling, or some other

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part of the room, look out of the window, play with a dog, twirl their snuff-box, or pick their nose. Nothing discovers a little, futile, frivolous mind more than this, and nothing is so offensively ill-bred.

This letter expresses several things, one of which is simply that, it is offensive to others to not pay attention to what they are saying. And, that it may make the hearer seem like an 'airhead.' But in all fairness, some people drone on and on with incessant talking, while saying little or nothing of value, and causing our eyes to glaze over. I do not think that there is a person anywhere in this room, in the church, or in the world who is not at least guilty of something like this of something like this one time or another.

So obviously there is responsibility in a conversation to apply what all other good manners require and that is to show perfect courtesy to the other person—whether we are the talker or the listener.

Here is a quote from Benjamin Franklin, found in his Poor Richard's Almanac: "It is ill manners to silence a fool, and cruelty to let him go on."

There are other ways in which the same fault comes to the surface. There is a danger that some of us dissipate a lot of energy in just talking too much.

Proverbs 15:23 A man has joy by the answer of his mouth, and a word spoken in due season, how good it is!

Proverbs 25:11 A word fitly spoken is like apples of gold in settings of silver.

We may talk so much that we impede, prevent our thinking, or meditation. Many of us talk far too much, and so waste a lot of energy. Long-drawn-out conversation can be very exhausting. Through sheer talk there are many who find themselves in spiritual trouble.

We have to learn to follow the exhortation of the scriptures.

James 1:19 So then, my beloved brethren, let every man be swift to hear, slow to speak, slow to wrath;

We should not go through life talking incessantly, and never really thinking over and

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understanding the truth, and thereby failing to grow in grace and in knowledge. We have to discipline ourselves and also our children in this matter. Almost everything a parent does in life, especially the bad things, the children imitate. So, we find that is the case too often in our lives.

Energy is dissipated and wasted through mere emptiness of purpose in conversation and silly arguments.

Have you ever considered that idle talk is a loveless act? Many warnings are given to us in scripture concerning this.

I Timothy 1:4-6 ...nor give heed to fables and endless genealogies, which cause disputes rather than godly edification which is in faith. Now the purpose of the commandment is love from a pure heart, from a good conscience, and from sincere faith, from which some, having strayed, have turned aside to idle talk,

We see there more principles having to do with our conversation. The original term *mataiologian*, translated 'idle talk,' in verse 6, of the New King James Version, and 'vain jangling,' in the King James Version, signifies empty or vain talking; discussions that are of no value; a great many words and little sense; senselessly waxing eloquent; and, foolish opinions not worth hearing.

I would like to read a poem that expresses this well:

The Chatterbox
by Ann and Jane Taylor

From morning till night it was Lucy's delight,
To chatter and talk without stopping;
There was not a day but she rattled away,
Like water forever a dropping!
As soon as she rose, while she put on her clothes,
'Twas vain to endeavor to still her;
Nor once did she lack, to continue her clack,
Till again she laid down on her pillow.
You'll think now, perhaps, that there would have been gaps,
If she had not been wonderful clever;
That her sense was so great, and so witty her pate,

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That it would be forthcoming forever:
But that's quite absurd, for have you not heard,
That much tongue, and few brains, are connected?
That they are suppos'd, to think least who talk most,
And their wisdom is always suspected?
While Lucy was young, if she'd bridled her tongue,
With a little good sense and exertion;
Who knows but she might now have been our delight,
Instead of our jest and aversion!

In one sense this poem is humorous, but cutting to the core to each and every one of us. I know I have had occasions where I have talked too much and talked idly, so I am right in there with you trying to overcome that problem.

It is poor manners to talk without letting others get a word in edgewise. It implies that what we have to say is more important than what anyone else has to say. And, it often shows that we are not interested in what others have to contribute. So, habitual interrupters do not care what others have to say. Often you will find them interrupting you in the middle of a sentence to tell you what they have to say, or coming back with a comment that is totally removed from what the subject was that you were talking about.

What is the best way to deal with the little things about others that irritate you? I am not talking about critical differences in overall values and doctrines. I am talking about the lack of consideration of others in a conversation. I am talking about the tone in which we tell others something. Or, the unsympathetic way we sometimes relate to others.

Sometimes we shrug off another person's concerns as if insignificant compared with the important things we have going on in our own lives. The little things I am talking about also include the bad impressions we sometimes make on others, but not the bad impressions others make on us.

Let me ask a rhetorical question: When someone else rubs us the wrong way as a result of insult or neglect, should we stew about it and communicate grinding resentment back—or should we just grin and bear it? Rule #1: Be gentle! Insensitive comments like "What is wrong with you?" Or, "What is your problem?" will not help the situation. Excellence in character displays little kindnesses, courtesies and gentleness.

(3) We should always keep commitments.

Commitments include such things as: telling someone we will help them move and showing up when we say we will; fulfilling commitments at Sabbath Services which include, set up, sound system preparation, song leading, sermonettes and sermons; showing up at social events when we have told the host that we will be there. Even volunteer work for the church should be handled seriously by showing up if promised to do so.

Excellence in character displays kept promises, because people build their hopes around promises, and to dash a hope is a hurtful thing. If we cannot keep a promise we should explain and ask to be released from the promise. Or, not make the promise in the first place. The latter would be the best.

Actually, keeping commitments is a matter of faithfulness. Faithfulness is dependability, loyalty, and stability, especially as it describes God in His relationship to the members of His church. The faithfulness of God and His Word is especially prominent in Psalm 89 and 119.

Deuteronomy 7:9 "Therefore know that the LORD your God, He is God, the faithful God who keeps covenant and mercy for a thousand generations with those who love Him and keep His commandments;"

And, of course, this aspect of God's nature also applies to Jesus Christ, who is clothed with faithfulness and who is described as 'Faithful and true,' the 'faithful witness,' and the 'faithful High Priest' in various scriptures.

God's faithfulness is the source of our deliverance from temptation; our assurance of salvation; and our forgiveness of sins. He is faithful to His children because He is first of all faithful to Himself.

II Timothy 2:13 If we are faithless, He remains faithful; He cannot deny Himself.

God's faithfulness should be so deeply reflected in our lives that we can be called simply 'the faithful' as were Abraham and Moses. Faithfulness is expected of God's people as a matter of fact. It is the mark of a true Christian.

(4) We should make clear what our expectations are and what we expect to happen.

We see this in a large way and probably mostly between parents and children, but it also very much applies to us as adults in general. Excellence in character displays clear intentions to ensure that expectations are always explicit and up front. It is common courtesy to others to make our directions, instructions and information easy to understand. We can pull a principle out of the tongues issue to explain this in a sense.

I Corinthians 14:6-9 But now, brethren, if I come to you speaking with tongues, what shall I profit you unless I speak to you either by revelation, by knowledge, by prophesying, or by teaching? Even things without life, whether flute or harp, when they make a sound, unless they make a distinction in the sounds, how will it be known what is piped or played? For if the trumpet makes an uncertain sound, who will prepare himself for battle? So likewise you, unless you utter by the tongue words easy to understand, how will it be known what is spoken? For you will be speaking into the air.

God sets us the perfect example of clarity.

Deuteronomy 28:1-3 "Now it shall come to pass, if you diligently obey the voice of the LORD your God, to observe carefully all His commandments which I command you today, that the LORD your God will set you high above all nations of the earth. "And all these blessings shall come upon you and overtake you, because you obey the voice of the LORD your God: "Blessed shall you be in the city, and blessed shall you be in the country.

Deuteronomy 28:15-16 "But it shall come to pass, if you do not obey the voice of the LORD your God, to observe carefully all His commandments and His statutes which I command you today, that all these curses will come upon you and overtake you: "Cursed shall you be in the city, and cursed shall you be in the country.

Leviticus 26:3-4 If you walk in My statutes and keep My commandments, and perform them, then I will give you rain in its season, the land shall yield its produce, and the trees of the field shall yield their fruit.

Leviticus 26:14-17 But if you do not obey Me, and do not observe all these commandments, and if you despise My statutes, or if your soul abhors My judgments, so that you do not perform all My commandments, but break My

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covenant, I also will do this to you: I will even appoint terror over you, wasting disease and fever which shall consume the eyes and cause sorrow of heart. And you shall sow your seed in vain, for your enemies shall eat it. I will set My face against you, and you shall be defeated by your enemies. Those who hate you shall reign over you, and you shall flee when no one pursues you.

I feel that we are on the verge of awful things happening to this nation for flagrant and blatant disobedience. If we are God's people we should follow His example and be clear, that is the point. So many misunderstandings, and so many offenses and hurt feelings, come just because we are unclear. Then, on the flipside of this, if we do not understand what someone says, and we think that it was offensive, then we should ask the person to clarify. We should not leave, and mope about it, and get into a bad attitude.

(5) We should always show personal integrity.

Excellence in character displays integrity which generates trust. Honesty is conforming our words to reality (i.e. telling the truth) while integrity is conforming reality to our words (keeping promises and fulfilling expectations).

Leaders show integrity when they are loyal to those who are not present; when they treat everyone with the same set of principles; and when they avoid deceptive and evil communication. Obviously our leaders and politicians are not men of integrity.

Falsehood tends to loosen the friendships of brethren in the church.

Ephesians 4:25 Therefore, putting away lying, "Let each one of you speak truth with his neighbor," for we are members of one another.

It is interesting to observe in the human body a definite harmony. The eye never deceives the hand, or the hand the foot, or the heart the lungs. The whole body moves harmoniously as if the one could put the utmost confidence in the other.

Falsehood in the church is as ruinous spiritually as it would be to the body physically if one member was perpetually practicing a deception on another.

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(6) We should always apologize for failing to come through on our word, or for false accusations.

Excellence in character displays a quick apology from the heart when we fail, and not just out of pity, but out of genuine regret for letting the other person down.

Ecclesiastes 7:3 "Sorrow is better than laughter; for by the sadness of the countenance the heart is made glad," [margin "better"].

The mind that is equally serious with regard to the concerns of others whether those concerns are pleasant or sorrowful is thankful, joyful and peaceful.

(7) We should always show unconditional love. This is especially true for parents toward children, and husbands toward wives, and church members toward other church members.

Excellence in character displays love toward others without conditions, without any strings attached. This helps people feel safe and secure in the fellowship. When a person feels respectfully acknowledged he feels that his essential worth, identity and integrity are intact.

Excellence in character is synonymous with true Christianity which produces true courteousness. It is always polite. It does not display itself in a rough, short-tempered, or sour way. It does not dispose its followers to violate the proper rules of social contact. What we might call proper etiquette, or simply good manners.

The secret of true politeness is benevolence, or a desire to make others happy. A true Christian should be the most polite of people. We see little or no evidence of the fruit of the Holy Spirit in bitter temperaments; none in rudeness, hardness, and repulsiveness; none in violating the rules of good manners.

There is a counterfeit humility, a hollow-hearted politeness, which is not of any value whatsoever to a true Christian or anyone in the world. Our politeness must be based on kindness, as the apostle Paul encourages us in Colossians 3:12.

Our courtesy should be the result of love, good-will, and a desire for the happiness of all others; and this will prompt us to the kind of conduct that will make our conversation

with others agreeable, profitable, pleasant and enjoyable.

Ephesians 4:29-32 Let no corrupt word proceed out of your mouth, but what is good for necessary edification, that it may impart grace to the hearers. And do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God, by whom you were sealed for the day of redemption. Let all bitterness, wrath, anger, clamor, and evil speaking be put away from you, with all malice. And be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, just as God in Christ forgave you.

Tenderhearted means having a heart inclined to pity and compassion, and especially inclined to show kindness with regard to the faults of erring fellow members of the church. The fact of its fellowship as sons of God demands it.

How should we handle the really irritating annoying habits and idiosyncrasies of others?

Here are five ways to be kind and tenderhearted with one another:

1. Be gentle!
2. Have a sense of humor about it!
3. Blame yourself! Own up to your own sensitivity.
4. Time it right! Keep quiet while you are at the height of anxiety or frustration over it.
5. Ask yourself if it is worth it! Lest you throw away a perfectly fine relationship otherwise, ask yourself: Is it really that bad? Most of the time we should be able to live with less-than-perfect people, because every last one of us are less than perfect.

After all is said and done, is it not true that no one is perfect? In fact, it is these quirks and these oddities that makes human life fascinating and makes relationships interesting. What is it that we talk about in our families sometimes? It is the idiosyncrasies of others, and we have fun doing it. Sometimes, we will joke about each others idiosyncrasies and oddities. We have a lot of fun laughing about it with each other and not at each other. One sure way to know how we are doing as a parent is to observe the good and bad manners of our children. I am not talking about whether they

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set the table properly, but whether they are thoughtful. Do they help clear the table or do the dishes, do they offer to help with things at home? Are they polite to other adults? Perfect gentle courtesy has been the subject of this sermon.

In II Corinthians 10:1, Paul beseeches us, "by the gentleness of Christ, coupled with His meekness."

Gentleness in this context suggests the yielding of a judge, who, instead of demanding the exact penalty required by strict justice, gives way to circumstances which call for mercy in this way. The concession of a legal right may avoid the perpetration of a moral wrong. That is, letting go of passing judgment legally, by offering mercy, is what a gentle judge often does, and the gentle judge being Jesus Christ. That is the way we should handle ourselves in situations, using gentleness, and not worrying about whether it is legally right, so to speak, for us to make the correction or point out somebody's fault.

Although the single word concept of gentleness is rarely used in the Old Testament, the principle of gentleness expresses the mercy of the divine Judge, whose refraining from exacting the full demands of the law lifts up those who would otherwise be crushed under the Law's condemnation.

In the New Testament, gentleness describes one of the qualities of the saints. This is the attitude we must have toward one another if we expect to be in God's Kingdom. Remember, Christ desires mercy and not sacrifice when it comes to our relationships with each other!

Chastising the Pharisees, Christ condemned their harsh judgments of others.

Matthew 12:7 But if you had known what this means, 'I desire mercy and not sacrifice,' you would not have condemned the guiltless.

Gentleness is mildness combined with tenderness and primarily refers to actions, and it is an external behavior when compared with meekness. Gentleness is not a mere contemplative virtue; it is an excellence in character that acts to maintain peace and patience even in the midst of exasperating annoyances.

We have a responsibility to treat everyone, even those in the world, with perfect gentle courtesy.

This quality of courteous consideration is perfectly reflected in the life of Jesus.

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Followers of Christ must always use appropriate conduct remembering that Jesus did not revile when He was reviled, but spoke gently to those with whom He came in contact.

Jesus promises us this:

Matthew 11:29-30 Take My yoke upon you and learn from Me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For My yoke is easy and My burden is light."