

American Manners?

Rules

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I hope that you've been minding your manners because that's what we are going to talk about for a little bit today. Your manners. Do they matter at all?

Well, for someone who has reached the age I have and lived through the Hero Generation high in a First Turning, there is hardly anything that has changed any more radically than the public manners Americans now customarily use.

What triggered this commentary is a commentary written by columnist George Friedman titled, *Manners and Political Life*. In his article, he uses the wide difference in manners between Bronx-born American Friedman and his Australian-born but high society English-reared wife.

Because they loved each other, they made the necessary adjustments to maintain a good marriage. However, from his descriptions it wasn't easy for this New York City-born man, for whom dinner was often a time of family combat. Usually verbal, I am sure of that, but nevertheless, family appearances were pretty rowdy.

He described her eating a bowl of soup as a work of art, a complex of motions difficult for him to master and incomprehensible of purpose. In other words, he could see no logical sense to it early in their marriage. But it illustrated her level of manners for him. But he learned as he matured that rules are absolutely necessary or chaos results. Manners are simply rules more or less agreed upon within a family or culture in order to maintain civility and progress.

At what level do rules become manners? Nobody has ever determined that yet. It is out there as a mystery, and suddenly it is required that one does—at least it seems that way.

This thing about manners is a lot bigger than we generally think of. The Ten Commandments can be defined in a very shallow sense as nothing more than manners, set by the very highest authority for the purpose of maintaining civility and progress within an entire culture—the nation. That is a pretty high rating—the Ten Commandments—and set by God to define the ultimate in manners. We tend to think of manners as nothing more than social constraints. Well, isn't that what the keeping of the Ten Commandments is? It too is a social restraint.

Another collection of rules, the sacrificial laws, are a more specific setting of manners regarding the proper rules or manners to worship God in order that God is not offended by one's behavior in His presence. I remember a couple of times—one specifically—when God was so offended He killed a guy because he reached out a cart. That broke His setting of a "manner."

Manners are defined in my *Reader's Digest Oxford Complete Wordfinder Dictionary* as, "a way a thing is done." What the thing is is not defined, but rather a manner is simply a way a thing is done. That was the number one definition. The second definition: social behavior. That is the way one behaves in public. "Polite or well bred behavior." Notice how often behavior comes up. And the fourth definition it gave was "conditions [that's behavior again] of society." They are just on different levels in terms of importance.

Who begins them? Who sets them? Who establishes them? Why do they even exist? Well, we are seeing that very clearly. I have already given you God as an example. In fact, He is the ultimate manner setter. Very often a prominent and admired public personality becomes one.

The stage is set for others to follow. Usually in such a case, the manner set is of little importance in terms of behavior and can be considered nothing more sometimes than a fad. For example, clothing styles go "in and out" with the wave of the popularity of a president. When does a fad become a customary manner in a certain group?

If the president is popular and he wears a beard, a male citizen might not be considered well-dressed in some circles unless he also has a beard. As you can see, there is a lot of variation that is open to use or to be set, depending on what it is, where it is, and who it is. See, they become internalized (very

often) individually and then spread to others. The same trend-setting is true of entertainers and athletes people follow closely.

You have surely noticed how many people wear a certain athlete's uniform number. In such a case, it is a mild form of emulation, but the emulation plays a major role in the adoption of manners in the broader culture. "I want to be just like Joe Blow down here." And that is a way some manners are begun—emulation.

Most manners are learned in childhood and absorbed, and then emulated within family life if only because of the overwhelming length of time spent interacting within the family they are born into in those dominant, habit-forming early life years of life. So there you find out where most manners are intended even by God to be set: in the home. Hopefully, they will be *good* manners.

It is very often that it is not until one leaves the family nest and is out earning a living in the workaday world that one begins refining more sharply the manners one more truly admires and makes more profitable use of. It is not until then that the importance of possessing and using right manners is appreciated, because one's manners often determine acceptance or rejection by a person, group or company one wants to be part of or, on the other hand, no part of at all. You don't want your children following the manners of the druggie down the road, do you? Not at all.

What I am getting at here is that whether we like it or not or realize it or not, manners directly and strongly influence control over one's life. They are one of those "everything matters" things. They are necessary to keep life from becoming chaotic. Civility depends upon commonly-accepted manners. Civility is disappearing in this nation, and people are increasingly ready to argue and even kill at the drop of a hat.

Consider briefly the relationship that exists between the president, the Republicans, the Democrats, the media, and the Leftists. Some of these people are deliberately striving to establish and set new manners for American citizens, and there is now much less peace than there used to be. They began by means of the Leftists. Then the Democrats joined in as a political party, and then liberal-thinkers generally, insisting on what was

called “political correctness.” These were new manners, never before broached in this nation, and they were in many cases breaking the boundaries of God’s laws and claiming correctness where God says, "No!"

In former generations, manners played a large role in restraining people by means a more rigid code regarding what was correct and what was not. But now the rules are much less rigid and many, many more people feel free to be loose, even if offensive, because of a loss of concern for what is considered disrespectful.

Why do those who “let it all hang out,” as the saying goes, cursing and getting violent, quickly do so? It is their justification that respect is hypocritical. To them, it is better to be bluntly, crudely, violently argumentative. No, quite the opposite is true. Their quick reaction exposes their proud contempt for the other. The restraint binding the more rigid manner allows tempers to cool and the dispute settled without violence.

Jesus, in revealing God’s truth, made people angry because they disagreed. But not once did He ever reveal any contempt for them because of their disrespect for Him.