

Love Does Not Act Unbecomingly

I Corinthians 13:5

Dr. Richard Mouw, President of Fuller Theological Seminary, a few others, and I have collaborated on a book entitled *Christian Civility in an Uncivil World*. My contribution was on the presence of civility, or lack thereof, on the Internet. Paul is clear that love for people precludes being rude (ESV), disgraceful (NASB), unseemly (KJV), or New American Standard (1995) “*love does not act unbecomingly*.” Christians are to be people with class and grace. Os Guinness in *The Case for Civility*, said, “Civility is a key not only to civil society but to civilization itself.”

I. People are rude and uncivil in general due to the nature and condition of their souls.

The singular characteristic that reveals you as a true follower of Jesus Christ is “your love” (John 13:34-35).

A. The Apostle Paul describes the Christian life as a “change of behaviors.”

Paul wrote to Titus from the island of Crete, and said the Cretans were, “Always liars, evil beasts, lazy gluttons” (Titus 1:12). Paul tells Titus to be diligent to remind those who knew Christ that they were to be “peaceable, gentle, and show every consideration for all men” (Titus 3:2). He then says, “For we also were once rude, insolent, and uncouth,” etc. You can’t call yourself a Christian without laying aside rudeness.

B. Laughing or celebrating a rude lifestyle is to celebrate the sub-human.

Hollywood portrays the rude, uncouth, unbecoming individual as someone over whom we should laugh or view as worthy of our imitation – but the Bible calls these traits one of the signs of reprobation.

II. Christian people show the world that Christ is Lord by the way we live our lives.

It is wise for every follower of Jesus to introspect our behavior on a regular basis in the routine areas of life.

A. “Love does not act unbecomingly” means “I” (_____ insert your name) don’t act rudely.

Wade, John, Sue, Rachele, or any follower of Christ doesn’t act rude or unbecomingly toward others.

B. We who follow Jesus influence society when we refuse to act rude.

When God’s people were in Babylonian captivity, they discovered a people with a different worldview. They were “exiles” and “aliens” and the conduct of the people around them was evil, ungodly and rude (Jeremiah 29). God told His people to build houses and settle down, plant gardens and give their daughters and sons in marriage. They were not to live separate from the Babylonians. God told them “Seek the peace and prosperity of the city to which I carried you into exile. Pray to the Lord for it, because if it prospers, you will prosper. Yes, this is what the Lord Almighty God of Israel says” (Jeremiah 29:7-8).

C. Our ability to be gracious and avoid rudeness has a practical, earthly result.

Peter uses the language of Jeremiah: “*Beloved, I urge you as aliens and strangers to abstain from fleshly lusts which wage war against the soul. Keep your behavior excellent among the Gentiles, so that in the thing in which they slander you as evildoers, they may because of your good deeds as they observe them, glorify God in the day of visitation*” (I Peter 2:11-12). Rude people come to their senses through the behaviors of those who are “salt and light,” and soon they begin to help God’s people.

III. Civility can never be lived in a world of darkness until it is first practiced at home and church.

When the Bible tells us husbands to love our wives as Christ loved the church (Ephesians 5) it is more than just a moral platitude, but the essence of Christian civility. When wives are told to respect and honor their husbands, it is more than just good advice, but the seed for change that comes to our world as a whole.

When God gives an injunction for children to respect and honor their parents, it is the soil upon which a pleasant crop of civility arises in a world gone astray.

A. When rudeness is a part of your life, it is a sign that something is wrong on the inside.

B. Since rudeness, like pride and selfishness, is the opposite of love, when it appears, confess it.

C. Working on your personal civility in an uncivil world is a practice that will NEVER fail you.