



## Is Courtesy a Dying Virtue?

*The Wired Word for the Week of September 21, 2025*

### **In the News**

According to a Pew Research Center survey of U.S. adults, conducted in November 2024, nearly half of the country (47%) believes Americans are behaving more rudely in public than they did before the pandemic.

The survey participants were asked to rate how acceptable eight actions are in public spaces: smoking around other people, taking a photo or video of someone without first asking for permission, using swear words or displaying profanity on clothing or a sign, bringing a child into a place normally reserved for adults, playing music out loud, wearing headphones or earbuds while talking to someone in person, and bringing a pet into an public indoor space.

More respondents said they thought it was rude to smoke in the presence of others or to take a picture or video without asking permission.

Older adults tended to find some behaviors more objectionable than did younger people.

A 2022 survey conducted by Christine Porath, author of *Mastering Civility: A Manifesto for the Workplace*, found 73% of respondents said it wasn't unusual for customers to behave badly, a 12% increase since her 2012 survey. Porath learned that feeling stressed or overwhelmed was the most often cited explanation for the increase in rudeness.

Research shows that witnessing rude behavior, either in person or online, can result in "worse mood and decreased cognitive performance." Incivility can spread like a virus, so that you are more likely to act rudely and defensive when you have experienced rudeness yourself.

Etiquette experts say that one's definition of rudeness depends on one's personal experience and preference. If someone's comments or actions

cause you to feel offended, disrespected or uncomfortable, you might describe them as rude, especially if they violate social norms or standards.

Different cultures have different standards of what constitutes rudeness. One TWW consultant comments: "Much of my early upbringing was in the American South, where standards of politeness -- using ma'am and sir, nodding to greet people in passing, etc. -- were to apply to all interactions, even with those we didn't like (bless their hearts!). My wife grew up in the Bronx. To those from the South, New Yorkers seem rude and impolite, but it's mainly just different cultural norms. In places in Europe, it is considered perfectly acceptable in a cafe to sit at an empty place at a stranger's table; in most of the United States, that would be considered rude."

Whether an action is considered rude or appropriate also depends on the context: Did it occur in public or private? in a formal or informal setting? in a culture that values social obligations, expectations and communal interaction, or in a culture that prioritizes personal rights and entitlements? What are the ages of the people involved? You may be able to speak to a younger person or a peer more freely than you can speak to an elder, for example.

The timing of a person's words or actions may also determine how others perceive them.

"You can take exactly the same behavior," says Amy Irwin, a senior lecturer in the School of Psychology at the University of Aberdeen, "put it in a different context, and it's viewed completely differently by the same person."

More on this story can be found at these links:

[Are We in a Crisis of Rudeness? Vox](#)

[Almost Half of Americans Say People Have Gotten Ruder Since the Covid-19 Pandemic. Pew Research Center](#)

[Couple 'Politely' Asks Woman if They Can Sit With Her at Café, but She Says No. People](#)

### **Applying the News Story**

Rudeness or impoliteness reveals a lack of consideration for others. It is contrary to Christian virtues of love, kindness and humility that are encouraged throughout scripture.

TWW team member Mary Sells says, "Rudeness is a form of bullying, reducing the other to get our wishes. Whatever the cause, our harm to others by word and deed is because we see them as less than and not equal to ourselves. Isn't this at the heart of 'love your neighbor as yourself' ([Matthew 22:39](#)) and 'treat others as you wish to be treated' ('Do to others as you would have them do to you' -- [Luke 6:31](#))? If we follow the model Jesus lived, we consider others worthy of our attention, respect and compassion."

The Golden Rule is based on the need for reciprocal and mutual respect for one another. We need to treat others with the same courtesy we want them to extend to us. John Howard, former President of Rockford College (n/k/a Rockford University) and founder of the Howard Center for Family, Religion and Society, said that his grandmother taught him that "good manners are gifts that we give to others."

Use this news to discuss how our faith helps us respond to rude people, and how we can avoid being rude to others.

### **The Big Questions**

1. Name an act or behavior you consider extremely rude.
2. What sociological factors might contribute to a rise in incivility?
3. Fyodor Dostoyevsky wrote in *Notes from the Underground*, "I am a spiteful man. ... I was rude and took pleasure in being so." Why might being rude produce a perverse kind of pleasure within a person? What psychological factors might lead an individual to treat others rudely at times?
4. How do you react when you feel someone has been rude to you?
5. How does the gospel speak to the problem of rudeness?

### **Confronting the News With Scripture and Hope**

Here are some Bible verses to guide your discussion:

#### **Proverbs 12:16**

*Fools show their anger at once, but the prudent ignore an insult.* (No context needed.)

#### **Proverbs 29:11**

*A fool gives full vent to anger, but the wise quietly holds it back. (No context needed.)*

**Proverbs 19:11**

*Those with good sense are slow to anger, and it is their glory to overlook an offense. (No context needed.)*

**Proverbs 10:12**

*Hatred stirs up strife, but love covers all offenses. (No context needed.)*

**Proverbs 21:23**

*To watch over mouth and tongue is to keep out of trouble. (No context needed.)*

These verses highlight the importance of learning how to manage our emotions and control our tongue. Speaking without thinking can lead to trouble, but guarding our speech can help us avoid many problems. Gentle and considerate speech has the power to defuse anger and de-escalate hostilities, while rude words may incite people to violence (see also [Proverbs 15:1-4](#)).

[1 Samuel 25:2-39](#) tells the story of Nabal, whose rudeness very nearly resulted in a massacre. But Nabal's wise wife, Abigail, urged David not to respond in kind but to ignore her husband's insults. David praised God for curbing his anger, which could have rendered David guilty of the unjust slaughter of innocent people.

Paul warned Timothy that in the last days, he could expect people to engage in all manner of unholy behavior ([2 Timothy 3:1-5](#)). His advice? "Avoid them!" Don't hang out with these kinds of people, and don't engage in fruitless arguments with them, lest you become like them in your own behavior. David could have indulged his anger at Nabal's rudeness, but to do so, he might have acted no differently from the man who had offended him.

One definition of rudeness is to act or speak in ways that insult or offend. When someone is rude to us, insults or offends us, it is easy to respond in kind. But we are wise to ignore, overlook and cover offenses. We do not have to respond to every invitation to anger, hatred, quarrel or fight.

Paul says we should do our best not to give unnecessary offense, but try to please everyone in everything we do, not seeking our own advantage but that of many, so that they may be saved ([1 Corinthians 10:31-33](#)). He

meant we should "major in the majors" (concentrate on the most important things), and not make mountains out of molehills. Focus on the big picture of the gospel, not on minor issues that won't mean squat in the end.

**Questions:** When we feel provoked to outrage and rudeness by the words, actions or online posts of others, how should we respond? How can we avoid giving offense in our interaction with others? How might our refusal to be rude contribute to the salvation of those to whom we show courtesy?

### **1 Corinthians 13:4-5**

*Love is patient; love is kind; love is not envious or boastful or arrogant or rude. It does not insist on its own way; it is not irritable; it keeps no record of wrongs; ...* (For context, read [1 Corinthians 13:4-13](#).)

When we're rude, we put our needs and desires ahead of the needs and desires of others. Avoiding rudeness is not just good manners, but it enables us to be channels so the love of God can flow into other people's lives.

**Question:** How does rudeness manifest itself as the lack of love for others? Give a specific example.

### **Titus 3:2**

*... to speak evil of no one, to avoid quarreling, to be gentle, and to show every courtesy to everyone.* (For context, read [Titus 2:1-10; 3:1-2](#).)

Paul advises Pastor Titus that he should teach various groups in the church to be self-disciplined and self-controlled, loving, humble, faithful, gentle and kind, committed to good works and encouraging and pleasing words that don't harm people but benefit others, and to show courtesy to everyone. This kind of behavior makes the message we share about Christ credible to observers.

**Question:** Why is "common courtesy" so hard to find and practice these days? Give examples of practical ways we can show "every" courtesy to "everyone."

### **Ephesians 4:29**

*Let no evil talk come out of your mouths but only what is good for building up, as there is need, so that your words may give grace to those who hear.* (For context, read [Ephesians 4:25-32](#).)

Another translation renders "evil talk" as "unwholesome" and "what is good" as "what is helpful" for building others up "according to their needs." The

point is that our words "may benefit" (uplift or give grace) to those who hear them.

In the context of this verse, Paul speaks of "putting away falsehood" and "speak[ing] the truth"; "give up stealing" and "doing good work" instead, "so as to have something to share with the needy"; and putting away "all bitterness and wrath and anger and wrangling and slander, together with all malice" choosing instead to be "kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, as God in Christ has forgiven you."

In [1 Corinthians 13:11 KJV](#), Paul speaks of "[put]ting away childish things," to take up a way of life more appropriate for a spiritually mature adult: the way of love.

**Questions:** How does speaking courteously to others benefit them and build them up? What steps do we need to take to "put away" rudeness, discourtesy and other childish attitudes and behaviors that keep us from developing the muscle of Christlike love?

### **For Further Discussion**

1. Discuss this: American philosopher and social critic Eric Hoffer wrote, "Rudeness is the weak man's imitation of strength." [Here's how one blogger responded](#), "I'm not rude because I dislike people. I'm rude because I can't always handle stress with grace. ... The irony is that I don't see myself as weak at all. ... The thing about rudeness is that it feels strong in the moment. You get that little rush of superiority when you snap at someone, as if you've re-established control over a world that has slipped out of your grasp. But a few minutes later you realize you've won nothing. You've only managed to make a stranger's day worse and your own dignity a little smaller."
2. According to German philosopher Arthur Schopenhauer, "It is a wise thing to be polite; consequently, it is a stupid thing to be rude. To make enemies by unnecessary and willful incivility, is just as insane a proceeding as to set your house on fire. For politeness is like a ... coin, with which it is foolish to be stingy." Why is it stupid to be rude and foolish to be stingy with politeness?
3. "When the healthy pursuit of self-interest and self-realization turns into self-absorption, other people can lose their intrinsic value in our eyes and become mere means to the fulfillment of our needs and desires," wrote Pier Massimo Forni, author of *The Civility Solution: What to Do When People Are*

*Rude* and the 2002 best seller *Choosing Civility: The Twenty-Five Rules of Considerate Conduct*. Explain the connection between self-absorption, dehumanizing others and rudeness. How do we know when we have crossed the line between healthy pursuit of self-interest and self-realization into self-absorption?

4. Consider this, from author Garima Soni: "Rude people justify their rudeness by thinking they are honest. There's no point in being honest if you lack kindness."

### **Responding to the News**

1. Take [this quiz](#) to see how your attitudes about rudeness compare with those of other survey participants.

2. Share the video, [Love Is Not Rude](#) (8:39), based on 1 Corinthians 13, with children in your family, church or sphere of influence.

**Prayer** suggested by [Galatians 5:22-23](#) (KJV)

Spirit of Jesus, please produce your fruit in us, so that in our relationships we may cheerfully and patiently share your love, kindness and gentleness with others. Help us to exercise self-control, to listen to others and to think before we speak, so that we can live in harmony and in peace with others, and draw people to the light of God. Amen.