

SUNDAY MORNING ETIQUETTE

Chuck Northrop

Etiquette is simply a fancy word for manners. Manners are the proper way of acting in any given situation. They pertain to all areas of life from eating habits to speaking. Often, they deal with social customs and change from culture to culture. For example, a large belch is rude in our culture, but I am told that in Singapore, it is proper to belch and even rude not to. There are some manners that are cross-cultural which means they are fitting and proper in any culture. For example, tardiness is impolite no matter where you are in the world. It shows an indifference of attitude toward other people's time.

One of the most embarrassing situations that a person can find himself in is being with someone who does not have manners. There are obviously some people who care nothing about manners which is clearly indicated by their actions. There are others who care about their manners but have not been taught properly. It seems apparent that most people really do care about manners and behaving properly. So I have listed a few ways that we can improve our Sunday morning etiquette.

Arrive Before Time To Begin. It has been shown in studies that those who arrive right on time or just a little late are generally unconcerned. We are not speaking of those who because of unforeseen reasons are late once in a while. We are speaking of those who are habitually late. Often, we ought to ask ourselves what we are saying by being habitually late. For example, the Bible class teacher who is seldom on time is saying to his or her students that the class is not really important when in reality every precious minute of a Bible class is most important.

Greet One Another. Greetings are a way of saying that you care about a person. Two-thirds of the epistles or letters of the New Testament speak about greetings either by sending them or by instruction. The apostle Paul spent nearly an entire chapter sending greetings to various ones (Romans 16). All of this indicates the importance of greeting one another. Paul instructed saints to "Salute every saint in Christ Jesus. The brethren which are with me greet you" (Philippians 4:21).

Dress Appropriately. In our culture, we tend to underestimate the importance of proper dress. All of us should understand that worship is a sacrifice (Hebrews 13:15). We should be offering the best and the first fruits. One way we offer the first fruits is by worshipping on the first day of the week. We must, also, be offering the best that we have. Jesus instructed "God is a Spirit: and they that worship him must worship him in spirit and in truth" (John 4:24). We offer the best by worshipping God in spirit (man's inner being) without the distractions of the world. We are offering the best by giving God the best of our time—our undivided attention. But consider, also, the best of what we wear. None of us would even consider going to a loved one's funeral in some of the clothes we wear to worship God. Why? Because we show our respect by the things we wear. Should we not give the same respect unto the "Father of lights"?

Have A Proper Attitude. Enough cannot be said concerning our attitude before and during worship. No doubt the devil does his best to help us with inappropriate attitudes, and some of the brethren seem to be the devil's advocates of these attitudes. There are some brethren who consistently fuss and fight before coming to Bible class and worship. And, while the rest of us are having fried chicken or roast beef, they are having fried song leader and roast preacher. Sadly, these brethren are the very ones who often cry out because their children are not faithful to the Lord. Because they displayed such attitudes, there is little doubt as to why their children are unfaithful.

Behave In An Appropriate Way. When little children are distractive, it is rather difficult to have a proper attitude of worship. There are basically two ways that children are distractive. First, children (and parents) are distractive by playing. A child who is up and down roaming about on the pew can't help but distract others from proper worship. Also, parents who play with their children are not engaged in worship and are guilty of distracting others from their worship. The worship assembly is not the proper place for playing. Second, fussy children are distractive. Most congregations have "cry rooms" for disruptive children and parents need to use them. The "cry rooms" are not intended to be a playroom for children. They should be training rooms to help teach little children how to behave during worship. It is understandable for little children to misbehave at times. More difficult to understand is to see teenagers and adults misbehaving. How sad and inappropriate such behavior is!

Prepare Yourself. There are ways to prepare ourselves for worship and Bible class. We can prepare by studying our lessons before we come. If you know the sermon topic, you can prepare for that lesson by studying the passage or the topic that will be used. Bible classes can easily be prepared for in the same way. We can, also, prepare our minds by attending to the daily cares before we come to Bible class and worship. In this way, we can remove the cares of the world and center our minds upon the object of our worship — God. In preparing our lesson and our minds, we have prepared ourselves to "worship Him in spirit and in truth."

Be Attentive. Once the Bible class period or the worship period has begun, we need to concentrate on what we are doing. There are many things that we can do that will help us do this. Sit close to the front so that distractions from others will not affect us; follow along in our Bibles; and take notes are a few suggestions that will help our concentration.

If each person followed these few simple suggestions, our worship would greatly improve. Our Bible classes and our worship assemblies would be even greater times of fellowship and service. Even though the title of this article pertains to Sunday morning, the application applies to every time the church or a part of the church meets. The improvement is not because of a change in the five acts of worship or a change in the curriculum of our Bible classes but because of an effective use of time and talents.