

Lifebyte 45

Do Your Manners Represent Jesus?

Living Righteously In The Days of Chastisement



*Jesus must remain in heaven
until the time comes for God to restore everything,
as He promised long ago through His holy prophets. (Acts 3:21)*



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Dear Friends,

It will come as no surprise to you that contemporary American society embodies an *age of informality*. Tradition and protocol are generally considered archaic, belonging to generations long past. Fads, whether in fashion, recreation, diet or even language idioms, come and go. However, these indicators of restless change reflect the underlying and increasing *lawlessness* that's tolerated at all levels of this culture.

The "Law", or instruction and teachings of our God, will never be outmoded! He made known His ways as a peaceable and interrelational means for people to exist considerately with one another.

We followers of Jesus, and those within our families, have been *called out* of the world's ME-centered system. We've been *called into* a Kingdom in which we mirror our Lord and King in the way we relate to each other and to the rest of the humanity He has created. *How we treat one another flows out of our character in Christ as His Spirit works in and through us.*

Informality, in itself, isn't the opposite of Christ-like character. Nowhere in Scripture are we presented with a Jesus Who is stuffy, dull or removed from common relational interaction. However, when *lawlessness* is at the root of interaction, casual familiarity crosses the line into discourteous disrespect.

When Christ is set apart in your heart, your conscience is clear, your conduct is righteous, and your attitude toward others — even those who slander you and impute wrongful motives — is humble and available to serve His purpose:

But treat the Messiah as holy, as Lord in your hearts; while remaining always ready to give a reasoned answer to anyone who asks you to explain the hope you

have in you — yet with humility and fear, keeping your conscience clear, so that when you are spoken against, those who abuse the good behavior flowing from your union with the Messiah may be put to shame (1 Peter 3:15,16).

In this Lifebyte we'll discuss a variety of areas in which we followers of Jesus should be mindful to intentionally represent our Lord in our interaction with others. In essence, we'll be talking about *Christ-like etiquette*. The foundation to good manners isn't found in *what you do*, but flows out of the *motive of your heart*.

So how should we behave in all our dealings with other people? Our Lord Jesus was precise and straightforward in His command:

Therefore, however you want people to treat you, so treat them, for this is the Law and the Prophets (Matthew 7:12).

As He made clear, *every command and prophecy from the Hebrew Scripture* is summed up as an **interrelational responsibility** that's carried out among one another for the good of each. This response isn't haphazard; otherwise, your baser emotions will kick in and irritation or self-interest will prompt unChrist-like responses.

Jesus is commanding each of us to consider *with forethought* how we will go about interacting with others. To have Christ-like manners — *consideration for others* — will require you to develop His motive and behavior.

How do *Christ-like manners* translate into practice? Consider these examples:

- kindness to others out of concern for their well-being;
- respect for someone else's feelings and dignity even if you disagree with them over some matter;

- admitting when you're wrong and asking forgiveness for hurt caused by your error;

- awareness that each person is made in the image of God and is someone for whom Jesus died.

Good manners mean the consideration you grant someone because *our Lord Jesus loved and died for them*. And, as His ambassador, you owe that person nothing less in your regard for him or her. If you are following Jesus wholeheartedly, please anchor this truth:

You are the physical representative of Jesus, and your good manners — your expression of His concern for others — attest to the work He has done in your heart. Others appraise your walk with Jesus not only by your faith but by your treatment of them.

In this Lifebyte we're going to propose some "social *halakhahs*" for you to consider in your interaction with others. Please **STOP** and **DISCUSS EACH ONE** with your family and extended spiritual family. If you don't agree with ours, then please develop your own to become a **way of life** that befits the character of Jesus! But, don't go on in life without Christ-like manners—*consideration shown through your heart, mind, hands and mouth* — in the areas we suggest.

Being On Time

"King David said to Amasa, 'Summon the men of Judah to come to me within three days, and be here yourself.' But when Amasa went to summon Judah, he took longer than the time the king had set for him" (2 Samuel 20:4,5).

King David had commanded General Amasa to assemble the army in three

days. Amasa delayed and failed to meet his king's appointed time. The end result of setting his own agenda over that of the one who had the right to set the time frame? Another general raised up the army and killed the distracted Amasa.

One of the most valuable habits you can acquire is that of *being on time*. *Promptness* and *responsibility* go hand in hand. Therefore, a habitual lack of punctuality must be considered irresponsibility.

Being on time shows your *respect* for other people. On the other hand, when you habitually keep others waiting, you are displaying your disregard for them. You create unnecessary apprehension as they wonder if perhaps they've gotten the day or time wrong, and you make it more difficult for others to trust you as a person of your word.

If for some unforeseen reason you're going to be late, call as soon as you can to let them know. You're showing them the consideration that frees them to be about other things in their life.

If you're invited to someone else's home for a sitdown meal, ask if they plan to serve it immediately upon your arrival. Why is this helpful for you to know? If you have a family and the meal isn't going to be served right away, make sure you and/or your children don't arrive so hungry that eating is all you can think about!

Time To Go

"The wisdom that comes from heaven is first of all pure; then peace-loving, considerate, submissive, full of mercy and good fruit, impartial and sincere" (James 3:17).

If you're an invited guest in someone's home, it's important that you know when you should leave. The aim of any host is to ensure that their guests

feel welcome and enjoy themselves. But, be sure *you* don't weary your host or hostess by outstaying that welcome! We've heard of guests who didn't pick up on the signals and the exhausted host finally commented, "Please turn the lights off when you leave!"

When it's time to leave, thank your hosts, and then say good-bye. Don't bring up a new conversation or otherwise dawdle and delay. Just smile and go.

Courtesy Toward Older People

"Rise in the presence of the aged, show respect for the elderly and revere your God. I am the LORD" (Leviticus 19:32).

God has not rescinded this command! Rising in the presence of older people is a wonderful act of respect, demonstrating your appreciation that they've lived through much.

Age is an acceptable yardstick for showing respect, whether you know the individual personally or not. Whenever an older person arrives home, even a father from work or a mother from errands, the child(ren) should rise and greet them. They're worthy of respect!

Personal acknowledgement of the importance of others is basic to human interaction. Giving special regard to seniors recognizes their role in God's sight as repositories of wisdom and life experience. If older people come to visit, find out what will make them comfortable and join in as a family to engage them conversationally.

Respect is encouraged when children recognize that older people are *not* their peers. You're wise to not let your children call older people by their first name, such as "Mike" or "Sue". *Given names are used by people who are on equal footing.* Children show respect by using

appropriate titles: Mr., Mrs., Miss. However, older friends who are close to the family may enjoy affectionate titles such as "Uncle", "Aunt", "Grandpa", "Grandma" or other agreed upon names.

Courtesy of Older People Toward The Younger

"Age should speak; advanced years should teach wisdom" (Job 32:7).

"Gray hair is a crown of splendor; it is attained by a righteous life" (Proverbs 16:31).

If you're older, be mindful of the feelings of those younger. Never forget that *you are an example* for good or for evil to the next generations. Genuine concern for and interest in those of fewer years will help them respect *you* more easily.

When a younger person comes into your presence, acknowledge them in a way that upholds their dignity and self-worth. Don't just nod or offer a half-hearted greeting. That is discourteous, and certainly not a picture of the inclusive welcome that Jesus would extend through you.

Inquire about the things in their life that are important to them. You might not consider their interests particularly worthy, but providing a conversational bridge allows you to frame questions and comments that come from God's perspective rather than that of the world. Don't close relational doors needlessly through thoughtless, judgmental opinions.

Handshakes and Hugs

"Greet one another with a holy kiss. All the called-out ones of Christ send greetings" (Romans 16:16).

Most adults shake hands when they're introduced. The older person initiates the greeting, and a man usually

waits until a woman offers her hand. If a man is seated, he should rise whenever he is being introduced.

Paul instructed followers of Jesus in Rome, Thessalonica and Corinth to greet with a *holy* kiss those with whom they share a deep common bond through the Spirit. (Culturally, the apostle's middle eastern heritage showed welcome through a kiss on the cheek. However, this was generally extended only to those of the same gender.)

Out of consideration, reserve your hugs and kisses for those whom you know they'll be a blessing rather than a discomfort. An undesired hug or kiss can *offend*, just the opposite of the responsive consideration that underlies Paul's admonitions in Romans 14. Just because you're a "hugger" doesn't mean you have a *right* to do so without asking first! Some people reserve physical affection for special people in their lives, so be considerate of their perspective.

Walking Outdoors, Opening Doors, Holding A Woman's Coat

"Husbands, in the same way be considerate as you live with your wives, and treat them with respect as the weaker partner and as heirs with you of the gracious gift of life, so that nothing will hinder your prayers" (1 Peter 3:7).

When a man walks with a woman outdoors, he is on the curb side or the side closest to oncoming traffic to protect her. Even this simple action, along with opening a door for a woman or holding her coat, expresses an element of honor and concern for her well-being.

These actions may elicit surprise from many women today who have been trained to do everything for themselves. If so, smile and offer to help, taking no

offense if your offer is refused. But if you make the effort to get to the door first (whether the car door or entry into a building or room), she *may* receive your considerate gesture with gratefulness!

Hold the door open until she (or an older person or one who is carrying something) passes through, then close it.

When you're helping a woman with her coat, hold the coat with the armhole at a comfortable height for her to slip her arms into it. And ladies, in each of these instances, remember to express appreciation that someone showed you kindness!

One other point to help men understand and appreciate how to respond to a key difference God has placed in women: the *diverse levels* from which they communicate. Men, this is an area in which you need to be especially considerate.

A woman is fully able to switch from communicating from her *mind* to her *emotions* to her *will* to her *spirit* — all without a man having any idea from which arena she's talking! Therefore, he can't make assumptions that he knows what she means without asking questions for clarification. This isn't meant to malign women or frustrate men; perhaps it's a means by which our Father allows these differences to complement one another as varying perspectives are brought forth.

Most men are "bottom line" thinkers. They see a problem and want to solve it. In fact, solving their wife's real and perceived "problems" gives most men a great deal of satisfaction. Without realizing it, though, men are in fact exhibiting inconsideration by projecting that women are bottom line thinkers as well. Not so!

Your wife, as your God-given companion/helper, is designed by Him to support you through her mind, emotions

and spirit. If you don't understand how intricately these three areas operate, you'll hurt her. Here's an example of how this communication difference works:

Wife: "You're always watching TV. You hardly spend any time with me."

Husband: "What do you mean? I spend a *lot* of time with you!"

To most husbands it sounds like she just wants more time in his company. Yet, she may be feeling unappreciated and unloved, so she's emoting. She doesn't want him to pay attention to her out of obligation, but *from his heart*. The time *together* isn't the real issue, but her need to feel wanted by her husband.

Telephone Courtesy

"Remind the people... to be ready for every good work, to speak evil of no one, to be peaceable, gentle, showing all humility to all men" (Titus 3:1,2).

Be courteous when you're talking on the phone. When answering or placing a call, identify yourself. When placing a call to a stranger or someone you don't know well, say, "This is [your name]", and tell them your purpose for calling.

Always be mindful of *when* you call. If you haven't made specific arrangements with someone about a good time to contact them, don't call before 9:00 AM or after 9:00 PM. And, always avoid calling at meal hours. (Also, be considerate of your own household and let your answering machine/voice mail take the call when you are meaningfully involved with each other.)

The *person you're with* is the one whom our Lord is interacting through you. You can easily make someone feel inferior by taking a call in mid-discussion by disregarding their dignity as they sit

silently while you talk to someone else.

If you're anticipating an important call, ask permission to be excused for a moment. At any rate, step away and take the call privately if you must, but keep the conversation as brief as possible. No one should have to be privy to anyone else's phone business! (We speak from personal experience. Recently, while awaiting a flight, we were sitting near a woman on a cell phone. Her loud, detailed descriptions of her daughter's personal life were *embarrassing!*)

If you're in an area of known poor cell phone reception, don't place a call only to be dropped by the network. It wastes the time of others and shows disrespect.

Don't Draw Attention to Yourself

"The woman of folly is boisterous, she is naive, and knows nothing" (Proverbs 9:13)

"There must be no filthiness and silly talk, or coarse jesting, which are not fitting, but rather giving of thanks" (Ephesians 5:4)

If you're habitually inclined to attract attention to yourself, you might benefit from discovering if spiritual strongholds are prompting you to do this. The character of Jesus is *"gentle and humble in heart"*, One Who calls us to learn from Him as He directs our lives within the protection of His yoke (see Matthew 11:29).

You may feel that shouting, whistling, clowning, loud laughter, booing, and coarse joking are acceptable fun — but those who are around you may not be amused. In fact, you may be coming across as an inconsiderate irritant. Is that the image of our Lord that you want to depict? It's not an issue of personality but one of *spirit*: "Am I putting others before myself out of love, or am I trying to grasp at something to meet a need in a way that's not as Jesus would do?"

Ask Forgiveness When You're Wrong
"Therefore, if you are offering your gift at the altar and there remember that your brother has something against you, leave your gift there in front of the altar. First go and be reconciled to your brother; then come and offer your gift"
(Matthew 5:23,24).

Being convicted that you need to ask forgiveness of someone you've wronged can be hard, especially if you feel the other person has wronged you as well! But YOU are the one the Spirit is calling to take that necessary step of reconciliation.

If your humble request is scorned, then continue to bring that person before our Lord in prayer. You're not responsible for his or her decision to withhold forgiveness, only to be sure that you are right-hearted in asking.

Be honest when you ask forgiveness. Look directly at the person and let them know that you've wronged them. Then ask, "Will you forgive me?" Don't just say you're sorry! By *asking* forgiveness, you're restoring their dignity by allowing them to choose to forgive or not.

In turn, if you're the one being asked for forgiveness, don't make it difficult by demanding an "emotional pound of flesh". Remember how much our Lord has forgiven YOU for all your offenses, and graciously extend mercy. Your willingness to forgive and to allow the Spirit to heal your wounded emotions gives hope that your relationship can be restored.

Moral Obligations

"Simply let your 'Yes' be 'Yes,' and your 'No,' 'No'; anything beyond this comes from the evil one" (Matthew 5:37).

Always remember that your word — or your signature — is your bond.

Whether you're dealing with someone who knows that you follow Jesus or not, be honest and direct in all that you do. The Book of Proverbs overflows with guidance for interpersonal contact in the business realm as well as among family and friends. Our God made sure that direction was included in His Word so that we would learn to apply His ways for our good and that of others.

A simple example for Proverbs application that your children will understand is this: Take care of another person's things with at least as much respect as you give your own. Never take someone's property without permission, and always return promptly that which you do borrow — cleaned and repaired if need be.

Another example of demonstrating consideration in your daily life: If you rent a house or apartment, don't abuse it! Don't leave your belongings lying around outside or allow your pets (or children!) to cause damage. You'd be surprised at how many people who consider themselves Christian disdain the property of others!

Financial Integrity

"Owe no man anything but to love one another" (Romans 13:8)

It's a matter of honoring Jesus that you discharge your acknowledged and just financial obligations. Be reluctant to borrow from family or friends. It often puts a wedge in the relationship.

Insofar as is immediately possible, avoid or free yourself from debt. The presumption of spending resources that you haven't yet received is an affront to God (see James 4:13,14). And misuse of the funds that you do have brings discomfort to those who care about you, as they aren't sure if they should offer help or

not. They certainly don't want to be out of God's will by subsidizing your irresponsibility!

Years ago, while at seminary, we planned to buy a house we'd found. Mike's brother had offered to co-sign for a loan, yet that evening the Holy Spirit gave us a *revelation* that altered that course: "*better a neighbor nearby than a brother far away*" (Proverbs 27:10). The next morning we were directed by a seminary staff person to a local banker, a follower of Christ who talked with us for two hours about our walk with Jesus. He then offered the loan for our house, which we were able to sell at a profit several years later.

Not only was Mike's brother freed from any possible sense of financial obligation, but we also had a testimony of our Lord's intervention that encouraged others about His faithfulness to make His will known!

Your Service To Your Community

"Do not withhold good from those who deserve it, when it is in your power to act"
(Proverbs 3:27).

"Each of you should look not only to your own interests, but also to the interests of others" (Philippians 2:4).

Look around your neighborhood and your community with a view to showing the Spirit of Christ at work through you in tangible love. (Remember Jesus' command to love our neighbors?) Ask yourself how Jesus would contribute to the well-being of those who live around you. Would He donate blood regularly? Work in a soup kitchen? Visit the elderly? Include in your family's life a single mom and her kids?

Each of these examples is an opportunity to treat others the way you'd wanted to be treated in their situation — and

to respond to the Spirit's prompting for the specific impact you can have with each person He brings your way!

Family Interaction

"Fathers, do not exasperate your children; instead, bring them up in the training and instruction of the Lord" (Ephesians 6:4).

Do you find yourself mired in the words "I", "me", or "my" around your home? How about intentionally thinking "we", "us", and "our" instead so that your family members can follow your pattern of *inclusivity* rather than self-focus. Jesus has called you out as members of His Body — parts functioning in love *together*. HOW you work that out daily demonstrates just how yielded you are in your love for HIM.

We've written about the need for your home to be a refuge for each person — a sanctuary of well-being in which consideration is first learned and consistently put into practice. This harmony is violated when a husband and wife bicker or belittle each other, especially in front of others. Any family dissension should be discussed in private between the individuals involved.

It's especially important that your mealtimes together not be allowed to be a verbal battlefield! Prevent hurtful intent by removing the offender from the meal and making clear that such behavior is unacceptable. If a child is unruly, take him or her away from the area and correct in private.

Keep in mind that children *are* people — little people with big feelings that can be hurt just like your own. Some parents constantly scold their children to try to make them polite. Sadly, insistent nagging changes nothing except to embitter a child. Develop your own fam-

ily *halakhahs* about the consideration and manners which *you'll* model and nurture at your table.

When your child is old enough to sit at the table, he or she should learn a few everyday manners — gradually — so that they'll become a habit: to be clean when he comes to the table (especially his hands), to close his mouth when he chews his food, and to talk only after the food is swallowed. He shouldn't play with his food or make noises to get attention. Eventually he needs to learn not to interrupt others— though this takes time because children talk spontaneously!

Teach your child to *ask* for food rather than grab it. And don't let him fuss or argue about the food that's set before him. He needs to trust that you, know what's healthy for him. If he does fuss, let him leave the table without eating. Again, your table is a family gathering for enjoyable discussion, not a battleground of willful rebellion!

Remember, as a parent *you* are responsible to God for the nutrition that goes into your child(ren). God has provided food out of His design to nourish the body and replace nutrients that have been used up. You are in effect teaching your children to rebel against His design if you let eating devolve into feeding their sin nature-controlled desires.

Providing food only to accommodate a child's taste preferences reinforces the sin of gluttony. It also fosters distrust in you as a loving parent who cares for their well-being. One wise parent told his complaining child, "We thanked God for this food which He provided out of His love. *This* is our meal, and nothing else." This phraseology has stopped a lot of resistance in many households.

Teach your child to say "Thank you" and "Excuse me" at the table so that

they'll recognize the value of others besides themselves. Then, as they grow up, they'll automatically express thanks in other social interactions.

When he's finished eating, teach him to ask if he may be excused if he needs to get up while others are still eating. And, how valuable it is to have them learn to pass food to others and to help set and clear the table. These aren't just tasks, but opportunities to overcome their self-centered sin nature by looking to the interests of others!

Have Meaningful Conversations

"Be wise in the way you act toward outsiders; make the most of every opportunity.

Let your conversation be always full of grace, seasoned with salt, so that you may know how to answer everyone"

(Colossians 4:5,6).

An essential facet of everyday living is the art of conversation. A good conversationalist:

- always has something interesting to talk about;
- is a focused, interactive listener who asks questions;
- is not overbearing or over-talkative;
- has ready testimony of how God has been at work around you.

For many people today, authentic conversation has little value. But if you're a follower of Jesus, you're representing a King Who has the interests of others at heart! ***Walking in His steps calls for responsiveness to the Holy Spirit in learning to converse with others in a meaningful way.***

To be a good conversationalist is to ***have something worthwhile to say.*** Then, you need to be able ***to say it well.*** Poor grammar, rude or vulgar expressions, and consistent drawing attention

to yourself are careless personal habits that can be corrected if representing Jesus to others is important to you. If you are older, remember that younger people are looking to you as a role model. If you're careless in the way you speak, you'll be sending a message that mediocrity is acceptable in the Kingdom.

The tongue also is a fire, a world of evil among the parts of the body. It corrupts the whole person, sets the whole course of his life on fire, and is itself set on fire by hell (James 3:6).

The objective in healthy conversations, even with those who may oppose what you're saying, is to create an atmosphere in which thoughts and ideas may be exchanged without tension. Paul's counsel in this area is most wise: *"All of us who are mature should take such a view of things. And if on some point you think differently, that too God will make clear to you"* (Philippians 3:15).

Be careful before engaging in arguments! You can disagree in your mind completely, but also engage in a conversation without leaving everyone emotionally estranged. Speak the truth, but don't manipulate or try to coerce others into agreeing with you. Keeping the relational door open is more important than pressing an issue as an argument.

Starting a quarrel is like breaching a dam; so drop the matter before a dispute breaks out (Proverbs 17:14).

Don't have anything to do with foolish and stupid arguments, because you know they produce quarrels. And the Lord's servant must not quarrel; instead, he must be kind to everyone, able to teach, not resentful (2 Timothy 2:23,24; see also 1 Timothy 4:7,8; 6:4,5; 2 Timothy 2:14, 16,23).

If you must go on record about a point of disagreement, word it with grace, such as, "I've given this matter much thought and have come to an entirely different conclusion." Don't just tell someone, "You're *wrong!*"

Think before you blurt out something you may later regret. Your relationship is key, and you may have other opportunities to return to the matter at hand after you've committed it to prayer. In short, learn how to disagree without being disagreeable.

Concluding Thoughts

If you long to genuinely represent Jesus, take seriously the question, **"What would Jesus do?"** in regard to everyday treatment of others. That's where good manners comes in. On the other hand, if you have a casual approach to life that's based on lawlessness, this Lifebyte will seem useless to you. Sadly, that's the attitude of many who call themselves "Christian" but whose lives defame the holy Name of Jesus:

You claim to know God, but by your actions you deny Him. You are detestable, disobedient and unfit for doing anything good (Titus 1:16).

We've shared with you various social *halakhahs* the Holy Spirit has given us to live by. These have helped us reflect Jesus in our personal interactions, and have helped others perceive the Bible as active and alive in its usefulness to daily living.

If you recognize the biblical foundation to our *halakhahs*, then discuss them and make them a way of life for yourself and your family. Consider all your social interactions in light of what Jesus would do if He were you.

"Even a child is known by his actions, by whether his conduct is pure and right" (Proverbs 20:11).