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Presentation Transcript
Preaching To the Choir, Part 4 – Rudeness
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Our title today is *Rudeness*. It's the fourth in our series, *Preaching To the Choir*. We named this series this way because very few want to admit to being rude.

Would you believe me if I told you that our nation is experiencing an epidemic of rudeness? I don't know if there is a way to measure that, so I probably can't prove that. But just talking to a lot of the people I talk to every week in my practice, they all seem to think that things are getting worse in that way. They talk about the national sense of entitlement and how that's rising, and more and more people are giving themselves permission to feel offended when all their unrealistic expectations are not met. And that's only a step away from believing it's okay to treat disrespectfully those who have offended them. Another reason for this epidemic is, as our culture is becoming less relational, treating with respect and consideration becomes less important in the minds of people. Thirdly, as fewer people are polite and respectful, children experience a watered down presentation of politeness and respect, and so become more and more rude. We see more and more children who don't know how to be polite, and consequently, don't know how to teach politeness when they become adults. So we see this spiral.

Since the opposite of rudeness is politeness, we're going to spend much of our effort today focusing on replacing rudeness with politeness. But first, what is politeness? Well, politeness is the practical application of good manners or etiquette. It's a culturally defined phenomenon, and therefore, what is considered polite in one culture can sometimes be quite rude – or maybe, just eccentric – in another cultural context. So there's nothing written in stone about this. It varies from culture to culture.

Now, what *is* consistent across cultures is the goal of politeness, or etiquette, is to make all of the parties relaxed and comfortable with one another. In other words, polite behavior, at its base, promotes relationship. It's considerate of other people. Something as simple as chewing with one's mouth closed, for example, is aimed at not making other people feel uncomfortable – would be just a simple example of what I'm talking about.

Now what is rudeness? Well, rudeness is a disregard for, a lack of, respect for others, expressed in the violation of the conventions of etiquette. If you watch TV for any length of time, you will see any number of commercials which contain rude behavior staged as humor – to the point that people now are believing that rudeness is positive, in some cases – or at least, acceptable.

I want to hit this again. What's considered rude and polite in one culture may be somewhat different in others, These are all manmade conventions, but still good in that politeness is an attempt to treat other people with respect. Sometimes rudeness can be masked as politeness. You know, we can always find a way to take something good and turn it into something bad. But these culturally defined standards, at times, may be manipulated to inflict shame on a designated party. When somebody does this, what is it? Well, actually, *that's* rudeness. When we make others feel shame because they were rude, we're not being polite to them. We're being rude. If someone puts their elbows on the table at a formal dinner, for example, and someone snickers at their *faux pax*, which is more rude – the posture or the snickering? To be polite, we would instead ask them to pass something in a subtle effort to change their posture. If we would do that, then we would be polite and kind.

Another thing to think about in our culture today is road rage. What is it about driving that causes people to become blatant in their expression of aggressiveness? Or, there's that passive/aggressive driver. I was listening to talk radio recently, and they were talking about how to drive in Albuquerque. Rule one was, "Do not signal when you want to change lanes," because that tells the driver behind you – in the lane you want to move – to move up just enough to make it uncomfortable or impossible for you to move into that lane. We see that all the time. It has really almost become the rule of the road here. People do not back off and let people in – in our town.

What is the cause of rudeness? Well, it's not a pretty picture really. Probably the least offensive would be just not knowing about social conventions – you know, unintentional. I run into lots of young people that don't know how to be polite. They never were taught. And I suspect that's because their parents didn't know how to teach them, because this has been getting worse for quite some time. I can remember back in the – I think it was in the – 70s reading an editorial by a guy named Dave Barry – he was a humorist writer – syndicated writer a newspaper in Florida, talking about the epidemic of rudeness and making some jokes about it.

Another one is thoughtlessness – or not paying attention. I know one of the things that happens to me when I'm driving is, if I don't keep my mind on it, I may slow down, and that will cause the person behind me to come up around me and want to pass me. And that will make me realize that I'm not going as fast as I wanted to and I start picking up my speed. But that signals the other person – they think I'm being that passive/aggressive driver. So, not paying attention, or thoughtlessness, can some of us, in that way, to become rude. Or, we can just forget and put our elbows on the table, or chew with our mouths open, or talk over somebody else, or some of these other things.

Another one to think about is passive/aggressive anger. I went to a meeting once, when I worked for Albuquerque Public Schools, that was a meeting about changes to be made in the administration for counselors, nurses, social workers, occupational therapists, etcetera – support staff. The person who ran the meeting went out of her way to belittle anybody who even came close to questioning her on any issue. I learned later that she was one of the “company bulldogs” at APS used to implement policy when they didn’t want any discussion on the topic. So she made her living by insulting, demeaning, belittling and bullying other people. Not only did her behavior speak badly for her, but it also said a lot about the people who would put her up to it – the people in the administration of Albuquerque Public Schools. Shame on them. It was clear that she felt powerful, but she was, in fact, a tool for even worse culprits – so not as strong as she thought she was. Some people are not even passive in their rudeness. They’re just directly aggressive. We’re seeing a new thing in politics recently, where a United States congresswoman has advocated threatening rude behavior toward members of the other side of the aisle when out in public, at gas stations, at the post office – wherever they’re to be encountered. We think about those who have elected her and continue to tolerate her in office, and we wonder if the whole state of California might be inhabited with rude, mean people. Well, of course not, but we *are* getting closer, aren’t we?

Remember, rudeness damages relationships. Politeness and respect tends to strengthen them.

I want to talk about, too, political correctness, because that’s something that masquerades as politeness. It sort of started out as a moral common sense, which actually is not a bad idea. For example, to be polite, one would never call someone something that would slur their race, culture, ethnicity, gender or sexual preference. The problem, however, is that so many people are so easily offended, it’s hard to find terms that satisfy everybody. The whole thing got out of hand in the early 90s, to the point where a lot of people would say, “Afro-Caribbean” or “Afro-American,” because they thought it was racist to say, “Black.” I think that’s probably still true. Now, not wanting to offend any of my black friends, I asked some of them about this issue, and all the ones I talked to said, “Black” was the respectful way to talk about their racial background. And neither were they offended by being called, “Afro-American,” though one of them told me that “Afro” referred to a place rather than a race. And he was no more African than I was, having grown up in the United States. I don’t think every black person that I know thinks that way, but that’s what *he* said. So I’ve decided I’ll call people whatever they *want* to be called related to their ethnicity, race, gender, geographical location, etcetera – anything to keep the peace and honor God’s given free will with the caveat that free will should not be used to hurt others. So, I’m a white guy – which I hear, nowadays, is *not* politically correct to say. To be politically correct, I should say that I’m a privileged, racist, old, white guy. But since all the minorities rightfully get to determine – *rightfully* get to determine – what they want to be called, to be fair, so should I. What’s good for the goose is good for the gander. I’m a white guy.

So we can see the trap the proponents of political correctness fall into. They and they alone decides what's correct. So it's not really about respect or politeness. In the end, it's about control. Here's a quote I got off the Web – and I can't remember where I got it – but it said, "At its worst, political correctness is nothing different from Orwell's news-speak – an attempt to change the way people think by forcibly changing the way they speak." I think, if we were a godly society, however, we would follow a completely different speech model. Let's call it *biblical* correctness and let's talk about that.

The basis of biblical correctness is not just about language, but about *all* aspects of life that are *relational* – how we relate to other people. So, we're going to expand the concept beyond language to behavior as well. And, if you'll turn with me to Leviticus 19:18, we'll read – and this is part of the law of Moses:

Leviticus 19:18 – *You shall not take vengeance or bear a grudge against the sons of your own people, but you shall love your neighbor as yourself: I am the LORD.*

Jesus also said this was the core of the law, as related to how to treat others. In fact, did you know that, if you were a Christian in the New Testament church, and someone used the term Old Testament or New Testament, you would have no idea what they were talking about? The first time those terms were used was in the second century after Christ. Interesting to think about. It's an artificial designation. The Bible is *one* book. Those who try to teach the Old Testament is irrelevant don't realize that, in the New Testament, when Jesus and the other biblical writers wrote, they managed to – together – reference a full third of the Old Testament in their writings. They quoted the Old Testament 855 times – mostly to support as valid the points they were making in the New – that is, they considered the entire Old Testament as a part of Christianity. And, if some people don't see the Old Testament as relevant, I think it's fair to say, it must be because they don't understand it. Fortunately, the men who wrote the New Testament *did* understand that the Old Testament was a part of Christianity. To understand the relevance of the Old Testament, we can read the New Testament today and realize that the Old Testament is as much a part of the Bible as is the New.

Let's talk about the framework of this idea of biblical correctness. If the basis of it is *love your neighbor as yourself*, then what would be the rest of that framework? Well, yeah, of course – the last six of the Ten Commandments. In Exodus 20, verse 12, we can read:

Exodus 20:12-17 – *Honor your father and your mother, that your days may be long in the land that God is giving you.* That's the fifth commandment. *You shall not murder* – that's the second. *You shall not commit adultery* – that's the third. *You shall not steal* – that's the fourth. *You shall not bear false witness against your neighbor* – that's the fifth. And the last one would be: *You shall not covet your neighbor's house, you shall not covet your neighbor's wife, or his male servant, or his female servant, or his ox, or his donkey, or anything that is your neighbor's.*

So the first four commandments were about loving God and the last six are about how to be biblically correct toward people.

Now, we always – and for good reason – think of this as things we should apply as we enter our relationship with others – there are laws that we should keep. Yes. But, if you think about it, they're also the way God wants people to treat us. And we would also like it very much if everyone treated us this way. So, if you go back to the original principle, *love your neighbor as yourself*, you'd like all of them to treat you with respect, and not steal your stuff, not lie, not try to get your stuff away from you. You would like your children to have respect for you, so we should be respectful to our parents and follow these things toward others.

There are lots of different way to extrapolate from the framework principle. I'm just going to talk about speech today. I'm sure most of us could pick other areas as well, but in Matthew 5:33, here's Jesus talking about how to talk:

Matthew 5:33 – *Again, you have heard it said to those of old, “You shall not swear falsely, but shall perform to the Lord what you have sworn.” But I say to you – here's Jesus amplifying the law and making it a spiritual thing, rather than just a behavior – “Do not take an oath at all, either by heaven – for it's God's throne – or by the earth – for it's His footstool – or by Jerusalem – for it's a city of the great King. And do not take an oath by your head – for you cannot make one hair white or black. Let what you say simply be ‘Yes’ or ‘No.’” Anything more than this comes from evil.*

What was He talking about here? Well, the way we talk reveals what's coming out of our hearts. Someone who would swear by heaven, or Jerusalem, or their own head, has no idea of how little control they have. So they think that they are more powerful than they really are – arrogant, in other words. And if we break the third commandment and swear by God's name, it reveals even more futility. Today, people use expletives that include God's name to punctuate their speech – to, they think, give it more power, when, in fact, they're only demonstrating huge weakness and ignorance of the natural order. Do you use words like that? Sometimes, we use euphemisms, but they're expletives that are designed to amplify the meaning of our speech, and therefore, make us feel, or seem, more powerful.

Listen to something that Paul said in Ephesians 5:

Ephesians 5:1-2 – *Therefore, be imitators of God, as beloved children, and walk in love, as Christ loved us and gave Himself for us – a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God.*

Jesus was mild and meek and gentle with people. He didn't read people the riot act very often. He was friendly with everybody. Then it says in verse 3:

V-3 – *But sexual immorality and all impurity or covetousness – there’s that commandment again – must not even be named among you, as is proper among saints. Let there be no filthiness nor foolish talk nor crude joking, which are out of place, but instead let there be thanksgiving.*

So instead of telling dirty jokes, and calling people bad names, and using bad language, spend some time thanking people, and appreciating, and positive talk – being encouraging. *Walking in love* here refers to living life in a way that expresses love to God and to all His other children. And we’re told that a replacement for crude negative speech is thanksgiving – to show appreciation for what God and others have done for and given us.

One of my clients told me last week about a man who came in to a café very early in the morning and ordered coffee. After he got his coffee, he was sitting and drinking it when he heard someone say, “You look nice today.” And he looked around, and he saw that he was the only person in the restaurant. A bit later, he heard someone say, “I really like your shoes – very stylish.” Still no one – he couldn’t see anyone. He was perplexed. Pretty soon the waitress appeared, and he said, “Is there a radio on in the back?” And she said, “No, why do you ask?” And he said, “Well, I heard someone talking.” She said, “Well, what did they say?” And he said, “Well, it was something like compliments.” She said, “Oh, it’s the nuts.” And he said, “What?!” And she gestured toward a bowl of nuts on the bar, and said, “The nuts are complementary.” So...yeah, corny joke, right?

God wants us to be kind, and loving and respectful and thoughtful of others. And, you know, this past week, one of the days – I think it was Thursday – was National Compliment Day. So, there’s even a day for it. At least we give lip service to the fact that we should be polite to people. And God says that when we are loving and kind and respectful, this is refreshing and a fragrance that is pleasing. So it smells good to Him. And that could mean that speaking and living the other way stinks, and is offensive, and drives Him and others away from us and shuts off relationship and all the good things that come with that. I mean, that makes sense, right?

Let’s look also in Colossians 4. Here’s another thing about being biblically correct. In Colossians 4:5, we’re told:

Colossians 4:5 – *Walk in wisdom toward outsiders – those people who are not believers – making the best use of time.* In other words, set a good example, instead of a bad one. That’s better use of your time. *Let your speech always be gracious, seasoned with salt, so that you may know how you ought to answer each person.*

So the way we live our lives, what we say to others – how gracious, how non-judgmental, how polite, how considerate, how respectful – all these attributes bring people toward us. They promote relationship. And, if we are with Christ, then our words and our character also bring people toward Him. To be biblically correct is something anyone of any culture and ethnicity, any race, any nation can do. The rules for this way are the same everywhere. They are God’s kind of correctness. It spans all these and every age as well, down through the ages, and every

age from young to old. They never change. You only have to learn them once and they're good for all time.

So, to sum it up here, being polite instead of rude is always a good thing. Do you recall that Jesus was well-liked by the people He met? He talked to everybody. He was not only polite – in the way that you were polite back in His day – but He was gracious and loving. And, if we take it to the next level beyond politeness, and become *biblically* correct, we will be God's instruments to draw people to Christ.

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Until next time, this is Bill Jacobs for LifeResource Ministries, serving children, families and the Church of God.