

# Church Etiquette

*By: Tommy Nelson*

I'm almost 60. I remember as a boy Momma and Daddy taking us four boys to church. I remember the experience well. Coat and tie (clip-on), shined shoes (tennis shoes verboten), hair greased in place with Vaseline Petroleum Jelly, sitting and listening, no moving, no talking, no bathroom break (God forbid), silence prior to the service in meditation; silence after the service in reflection. Many of you can relate. It was old school. Church was more than just an activity; it was the public honoring of God. How you did what you did was as important as doing what you did. Times have changed. Some things needed changing but some did not. I fear today in our secular perspective and our dethroning of the majesty of God that many Christians, young and old, have lost a sense of Sunday etiquette. May I review some rules to live by?

1. Prepare your heart for Sunday on Saturday. Don't schedule your Sundays so that you are holding God to the clock. Unless absolutely necessary, you should never have to leave a service early. You and I run harried all six days. Put your clock and calendar to rest on Sunday as well as your ox and servant. Rest. Have nothing to get to.

2. Give your wife a break unless she absolutely loves to cook. Make your Sunday afternoon easy for her. If it's eating out, cold cuts, or leftovers (Do you know that no Jewish woman could cook on the Sabbath?) make her Sundays a day of rest. You never race home to leftovers.

3. Give yourself time. Plan Saturday night to leave on time Sunday morning. Don't be in a mad rush cursing your children, frothing at your mate, violating the law. Let nothing abscond with your Sundays.

4. Turn off your \*%#@\*!^+##% cell phone and as a matter of fact don't even bring the @!#\$%^&\*()+ thing into the building. Men have conducted business for centuries without being interrupted on Sunday mornings. We can still. Sunday is for God. All else can wait. Unless you are a doctor or pilot, etc. on call, leave your cell phone in the car. Take a break. Six days you serve the @#>\$%^&\*()+! On Sunday give it a rest.

5. Dress properly. We are not just spiritual creatures. Our bodies outside reflect what we feel inside. Your dress reflects your heart. Be neat and properly attired. A woman should not be

too low, too high or too tight. A man should not be sloppy. A young person should not draw attention to themselves. Church is to look upwards.

6. Come on time. Punctuality is consideration of another man's schedule. Even though we start on time, those who come late can create a distraction. And remember that worship involves learning but it also involves all of the life of the body of Christ. The emotional experience of singing and worship is as vital to us as the intellectual experience of learning and the volitional experience of obeying. Be in place when the service begins.

7. Be respectful of others if you have a crying child. A child who screams at the top of his lungs is no problem as long as the mother takes him out. But a continually fretful, whining child becomes a constant drip unto frustration and insanity. Don't let your child be a distraction. We have a Family Room available for you in the lobby near the Media Center. The TV feed of the service is now operative. While your child's voice is precious to you, he's probably not to others wanting to hear the service.

8. Once you come into the sanctuary and the service begins, do not talk; especially in the back. In a sanctuary as large as ours you may think that you are not being heard but to those in your vicinity, it sounds like a Rangers game. Don't be a distraction to those around you.

9. If you should come in late for some reason, sit in the back and don't parade down front. All eyes will turn from the Bible to the entrance of the royal train.

10. Do not "fiddle" with wrappers on a piece of candy or gum. That drives people around you nigh unto violence at the continual crinkling of cellophane. Stick candy in your yapper prior to the service. If you need a lozenge during the service, then be quick.

11. Our morning services last about 1 hour 15 minutes; 1 hour 30 minutes in the evening. From 9:00-10:15 and 11:00-12:15 in the morning and 6:00-7:30 in the evening. Leave when Kendall or Jono says, "You are dismissed." Leaving early takes the edge off of the finality of a service. Staying brings closure to all of the time together. Be respectful.

12. Don't ("plink plink") cut your ("plink") fingernails during ("plink")the service. People around you are ("plink plink") amazed at your insensitive ("plink") plinking. A congregant once said of watching a plinker plinking, "I was ready for him to pull out them big yellors!"

13. If a child (not a baby) is brought to service then the child must behave. Back in the old building there was a woman who would sit on the outer chair and let her child play in the

aisle. She was surrounded by disapproving, distracted faces. No one was edified. If a child is brought to church it is to train them in adult ways. Playing a computer game defeats the purpose as well as being disrespectful. It also teaches a child to be irreverent. Doodling is one thing. Playing a game is quite another.

14. Men do not wear hats into a house, an office and for certain not into the house of God. It is a maxim of courtesy that has been in vogue over a millennia. It implies a lack of respect to what goes on in the house. It implies discourtesy to the rule of that establishment at imposing the outside upon the inside. Wipe your feet, lower the voice, take off the hat. That is the rule of the South for sure.

15. Respect the building. Do you know that on Monday mornings our maintenance staff has to pick up the mints that are spit out and have stuck to the carpet or floor? Then we pick up trash and wrappers. I wonder if the culprits would do so in the Oval Office or in the Kremlin or Windsor Castle? And yet they will do so in the house of the saints. Amazing! Clean up after yourself as your mama taught you. And you know what? Our bathrooms are nastier after Sunday than the American Airlines Center bathrooms are after a Mavericks games. There is no way you will excel at an 8 through 10 when you flop at 1 and 2. Habits build character. Respect the property of others.

16. Texting is not only distracting to those around you, but it is downright sacrilegious. We are to “in humility receive the word implanted” and “as newborn babes long for the pure milk of the word.” Texting when one should be listening is a sinful and dishonoring thing in the presence of the explanation of holy scripture. In a court of law if one’s cell phone rings or one is seen texting, they will be fined for contempt. How much more disrespectful is it to Him who is the very source of law?

As God said through Malachi in his day concerning Israel’s flawed sacrifices “Why not offer it to your governor? Would he be pleased with you?” God is to be honored above all others with reverence in the beauty of holy worship; our gathering is to be as such.

– The Right Reverend H. Thomas Nelson, Jr.