

## Have You Become An Example To All Who Believe?

**Martin G. Collins**

**Given 09-Aug-25; Sermon #1831**

Have you become an example to all who believe?

Please turn to I Thessalonians 1. It is one thing to be a good example to the world, but how much tougher is it to be an example to other saints? In the early years of the Christian church, the apostle Paul was inspired to write an encouraging letter praising a group of people who were exemplary in their families and to their neighbors.

**I Thessalonians 1:2-3** We [that is Paul writing on behalf of the other apostles] give thanks to God always for you all, making mention of you in our prayers, remembering without ceasing your work of faith, labor of love, and patience of hope in the Lord Jesus Christ in the sight of our God and Father.

**I Thessalonians 1:7** so that you became examples to all in Macedonia and Achaia who believe.

Often the small actions we take have a significant influence on how others perceive and respond to us. Making guests feel welcome in our homes, sending an encouraging card, giving the attendant at the store or restaurant a courteous smile and a thank you, and offering a polite word to someone who accidentally steps on our toes or pushes us in line. All these actions and more contribute to a life of helping and caring for others.

Little things do matter. We all need to step back sometimes and step out of the dense forest of our daily responsibilities and take a close look at ourselves, our work, our accomplishments, as well as our daily example. Our words and examples should align, they should not conflict.

The familiar question remains, do you practice what you preach? As Christians, we must live according to what we say and what we have been

taught from the Word of God. Otherwise, we become a false example and a false witness of God's way.

As future leaders in the Kingdom of God, we must demonstrate credibility in our daily lives. Although maintaining credibility can sometimes be challenging. The steps are simple to recognize and teach, however.

What kind of example does a good leader set? He must always build credibility. You must always tell the truth. If you are going to be credible as a leader, not doing so suggests an intent to deceive, whether deliberate or not. Any inconsistency between what you believe and what you want others to believe, due to what you do or say, damages your credibility.

**Proverbs 26:18-19** Like a madman who throws firebrands, arrows, and death, is the man who deceives his neighbor, and says, "I was only joking!"

**Exodus 20:16** [You are very familiar with this. It is a command, a direct one.] "You shall not bear false witness [that is, lie] against your neighbor.

Next, you should own your own mistakes if you are going to be a credible leader. We all are human and make errors. Why deny it? When we admit, "I was wrong," it often boosts our credibility later when we claim, "I'm right."

**Proverbs 28:13** He who covers his sins will not prosper, but whoever confesses and forsakes them will have mercy.

I am going to go through just a few more scriptures similar to these just within the next couple of minutes or so.

Also, when you do not know or understand something, admit it.

**Job 42:3** [a fine example] "You asked, 'Who is this who hides counsel without knowledge?' Therefore I have uttered [that is, Job] what I did not understand, things too wonderful for me, which I did not know."

Remember, God will hold us accountable for our actions and our words. The risk of losing credibility far outweighs the slight advantage gained by bluffing momentarily.

**Hebrews 4:13** And there is no creature hidden from His [that is, God's] sight, but all things are naked and open to the eyes of Him to whom we must give account.

You must always keep to your promises, even if it hurts. The reaction to an outright lie or forgotten promise can range from rage to annoyance. But breaking a promise makes the other person—spouse, child, or acquaintance—feel cheated, forgotten, or even unimportant.

**II Peter 2:19** While they [false teachers] promised liberty [so do the politicians], they themselves are slaves of corruption; for by whom a person is overcome, by him also he is brought into bondage [or slavery].

So claiming to give us liberty, they put us into more slavery.

Credibility represents the highest degree of believability. One of the greatest compliments that any of God's people worldwide can receive is, "If he or she says so, you can count on it." We should hope that Christ will see us this way and say when he returns, "Well done, good and faithful servant."

Turn with me now to I Peter 2, verse 21. Example is contagious. Our behavior influences those we interact with, including those who we work, play, and worship with. Most importantly, our children mirror us. If a parent or a leader sets a poor example, everyone in the family or group suffers the consequences.

Examples can serve as tools to help build the family team, both physically and spiritually. It always encourages growth. Christ should serve as our example in everything we do is such an obvious statement, but so often we forget to ask ourselves what Christ would do or what Jesus would do in that circumstance we are in.

**I Peter 2:21** For to this you were called, because Christ also suffered for us, leaving us an example, that you should follow in His steps.

It also includes that example that we are to follow in His steps. So Jesus was a perfect spiritual man, however, He did not use syrupy language. He was not effeminate, sentimental, or emotionally weak. He was a strong, masculine, masterful, yet a kind and gentle man, and He possessed leadership, strength, purpose, and a powerful will. And these masculine qualities of strength and power were perfectly balanced with wisdom and judgment and knowledge and understanding and justice, and also patience, compassion, and mercy. He was filled with peace, love, and faith, and His will, as strong as it was, was completely surrendered and obedient to God.

All of this reflected God's character, and He is our example. Christ exemplified leadership; the stamp of a leader is credibility.

We find great comfort and encouragement from Jesus' credible promise that He is gentle and humble in the way that He works with us.

**Matthew 11:29-30** "Take My yoke upon you and learn from Me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For My yoke is easy and My burden is light."

So Jesus Christ provides a reason why we should follow His teachings. He is not harsh, oppressive, or overbearing like the Pharisees, but humble and patient in how He governs. His laws are reasonable, making them easy to obey. Where the gentleness of Christ exists, everything is calm, even peaceable and orderly, and the reason for this is that the work of righteousness is peace, and the effect of righteousness is joy.

Please turn with me to Colossians 3, verse 12. Now the apostle Paul, the formerly zealously harsh persecutor of the church, recognized that gentleness does not come naturally for many. He lists gentleness as a fruit of the Spirit, a virtue that is planted and flourishes where God dwells by His Spirit. It must be put on with other Christian virtues such as compassion, humility, and patience.

**Colossians 3:12** [about the character of the new man] Therefore, as the elect of God, holy and beloved, put on tender mercies, kindness, humility, meekness [which includes gentleness], long suffering [which includes patience].

Gentleness is not a mere contemplative virtue. It is a good character trait in action that maintains peace and patience even amid exasperating annoyances, and we certainly run across many of those in the society, as well as sometimes in our families.

Please turn with me next to Ephesians 4, verse 2. Within the Bible, we find gentleness associated with love, kindness, and patience, also meekness and humility. The apostle Paul explains these virtues as a life worthy of the calling we have received.

**Ephesians 4:1-3** I, therefore, the prisoner of the Lord, beseech you to walk worthy of the calling with which you are called, with all lowliness [that is, humility] and gentleness, with longsuffering, bearing with one another in love, endeavoring to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace.

So the church, both individually and collectively, is called to be gentle. And we must follow the example of our gentle Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ in how we treat one another.

Writing to the Corinthian congregation, Paul highlights this quality of Christ in these words:

**II Corinthians 10:1** Now, I, Paul, myself am pleading with you by the meekness and gentleness of Christ.

This is not a gentleness born of naivety and or weakness, but one that stands with principled strength, like the innocence of doves paired with the shrewdness of snakes. Jesus gave such a commission to his apostles.

**Matthew 10:16** "Behold, I send you out as sheep in the midst of wolves. Therefore be wise as serpents and harmless as doves."

Serpents are interesting because they kind of have a contrast within them. Serpents have long been associated with wisdom and cunning. And what Christ likely intended His followers to imitate in the serpent was its caution and discernment in avoiding danger. Few creatures match the serpent's swiftness and skill in escaping harm, and this, it seems, was the message Christ sought to impress upon His disciples.

He instructed them to live with caution and wisdom in a world that would seek to shape their lives. At the same time, He commanded them not to harm or provoke anyone nor to stir up anger in others.

Doves have long been a strong symbol of innocence. And while many people might instinctively destroy a serpent, even a harmless one, few would show such cold indifference toward a dove. Doves carry a simplicity and gentle demeanor characterized by a natural unpretentious grace.

Emily Post, the American philosopher in her book on etiquette, chapter 24, *The Fundamentals of Good Behavior* under the minor caption of "Simplicity and Unconsciousness of Self," writes this:

Unconsciousness of self is not so much unselfishness as it is the mental ability to extinguish all thought of oneself precisely as one turns out the light. Simplicity is like it, in that it also has a quality of self-effacement, but it means a love of the essential and of directness. Simple people put no trimmings on their phrases, nor their manners; but remember, simplicity is not crudeness nor anything like it. On the contrary, simplicity of speech and manners means language in its purest, most limpid form, and manners are of such perfection that they do not suggest "manners" at all.

That comes from the heart.

**Acts 2:46** So continuing daily with one accord in the temple, and breaking bread from house to house, they ate their food with gladness and simplicity of heart.

**II Corinthians 1:12** For our boasting is this: the testimony of our conscience that we conducted ourselves in the world in simplicity and godly sincerity, not with fleshly wisdom but by the grace of God, and more abundantly toward you.

**II Corinthians 11:3** But I fear, lest somehow, as the serpent deceived Eve by his craftiness, so your minds may be corrupted from the simplicity that is in Christ.

What we find in the world is complexity, confusion, and disorder. The Corinthian's pure and simple devotion to Christ was being threatened by false teaching, and Paul did not want the believers to lose their single-minded love for Christ. Keeping Christ first in our lives can be very challenging when we have numerous distractions threatening to sidetrack our faith.

As Eve lost her focus by listening to the serpent, we too can lose our focus by letting our lives become overcrowded and confused.

How can we minimize the distractions that threaten our devotion to God and Christ? The Corinthian believers fell for smooth talk, messages that sounded good and seemed sensible. Today, many false teachers may seem to make sense. Do not believe anyone simply because they sound like an authority or says words you like to hear. Search the Bible, fact-check the teaching by using God's Word. The Bible should be your authoritative guide to all teaching. Avoid any authoritative sounding preacher who contradicts God's Word.

Please turn over to Romans 12, verse 16. The apostle Paul provides principles that help us understand the attitude required to display good manners, proper etiquette, and politeness, especially within the church, and the key word, of course, is humility.

**Romans 12:16** Be of the same mind toward one another. Do not set your mind on high things, but associate with the humble. Do not be wise in your own opinion.

So Paul advises us to avoid pride and snobbishness, emphasizing the importance of humility in our interactions. To foster a genuine connection with humble individuals, it is essential to embody humility and simplicity ourselves. Engaging with the humble can lead to positive and admirable influences that are worth emulating. Therefore, Paul advises us to steer clear of arrogance and elitism. We do not want to hobnob with the world for very much of our time.

Although the world often admires ostentatious individuals, it is important to remember that the standards by which they live are typically not standards by which God judges. The Christian etiquette is unrelated to social status or wealth, and the Christian church remains the only genuine place where master and servant, rich and poor, can sit together as equals. It is the sole environment where all physical distinctions are eliminated because with God there is no partiality.

Please turn over to Ephesians 4, verse 23. Now Paul understood that Christian conduct must not only be exemplary but also produce positive outcomes. Genuine Christianity can be misrepresented through callous or unattractive appearance, yet authentic faith remains gentle, pleasant, and avoids any semblance of evil.

**Ephesians 4:23-24** [this is about the new man] And be renewed in the spirit of your mind, and that you put on the new man which was created according to God, in true righteousness and holiness.

**Ephesians 4:29** Let no corrupt word proceed out of your mouth, but what is good for necessary edification, that it may impart grace to the hearers.



The difference between corrupt talk and helpful talk is very clear. In Greek, the word translated as corrupt is *sapros*, which is used to describe rotting fruit. For example, Paul argues that some speech does this, it corrupts and destroys. On the other hand, we should use our words to encourage and build up others.

It is difficult to read these words without thinking of the apostle James' discussion in his epistle about the tongue problem. The point he makes there, which Paul also echoes, is that speech is a powerful tool that can be used for good or evil. It is like a bit placed in a horse's mouth, he says. It can steer that large animal either way, or it is like a rudder on a ship. Consider what a great forest is set on fire by a small spark. The tongue also is a fire and a world of evil among the parts of the body. It corrupts the whole person, sets the entire course of his life on fire. And is itself set on fire by the final judgment.

This is a powerful statement, but it is not an exaggeration. For example, Hitler's corrupt speech drove the entire world into war and caused immense suffering and death. In contrast, the words of Jesus Christ have blessed more people than any other single thing in history. We should learn about the good or evil of our speech can cause, and we should seek God's help in controlling our tongue. But how? By allowing God to control our minds.

**Philippians 2:5** Let this mind be in you which is also in Christ Jesus.

So looking to the example of Jesus Christ, we must live in harmony, set aside our disagreements, shatter pride, and nurture in our hearts that humble selfless desire to serve one another, which was the essence of Christ's life. Once again, Ephesians 4:29 says, "Let no corrupt word proceed out of your mouth, but what is good for necessary edification, that it may impart grace to the hearers." To impart grace in speaking means to benefit others rather than corrupt them through what is said.

Continuing from Ephesians 2:9 to

**Ephesians 4:31** Let all bitterness, wrath, anger, clamor, and evil speaking be put away from you, with all malice.

On the one hand, Paul condemns vices such as bitterness, rage, anger, brawling, slander, and every form of meanness. Bitterness is the spite that fuels resentment and keeps track of wrongs. It is hard to find reconciliation when bitterness exists. Wrath or rage is what results from bitterness expressed in an outburst of uncontrolled anger and frustration. Anger is a negative emotion. It is an unwarranted feeling that shows itself in loud assertiveness.

The root of all these regrettable reaffirmations of the old self is called malice. Simply put, a bad feeling or attitude.

On the other hand, he commends three virtues. Having overcome these malicious traits, we exhibit kindness, compassion, forgiveness.

**Ephesians 4:32** And be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, even as God in Christ forgave you.

So verse 31 is negative and verse 32 is positive. Bitterness is the opposite of kindness. "Be" is really become, "become kind." You have to work on it because Paul realizes that we have not yet attained the full measure of the perfection found in Christ. To be kind is to show a humble and generous temperament.

Mutual forgiveness is an essential aspect of genuine Christian fellowship, and it involves a give-and-take. Paul highlights the strongest possible reason: We should forgive one another because God has forgiven us through Christ who became the atoning sacrifice for our sins. Our forgiveness of others should mirror God's forgiveness of us. It must come from sincere, willingly given love.

In the next verse, Ephesians 5:1, Paul is going to say, "Be imitators of God." Therefore, the main reason for following these instructions is that they reflect the character of God, and we are to imitate this because God is like this.

Tenderhearted means having a heart inclined to pity and compassion and inclined to show kindness concerning the faults of others.

One of the things that inspired this sermon, this practical application sermon, is all of the rumors I keep hearing about how nasty people are on Facebook and other media sources and how many arguments and how many people will get angry at each other over that. And I thought, well, that is one venue of it, but it is everywhere around us. And as saints, as members of God's church, we are called to rise to a higher level than what the average person on the Internet is, of course.

An article in The Epoch Times by Jeff Minick on July 11, 2025 titled "Abraham Lincoln's Advice on Learning, Work, Smartphones, and Anxiety." And then the subheading Try Lincoln's "hot letter" before hitting send.

Many of us have whipped out an email or post something on social media that we instantly regret. We throw a match onto gasoline and destroy relationships or unintentionally harm others and ourselves. Lincoln had a solution for us. After his death, a number of what he called "hot letters" were discovered, angry notes he had written to others but never sent.

Among these was a letter he wrote to General Meade, commander of the Union forces at Gettysburg. Lincoln believed that Meade and his superior forces could have crushed Robert E. Lee's badly mauled Confederates, trapped as they were between Meade's army and a rain swollen Potomac River. In the letter, Lincoln severely chastised Meade for this lost opportunity to end the war, and then stuck the letter into a drawer. He realized the North needed a victory untarnished by criticism or regret.

So before sending a friend some accusatory text or posting some raging diatribe online, read over that note or post, put it aside for a time, and read it again. If your message is apt to do more harm or more damage than good, follow Lincoln's example and either delete it or leave it unsent.

Good advice. And there was not even an Internet at that time.

Pop culture has eradicated much of the civility of the past, and we live in a world of hate speech, vulgarity, and disrespect. Manners are as alien to the God-hating political Left as the truth is to pathological liars.

Often offenses, irritations, frustrations in our interactions with others stem from a lack of etiquette and common courtesy. Or in other words, poor manners. Manners are: civil ways of social behavior; conduct, especially concerning polite agreements; as, good manners, bad manners.

Basically, manners are ways of behavior and lifestyles. Christians strive hard to learn how to live according to God's way of life. That's one of the things that Christianity is about. We strive to emulate Jesus Christ in following God's way of life.

Now Emily Post, who I mentioned earlier, offers this insight into manners as a way of living. "Manners are made up of trivialities of deportment [that is, proper behavior] which can be easily learned if one does not happen to know them; manner is personality—the outward manifestation of one's innate character and attitude toward life."

So if you are rude or you have bad manners, it is coming from your heart.

Titus 3 and verse 1, if you will turn there please. Good manners include civility, graciousness, credibility, accuracy, and respectability. They demonstrate maturity and good character within the church, within the Family of God, and ultimately in the Kingdom of God.

**Titus 3:1-2** (ESV) [This section is Be Ready for Every Good Work] Remind them to be submissive to rulers and authorities, to be obedient, to be ready for every good work, to speak evil of no one, to avoid quarreling, to be gentle, and show perfect courtesy toward all people.

The *Amplified Bible* paraphrases the end of this phrase "to show unqualified courtesy toward everybody."

Although the English word courtesy in the ESV and humility in the *New King James Version* in verse 2 is translated from the very hard to translate Greek word *prauteeta*, it also carries the implied meaning "courteous consideration." The two similar ideas together teach us that we should be polite to one another in a gentle manner. We must peacefully avoid conflict, exercise restraint considerably. We are responsible for treating everyone, including those in the world, with consistent kindness and courtesy. This means we must not insult or belittle anyone or engage in the common worldly practice of using harsh words, inflammatory remarks, or cruel nicknames.

The quality of courteous consideration is perfectly reflected in Jesus' life. Christ's followers must always conduct themselves properly, remembering that Jesus did not insult when He was insulted. Jesus refused to engage in quarrels and conflicts, and He never spoke intending to agitate others.

According to the apostle Paul in his epistle to Titus, we should be considerate, gentle, and compliant, not stubbornly insisting on our rights, but instead acting graciously and patiently.

Now equally important is our duty to show genuine humility and utmost civility. It is a mindset opposed to self-assertion and harshness. In verse 2 of Titus 3, Paul says to "show perfect courtesy toward all people." Various translations use all meekness, true humility, and every consideration. This highlights its genuineness and the most meaningful expression of courtesy, meekness and humility.

Grammatically, the present participle rendered "to show" indicates a continuous demonstration of humility. As a core part of Christian character, humility must come from the heart, from the deepest inner thoughts of our minds. It should be demonstrated in our intentions with members of God's church. Still, it must also be shown toward everyone on earth, including those who are hostile and morally corrupt. And this is a challenging test of Christian character, but one that effectively proves the sincerity of our effort to live God's way of life. It is a challenge, it is a test when we are faced with these times where we are when our patience is tried.

The motive behind the connection between God's truth and good conduct helps us understand why children of God must develop righteous character. Ethical standards and good manners are admirable and beneficial for everyone, and we must combine faith and practice regarding these matters. By their very nature, they are reasonable, attractive, and praiseworthy. Good manners are an indicator of a gentle and considerate temperament.

Character, not charisma is the essential element of personal excellence. The author Walter Johnson is credited with saying, "To excel is to go beyond the average and at times to achieve the best. If non-Christians enlisted such energy and excellence, can Christians afford the luxury of anything less than their best?"

The author Ted Engstrom is credited with saying, "It takes action to achieve excellence—deliberate, careful, relentless action—there are no shortcuts to quality." And one final one, which is from the Bible in Colossians 3:17, the apostle Paul writes, "And whatever you do in word or deed, do all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through Him."

If excellence is going beyond the norm and sometimes achieve perfection, then we can understand excellence by considering what it means to be average. What does it mean to be average? To be average is to be mediocre, unexceptional, undistinguished. None of us want to be average, do we? I do not. It is neither very good nor bad, a peak of middle quality, ordinary, or lukewarm.

**Revelation 3:16** "So then, because you are lukewarm, and neither cold nor hot, I will vomit you out of My mouth."

Those are very strong words, some of the strongest in the Bible.

What are some things we can do to polish our character as we pursue personal excellence? There are seven ways we can fine tune our Christian example and witness. Very basic ways, but ways that we should keep in mind.

1. We should make an effort to understand the other person's perspective.

Gracious character is evident when we strive to get to know and understand others, to discover their interests and needs. Try to understand the other person, then try to be understood by them. This requires such qualities as compassion, kindness, and consideration.

**Proverbs 19:22** What is what is desired in a man is kindness.

There is a significant difference between the person who learns from criticism and the person who refuses to accept correction. How we respond to criticism determines whether or not we grow in wisdom. The next time someone criticizes you, make a point of listening carefully to all that is said—you might learn something.

People focus on the outward appearance, but God examines the heart. We need to consider their heart to consider their motives. Often we can understand how others feel by imagining how we would feel in their situation. Jesus is recorded in Luke 6:31 as saying, "Just as you want men to do to you, you also do to them likewise."

2. The second way of fine-tuning our Christian example and witness: we should pay attention to small details in our interactions with others.

Let us compare, for example, those who are poor listeners with those who are constant talkers. Both overlook small details leading to disrespect and rudeness. Most people have probably had issues with one or the other. Consider the distracted listening for a moment. Philip D. Stanhope, a British statesman in 1752 (wisdom is wisdom, no matter how far back you go). He wrote this in a letter to his son:

I have seen many people who, while you are speaking to them, instead of looking at and attending to you, fix their eyes upon the ceiling or other some part of the room, look out of the window, play with the dog, twirl their snuff box, or pick their nose.

I do not know if I have ever seen anybody do that when they were ignoring my conversation. Apparently back in 1700s, they did. Continuing on with the quote:

Nothing discovers a little, futile, frivolous mind more than this, and nothing is so offensively ill-bred.

I think he meant to be somewhat humorous in that. His letter makes several points, one of which is that ignoring what others are saying is offensive. It may also make the listener seem like an airhead. That is how it comes back on us. I have done that before, you know, been distracted and that type of thing. So we have all done it at one time or another. This is not pointing any fingers. This is just pointing them all back at me and one of you.

**Proverbs 15:32** He who disdains instruction despises his own soul, but he who heeds rebuke gets understanding.

However, some people talk on endlessly without saying much of value, making our eyes glaze over. We have all experienced that as well.

**Titus 1:10-11** For there are many insubordinate, both idle talkers and deceivers, especially those of the circumcision [that is, in the church or could mean the Jews, one or the other], whose mouths must be stopped, who subvert whole households, teaching things they ought not, for the sake of dishonest gain.

There is a responsibility in conversation to adhere to the principles of good manners which require us to be respectful and considerate towards the other person. Whether we are the ones speaking or listening, little things do matter.



Consider incessant talking. Benjamin Franklin in *Poor Richard's Almanac* says, "It is ill manners to silence a fool and cruelty to let him go on." Benjamin Franklin had a way with words in that way.

There are other ways the same fault becomes apparent. Some of us might waste a lot of energy just by talking too much.

**Proverbs 15:23** A man has joy by the answer of his mouth, and a word spoken in due season, how good it is!

**Proverbs 25:11** A word word fitly spoken is like apples of gold in settings of silver.

So we may talk so much that we hinder our thinking and reflection. Many of us talk excessively and waste a lot of energy. Long-winded conversations can be exhausting through excessive talking, and many find themselves in spiritual trouble. We need to learn to follow the guidance of Scripture in

**James 1:19** So then, my beloved brethren, let every man be swift to hear, slow to speak, and slow to wrath.

And we should avoid going through life, talking nonstop without truly reflecting on understanding the truth and without growing in grace and knowledge. We must discipline ourselves and our children regarding excessive talking. When children are very young, toddlers, when they talk a lot, it is cute because they are learning to talk. But then if they are not corrected on it through life, they become obnoxious later on, not too soon or later on either. And so it is something that we should consider as parents in our training of our children.

Please turn with me to I Timothy 1, verse 4. Energy is wasted through pointless conversation and silly arguments, which the Internet seems to foster. Have you ever considered that idle talk is a loveless act? Warnings are given to us in Scripture concerning this, and Timothy here gives us some very strong advice.

**I Timothy 1:4-6** Nor give heed to fables and endless genealogies which cause disputes rather than godly edification which is in faith. Now the purpose of the commandment is love from a pure heart, from a good conscience, and from sincere faith, from which some have strayed, having turned aside to idle talk.

The original term translated as idle talk in verse 6 of the *New King James Version*, and vain janglings of the *King James Version*, the authorized version, means empty or vain talking, means useless, not benefiting anyone, just rambling on. So these are discussions that are of no value. A great many words and little sense; senselessly waxing eloquent; and foolish opinions not worth hearing.

So talking without letting others speak is poor manners. It suggests that our words are more important than those of anyone else, and it also shows we are not interested in others' contributions. So habitual interruptions do not care about what others have to say.

What is the best way to handle the small annoyances others cause us? Now the carnal side of our mind has one opinion and then the converted side of our mind has another. This is not about fundamental differences in values and beliefs. It is about the lack of consideration for others during a conversation. It is about the tone in which we communicate with others or the unsympathetic way we sometimes interact with people.

Sometimes we dismiss others' concerns as insignificant compared to the important things we have in our lives.

Now the little things I am talking about include the negative impressions we sometimes give others, but not the negative impressions others give us. Here is a rhetorical question. When someone else annoys us through insult or neglect, should we dwell on it and express mounting resentment or just grin and bear it? Insensitive comments like "What's wrong with you?" or "What's your problem?" will not improve the situation or however you do word it on media. A virtuous character shows gentleness, kindness, and courtesy.

3. We should always keep commitments (shifting a little bit here).

Commitments include things like telling someone we will help them and showing up when we say we will, fulfilling commitments at Sabbath services such as setting up, leading songs, giving sermonettes, or delivering sermons. It includes participating in social events when we have promised to be there. Even volunteering for the church should be taken seriously by showing up as promised.

A kind person keeps promises because people rely on them, and breaking a promise can hurt others. If we cannot keep a promise, we should explain and ask to be released from it or do not make the promise in the first place.

Keeping commitments is a matter of faithfulness. Faithfulness is characterized by dependability, loyalty, stability, particularly as it describes God and His relationship to members of His church. The faithfulness of God and His Word is especially prominent in Psalm 89 and Psalm 119.

**Psalm 89:5** And the heavens will praise your wonders, O Lord;  
Your faithfulness also in the assembly of the saints.

**Psalm 89:8** O Lord God of Hosts, who is mighty like You, O  
Lord? Your faithfulness also surrounds You.

**Psalm 119:89-90** Forever, O Lord, Your word is settled in heaven.  
Your faithfulness endures to all generations. You establish the  
earth, and it abides.

And of course, this aspect of God's nature also belongs to Jesus Christ, who is clothed with faithfulness, and who is described as faithful and true, and the faithful witness and the faithful High Priest in various scriptures.

God's faithfulness is the source of our deliverance from temptation, assurance of salvation, and forgiveness of sins. He is faithful to His children because He is loyal to Himself.

**II Timothy 2:13** If we are faithless, He remains faithful; He cannot deny Himself.

So God's faithfulness should be so deeply reflected in our lives that we can be called the faithful as were Abraham and Moses. Faithfulness is expected of God's people. It is the mark of a good Christian.

4. We should clearly state what our expectations are and what we anticipate happening.

Please turn to I Corinthians 14, verse 6. Virtuous character displays clear intentions to ensure that expectations are always up front and explicit. It is common courtesy to make our directions, instructions, and information easy to understand.

**I Corinthians 14:6-11** [This is the obvious one that you are familiar with: Tongues Must Be Interpreted] But now, brethren, if I come to you speaking with tongues, what shall I profit you unless I speak to you either by revelation, by knowledge, by prophesying, or by teaching? Even things without life, whether flute or harp, when they make a sound, unless they make a distinction in the sounds, how will it be known what is piped or played? For if the trumpet makes an uncertain sound, who will prepare for battle? So likewise you, unless you utter by tongue words easy to understand, how will it be known what is spoken? For you will be speaking into the air. There are, it may be, so many kinds of languages in the world, and none of them is without significance. Therefore, if I do not know the meaning of the language, I shall be a foreigner to him who speaks, and he who speaks will be a foreigner to me.

Just as a musical instrument must play every note for the music to be heard and to be clear, Paul said words spoken in the hearer's language are more precise and more helpful. There are many languages in the world, and people who speak different languages often struggle to understand each other, which is obvious, is it not?

Now Paul expressed that he would rather speak five words that his hearers can understand than 10,000 words they cannot. So when somebody says too many words and we zone out, how many words were actually of benefit and what was our reaction? Were we just patient and listened patiently without complaining or saying anything? We have to consider both of those things.

As an example, please turn over to Deuteronomy 28, verse 1. God sets us the perfect example of clarity. We are going to read verses 1 through 3, which is about the blessings on obedience. It does not get much clearer than this.

**Deuteronomy 28:1-3** "Now it shall come to pass, if you diligently obey the voice of the Lord your God, to observe carefully all His commandments which I command you today, that the Lord your God will set you high above all the nations of the earth. And all these blessings shall come upon you and overtake you, because you obey the voice of the Lord your God. Blessed shall you be . . ."

Absolutely clear. No doubt.

**Deuteronomy 28:15-16** [curses on disobedience] "But it shall come to pass, if you do not obey the voice of the Lord your God, to observe carefully all His commandments and the statutes which I command you today, that all these curses will come upon you and overtake you. Cursed shall you be. . ."

God makes it crystal clear that there are consequences for obedience to God or the lack thereof.

5. We should demonstrate personal integrity.

Gracious character exhibits integrity, which fosters trust. Honesty involves aligning our words with reality, that is, telling the truth; while integrity is about aligning reality with our words, that is, keeping promises and meeting expectations. *Leaders demonstrate integrity when they are loyal to those who are not present, treating everyone with the same principles and refrain from deceptive and evil communication.*

On the other hand, falsehood damages friendships within the church. Ephesians 4:25 says, "Therefore putting away lying, let each each one of you speak truth with his neighbor, for we are members of one another." So our unity in the spiritual church of God requires it. It requires us to be completely truthful.

The connection between God's truth and good behavior helps us understand why children of God need to develop righteous character. It is fascinating to see an apparent harmony in the human body. The eye never betrays the hand; nor the hand, the foot; nor the heart, the lungs. The entire body moves in perfect harmony, as if each part would completely trust the others.

**Proverbs 11:9** The hypocrite with his mouth destroys his neighbor, but through knowledge the righteous will be delivered.

Words can be used either as weapons or tools, hurting relationships or building them up. And sadly, it is often easier to destroy than to build. Most people have received more destructive words than words that build up. Every person you meet today is either a demolition site or a construction site. I have seen demolition sites before and they use explosives in them. Sometimes words are explosive. Your words will make a difference. Will they be weapons for destruction or tools for construction?

**Proverbs 11:13-14** A tale bearer reveals secrets, but he who is of a faithful spirit conceals a matter. Where there is no counsel, the people fall; but in the multitude of counselors there is safety.

So a good leader seeks and values wise counselors. One person's perspective and understanding are often limited. They might lack all the facts or be influenced by bias, emotions, or false impressions. To be a wise leader at home, in the church, or at work, seek advice from others and be open to their opinions. And then after considering all the information, make your decision. One with integrity tells the truth, fosters trust, and is known for honesty.

6. We should always apologize for failing to come through on our word.

A gracious character displays a genuine apology from the heart when he fails, not just out of pity, but with genuine regret for letting the other person down.

**II Corinthians 7:9-11** Now I rejoice, not that you were made sorry, but that your sorrow led to repentance. For you were made sorry in a godly manner, that you might suffer loss from us in

nothing. For godly sorrow produces repentance, leading to salvation, not to be regretted; but the sorrow of the world produces death. For observe this very thing, that you sorrowed in a godly manner: What diligence it produced in you, what clearing of yourselves, what indignation, what fear, what vehement desire, what zeal, what vindication! In all things you proved yourself to be clear in this matter.

So the remorse of our sins or failing to keep our words should lead to change in behavior. Many people only regret the consequences of their sin or broken word or being caught, similar to worldly sorrow. Compare Peter's remorse and repentance with Judah's bitterness and suicide. Both denied Christ. One repented and was restored to faith and service. The other took his own life.

Are you defensive when you fail to keep your word and are confronted with the consequences? Do not let pride stop you from admitting your mistakes. Do everything possible to resolve any issues in this area.

7. We should always be motivated by unconditional love.

Now this is fairly obvious, but let us get into a little bit of the practical applications out of it. Gracious character displays love toward others without conditions, without any strings attached, and this helps people feel safe and secure in our fellowship. And when people feel respectfully acknowledged, they think their essential worth, identity, and integrity are intact.

Our character must be motivated by love and goodwill and a desire for the well-being and happiness of others. This will promote behavior that makes our interactions with others enjoyable and positive.

In stark contrast, the disciples of Jesus Christ, while still under the power of their own human nature, wanted to burn sinners. That sounds pretty dramatic for somebody that's a disciple of Christ. They mistakenly thought ferocity was the ideal behavior for a servant of God, and in time Jesus showed them by example how wrong they were. In Mark 3, friends of James and John called those two the Sons of Thunder. The gospel of Luke shows this was an appropriate nickname for the two of them.

Jesus and His disciples were traveling to Jerusalem, and on the way, they sought lodging in a Samaritan city. Historians tell us of the long-standing enmity between the Samaritans and the Jews, and of course, Samaritans refused to allow Jews to enter their city.

Please turn with me to Luke 9, verse 55. Chapter 9 of Luke records that because they feel snubbed, James and John say they would like to duplicate Elijah's miracle of bringing fire down from heaven to destroy the Samaritan's village, and their attitudes repulse Jesus.

**Luke 9:55-56** But He turned and rebuked them, and said, "You do not know what manner of spirit you are of. For the Son of Man did not come to destroy men's lives but to save them." And they went to another village.

So that was Christ's commission or purpose and by extension, by being sons of God, it is our responsibility as well. Jesus sets James and John straight in their attitudes, and His unequivocal response comes through in His statement that "He turned and rebuked them." Jesus lets James and John know that their attitudes should be meek and gentle. Then He reminds them of His reason for coming, "The Son of Man did not come to destroy men's lives, but to save them."

Here we see a primary reason for gentleness in dealing with people: to not destroy people's lives physically, emotionally, mentally, or spiritually. Now I am sure when Jesus rebuked them that He was controlled, direct, but also said in a form not to humiliate them, but just to set them straight.

Please turn over to James 3, verse 13. This biblical account of the sons of thunder emphasizes that we are to be predominantly gentle Christians, just as our Savior Jesus Christ was gentle, but not weak in the faith and not lackadaisical in guarding and defending the truth. James eventually came to understand what Jesus meant by His statement, "I am gentle and lowly of heart." When James speaks of the wisdom from above, he refers to it as meek or gentle.



**James 3:13** Who is wise and understanding among you? Let him show by good conduct that his works are done in the meekness of wisdom.

Regarding the phrase "meekness of wisdom" in verse 13, *Barnes' Notes* has this description:

A wise and prudent gentleness of life, not in a noisy, arrogant, and boastful manner. True wisdom is always meek, mild, gentle, and that is the wisdom which is needful, if men would become public teachers. It is remarkable that the truly wise man is always characterized by a calm spirit, a mild and placid demeanor, and a gentle though firm enunciation of his sentiments.

So a person who speaks loudly and vehemently is never our choice as a safe counselor, which I find interesting. He may achieve much in his own way through his bold eloquence, but we do not assign to him roles that require deep thought or profound philosophical insight. The ministry of the gospel should, in an eminent degree, be characterized by calm, gentle, and thoughtful wisdom, a wisdom that shines through all our actions.

James contrasts this meek and gentle wisdom from above with envious, self-seeking, worldly wisdom.

**James 3:14-17** But if you have bitter envy and self-seeking in your hearts, do not boast and lie against the truth. This wisdom does not descend from above, but is earthly, sensual, demonic. For where envy and self-seeking exist, confusion and every evil thing are there. But the wisdom that is from above is first pure, then peaceable, gentle, willing to yield, full of mercy and good fruits, without partiality and without hypocrisy.

So gentleness should be an ever-present restraint in all our thoughts and actions. It comes to some men seemingly by inheritance. To most, however,

it must be developed since it is generally lacking. Our masculine human nature does not encourage these gentle qualities, so they must be actively developed.

This society has been negligent in portraying proper masculine but gentle behavior in men, except as it is perversely portrayed as a quality in homosexual men. And of course we realize that Satan distorts everything, especially godly character qualities. So Satan redefines them in his perverse image.

Satan has perverted gentleness in men by convincing worldly men that an outward softness with an effeminate slant is an admirable quality, but the heart of the homosexual, the effeminate, is bent on self-destruction resulting from their lifestyle. Among the rest of society, because a gentle softness is inherent in feminine nature, many men avoid being gentle, thinking it signals femininity and weakness.

So men who lack qualities like strength, endurance, confidence, decisiveness, assertiveness, and self-control tend to accept the macho, out-of-control image promoted by the media and sports events tainted with political and social agendas.

In a truly Christian man, God carefully guides and disciplines him to blend gentleness with strong masculinity, creating an attractive and admirable combination. His gentleness must be cultivated by subduing his rough and tough human nature, similar to the taming of a wild colt. His passionate feelings must be kept in check.

Aubrey Andalen in his book *Man of Steel and Velvet*, illustrates gentleness this way.

Gentleness is to the steel qualities that mercy is to justice. When justice is meted out alone, it is cold, undeviating, and unsympathetic. Although justice is in reality given for the benefit of the individual, without mercy it appears intent on the suffering or even the destruction of the person. As mercy softens justice, gentleness softens the steel in man.

So gentleness is to strict qualities what mercy is to justice.

Please turn over to II Corinthians 10. Our minds need to reflect on the proper model if life is to be lived for God. In II Corinthians, Paul implores us by the gentleness of Christ coupled with his meekness. This is about our spiritual war.

**II Corinthians 10:1-5** Now I, Paul, myself, am pleading with you by the meekness and gentleness of Christ—who in presence [Paul speaking] am lowly among you, but being absent am bold toward you. But I beg you that when I am present I may not be bold with that confidence by which I intend to be bold against some, who think of us as if we walk according to the flesh. For though we walk in the flesh, we do not war according to the flesh. For the weapons of our warfare are not carnal but mighty in God for pulling down strongholds, casting down arguments and every high thing that exalts itself against the knowledge of God, bringing every thought into captivity to the obedience of Christ.

Gentleness in this context means a judge's willingness to yield, who, instead of insisting on the exact penalty dictated by strict justice, considers circumstances that call for mercy. In this manner, granting a legal right can prevent the continuation of a moral wrong.

Although the single word gentleness is rarely used in the Old Testament, the principle of gentleness reflects the mercy of the divine Judge, whose restraint from fully enforcing the law lifts those who would otherwise be crushed under its weight.

And in the New Testament, gentleness describes an essential quality of the saints. We must have this attitude toward one another if we expect to be in God's Kingdom. Remember, Christ desires mercy, not sacrifice in our relationships with one another. Chastising the Pharisees, Christ condemned their severe judgments.

**Matthew 12:7** "But if you had known what this means, 'I desire mercy and not sacrifice,' you would not have condemned the guiltless."

Christ's words.

So gentleness is mildness combined with tenderness and primarily refers to actions which are an external behavior compared to meekness. Gentleness is not a mere contemplative virtue. It is character excellence that maintains peace and patience even amid exasperating annoyances.

Please turn with me for a final scripture to Philippians 2, verse 1. This quality of gentle courtesy is perfectly reflected in Jesus' life. Followers of Christ should consistently demonstrate proper conduct, remembering that Jesus did not retaliate when He was insulted, but spoke kindly to those He interacted with.

The central theme of Philippians 2, verses 1 through 5 is that God's church be of one mind, united by love and humility, and looking out for the interest of others.

**Philippians 2:1-5** Therefore if there is any consolation in Christ, if any comfort of love, if any fellowship of the Spirit, if any affection and mercy, fulfill my joy [Paul speaking] by being like-minded, having the same love, being of one accord, of one mind.  
[Emphasizing the necessity of a deep unity between us.] Let nothing be done through selfish ambition or conceit, but in lowliness of mind let each esteem others better than himself. Let each of you look not only to for his own interests, but also the interests of others. Let this mind be in you which is was also in Christ Jesus.

Then in verses 5 through 11 Paul depicts Christ's example of service in a poem that traces His pre-existence, incarnation, death, resurrection, and ascension to God's right hand. Paul wrote this to inspire us to prioritize others' interests over our own.

Jesus is the model of true spiritual growth: not a selfish struggle for control, but a genuine love for God and our neighbors demonstrated through humble acts of service.

Have You Become an Example to All Who Believe? by Martin G. Collins  
(<https://www.cgg.org>)

May God inspire us to be loving, kind, gentle with one another, and become an example to all who believe, even in the "little things"!