

“HOW TO GIVE AND GET RESPECT”

Building Great Relationships - Part 5 of 9

I Corinthians 13:5

August 17, 2008

In Cambridge, Massachusetts, a bus driver told a woman that she couldn't smoke on the bus, so she beat him repeatedly with her umbrella. A man in an Atlanta restaurant was told that he would have to wait about 2 hours for a table so he punched the hostess. A gas meter reader in Houston went to check a home's gas meter and was shot in the stomach with a pellet gun by the resident. There's no doubt that rudeness is on the rise. People have become more abusive, physically and verbally, than any other time in history. Common courtesy is not so common. But God tells us that there is a better way. 1 Corinthians 13:5: *“Love is not rude.”* The Phillips translation says, *“Love has good manners.”*

Rudeness is simply a lack of respect for others. It says that I care nothing about you, only myself. It doesn't matter what anyone else thinks or who it hurts. I'm going to do what I want to do. In a word, rudeness is simply selfishness. We read *“Love is not rude,”* but much of the world is. So we need a remedy for rudeness. And we find that remedy in 1 Peter 2:17 *“Show proper respect to everyone.”* We are to respect everybody. Our kids, our spouse and their family, the fool we work with, and even the people we don't know. We respect democrats and republicans, unbelievers and atheists. We are to respect everyone. But why? A couple of reasons.

A. Because God Made Everybody.

Psalm 8:5 *“You, God, made man inferior only to yourself. You crowned him with glory and honor.”* That says that people are the crown of creation. Even the despicable, the unloving and the unlovable were made by God. And since we are all created by God, we all deserve respect. We tend to be polite to people we consider important, and rude to those we think are not important. But God says they're all Mine. Be respectful to them all. Be respectful to the President and to the beggar on the street, the CEO and the guy who's homeless. God made them all.

B. Because Jesus Died for Everyone.

1 Peter 1:18-19 *“God paid a ransom to save you. He paid for you with the precious life blood of Jesus.”* The cross shows how valuable God considers us, for Jesus not only died for all of us, He died for each of us. In fact, God loves everyone so much that we are all watched to see how well we treat all those people that Jesus died for. In Matthew 25, all the world is gathered to be judged. How are decisions made? Jesus said, *“I was sick and you came and visited me, I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink, I was hungry and you gave me something to eat, I was in prison and you visited me.”* We say, *“Lord, when did we do that to You?”* Jesus says, *“Anytime you've done it to the least person, you did it to Me.”* That's how important this is.

C. Because it Shows That I Know God.

1 John 4:8 *“If a person isn't loving and kind it shows that he doesn't know God.”* for *“God is love.”* I can hold all the right doctrines, I can know the scriptures forward and backward, but if I don't have love, it doesn't matter. Jesus was gracious. He protected people's dignity. When the Pharisees caught a woman in the act of adultery, they simply threw her at the feet of Jesus. That was incredibly rude. The

doctrine was right, adultery is wrong, but so was their rudeness. In contrast, Jesus protected her dignity saying, *“Let him who is without sin cast the first stone.”* When they all walked away, one on one He dealt with her sin. Jesus even gave respect to the most disrespected people in society. The Pharisees hated that. They complained that Jesus hung out with sinners, and he even had the audacity to eat with them. Tax collectors, prostitutes and lepers, He befriended them all. He treated them with dignity and respect and the Pharisees couldn't handle that. Now if that is the way Jesus treated people, and Jesus is in me, shouldn't I act the same way? For he who doesn't have love, doesn't know God.

D. Because I'll Get Back What I Give.

Galatians 6:7 *“A man's harvest in life will depend entirely on what he sows.”* Whatever I plant I will reap. What goes around, comes around. We know that. So if we want respect, we need to give respect. If we want to be treated graciously, then we need to treat people with grace. If we want people to smile at us, then we need to smile at them. But if we're rude to people, they will be rude in return. Whatever we sow we're going to reap.

Question, how do I sow respect? We can begin simply by being courteous. And courtesy has some fringe benefits. Emerson said, *“Manners are the happy way to do things.”* Courteous people are happy people. Rude people are not. They are always miserable. They've got a huge chip on their shoulder. They go around angry all the time. Proverbs 11:17 *“You do yourself a favor when you are kind.”* It never pays to be rude. It never gets the intended results. Never. Businesses know this. A successful business knows that if you don't treat customers with respect, you don't get them back. Regardless the product, if there's a focus on customer service, on treating people with kindness, courtesy and respect, that business will stand out from those around it. A lot of churches need to learn that lesson. We harvest what we plant. We reap what we sow.

So we know why we need to give respect to others, but how do we do that? There are five ways.

A. When You Speak to People Be Tactful Not Just Truthful.

The primary way we're rude to people is with our words. Proverbs 15:33 *“What a joy it is to find just the right word for just the right occasion.”* That speaks about tact. Tactfulness is thinking before we speak. Remember that how we say something is just as important, sometimes even more important than what we say. We can either speak to enhance what we are saying, or to detract from what we're saying. We can say the same thing five different ways and it will be received five different ways even though it's the same words. We've got to learn to be tactful, how to say things the right way. Tactfulness is a relationship lubricant. It minimizes friction between people. It is said that when we use tact, we have less to retract.” Because we think first. Yes, Christians are called to be truthful, but for the right message to be heard, we're also called to be tactful.

What is tact? Tact is what you thought but didn't say. It is the ability to make a point without making an enemy. Tact is telling someone to “go jump off a cliff” in a way that makes them look forward to the experience. Tact is treating everybody as if they know what they're talking about even when they don't. It is the art of telling somebody he's open minded when he just has a hole in his head. Tact is changing the subject without changing your mind.

Ephesians 4 talks about *“Speaking the truth in love.”* That says, be tactful, not just truthful. Proverbs 15:4 *“Kind words bring life but cruel words crush your spirit.”* We tell our kids that “Sticks and

stones may break my bones but names will never hurt me, “ That’s not true. Names do hurt. Sometimes they hurt worse than sticks and stones. A broken bone can heal in a matter of weeks, but emotional wounds can take forever to heal. We need to be tactful as well as truthful.

Of course some people are proud of their rudeness. “I just tell it like it is and let the chips fall where they may!” That’s not candor; that’s rudeness. It means that you don’t care about the people around you. Sometimes we need to tell it like it is, but we do it with tact. So before we’re frank with anybody, we need to stop and ask, “Why am I saying this? Am I trying to demean them? Will it make me feel better to put them down? Will this build up the relationship or tear it town? What is the motive?” When we speak, we need to be tactful, not just truthful.

B. When You Are Served by People, Be Understanding Not Demanding.

Luke 6:31 *“Do to others as you would have them do to you.”* That’s the Golden Rule. Treat people as you want to be treated. So how do you treat the people who serve you? A great test of Christian character is how we treat a waitress or waiter? A waitress once told Rick Warren that some of the rudest people she sees are those who have Bible studies in her restaurant. They don’t leave tips and they’re rude. How do you treat your employees, or that fast food person who doesn’t speak English very well? Are you understanding or demanding? Eric Hoffer said “Rudeness is the weak man’s imitation of strength.” Rude people try to pretend that they are strong when they are really weak. Be understanding not demanding.

Proverbs 16:21 *“A wise mature person is known for his understanding. The more pleasant his words the more persuasive he is.”* Would you like to be more persuasive with your children? How about your husband, wife, boss, employees? Be pleasant. We are never persuasive when we’re abrasive. It is politeness that changes people. After all, we catch more flies with honey than vinegar. So be understanding, not demanding. And a great place to practice this is in the home. Often we are more polite to strangers than we are to the people we live with. We are most rude to the people we love the most. Courtesy is showing love in the little things. Emerson said that courtesy is made up of little sacrifices. (Actual Quote: “Good manners are made up of petty sacrifices.”) That’s what manners are, little sacrifices. It’s the little things that irritate us. Rudeness can kill a relationship. So be understanding, not demanding.

C. When You Disagree with People Be Gentle Not Judgmental.

As a Christian there are a lot of things in the world, lifestyles, behavior, things that happen that I disagree with. Many times Christians don’t even agree with Christians. What are we to do about that? Romans 14:12-13 *“Each of us will give an account of himself to God, therefore let us stop passing judgment on each other. Instead, make up your mind not to put any stumbling block in another’s way.”* Be gentle, not judgmental. Two things we need to remember when we disagree with people on behavior, standards, whatever. 1. The time will come when each of us will need to give an account to God. And 2. We are not God. In my prayer life a verse I hear often is Psalm 46:10, *“Be still and know that I am God.”* It is the Lord saying, “I’m God and you’re not.” That means that the unbelieving world is not accountable to me. They’re accountable to God, but I’m not God. Even Christians disagree with each other on major issues. But we can disagree without being disagreeable. We can have various views on nonessential issues without devastating one another because love is not rude. And we need to live as though we believe it.

James 3:16-17 “*Where ever there is jealousy or selfish ambition there will be disorder. But wisdom from above is peaceful, gentle and friendly.*” If it’s really wisdom from God it’s going to be peaceful, gentle and friendly. When two Christians argue about beliefs, how do I know what’s right? Wisdom from above is peaceful, gentle and friendly not argumentative, destructive and devastating. That doesn’t mean that we can’t be bold with our ideas. But we need to be tactfully bold. Bold in the sense that we can name an evil and not personally fear the consequences. Tactful in that we approach individuals without condemnation. Bold in stepping out on matters of principle. Yet tactful in respecting the intellectual abilities of others and allowing them to make the best decisions based on their own enlightenments. Tactfully bold. I think that’s what God wants Christians to be when we disagree with each other.

D. When You Share Your Faith with People, Respect Them Don’t Reject Them.

Colossians 4:5-6 “*Be tactful with those who are not Christians, talk to them agreeably with the flavor of wit and try to fit your answers to the needs of each one.*” Be tactful. The gospel of Jesus is the most positive message in history, and yet some deliver it with such negativity. They beat people over the head with it. A lot of evangelism is subtle, and sometimes a not so subtle a putdown: “I’m saved and you’re not; I’m good, you’re bad.” Billy Graham’s definition of sharing the good news is one beggar telling another beggar where to get bread. That’s it. I’m no better than anybody else but I’ve found something that I want to share with them. When we share our faith, we need to respect people, not reject them. Some of the tel-evangelists that I have heard just drive me nuts. Blasting away in anger with condemnation and an air of self righteousness. What an insulting message. It’s no wonder that some people don’t understand the love of God. To them, “love of God” sounds like an oxymoron. Jesus never spoke to the common people that way. He did to the arrogant religious people, but not the common folk. He was kind, gentle, and respectful. The Pharisees rejected people, but Jesus did not.

Now that verse also says, when you share, fit your answers to the needs of the other. Start with their needs. How does the gospel help them? Don’t use a canned approach. Start with their needs. 1 Peter 3:15-16 “*If anyone asks you why you believe as you do be ready to tell them and do it in a gentle and respectful way.*” When you share, let your light shine, but don’t be a blow torch.

E. When People Are Rude to You, Respond Politely.

Don’t respond by being rude in return. That only adds fuel to the fire. But most of the time we want to be rude in return. We want to outdo them in rudeness. But it doesn’t work. Rudeness never pays. Kindness does. Romans 12 “*Do not repay evil with evil. Overcome evil with good.*” We need to overcome evil with kindness and love. In love we need to wage war against rudeness. Have you noticed that the more machines act like people the more people act like machines. As our world becomes more crowded, as the stress level goes up people are more rude. Studies show that the more stress people have, the more rude they tend to be. With “me” generation values that says “It’s all about me” we are ripe for a very rude harvest. We need to start a polite revolution, a revolution of courtesy, for love is not rude. It is polite and courteous. After all we are going to be judged on how we treat people. So we need to be the most polite, courteous church possible. When people come to St. Paul, I want them to say, “They love people there. It doesn’t matter what you wear or what you look like. They’re friendly there.” That’s what God wants us to be. Start working on it in your home this week. Start working in your church, your community, your world. Let love abound. And in your life, may it be so. Amen.