

Good Manners

Proverbs 3:17 HCSB Her ways are pleasant, and all her paths, peaceful.

Introduction

a. God the Holy Spirit is well mannered (Exodus 28:3; Isaiah 11:2; Ephesians 1:17; Proverbs 7:4; 9:1; Matthew 11:19)

I have come to believe that when the book of Proverbs personifies Wisdom it is referring to the Holy Spirit. Both the Old and New Covenants refer to the Holy Spirit as the Spirit of Wisdom.

- **Exodus 28:3 HCSB** You are to instruct all the skilled craftsmen, whom I have filled with a spirit of wisdom, to make Aaron's garments for consecrating him to serve Me as priest.
- **Isaiah 11:2 HCSB** The Spirit of the LORD will rest on Him--a Spirit of wisdom and understanding, a Spirit of counsel and strength, a Spirit of knowledge and of the fear of the LORD.
- **Ephesians 1:17 HCSB** *I pray* that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the glorious Father, would give you a spirit of wisdom and revelation in the knowledge of Him.

In both the Old and New Testaments, Wisdom is personified in the feminine gender.

- **Proverbs 7:4 HCSB** Say to wisdom, "You are my sister," and call understanding *your* relative.
- **Proverbs 9:1 HCSB** Wisdom has built her house; she has carved out her seven pillars.
- **Matthew 11:19 HCSB** *The Son of Man came eating and drinking, and they say, 'Look, a glutton and a drunkard, a friend of tax collectors and sinners!' Yet wisdom is vindicated by her deeds."*

So here we see that Wisdom (Sophia in the New Covenant's Greek) makes sure that her ways are pleasant and that all her paths are peaceful. Even omnipotent God practices civility!

b. The dark side of God's good manners (Exodus 20:19; Deuteronomy 5:25-27)

This can be both a good and bad thing because it means that Adonai will not overcome our free will and force us to do what is right - even if it means our own destruction. He is, in many ways, a strangely compliant God. For example, when the people saw the fire and heard the thunder of God's presence on Mt. Sinai they pleaded,

- **Exodus 20:19 HCSB** "You speak to us, and we will listen," they said to Moses, "but don't let God speak to us, or we will die."
- **Deuteronomy 5:25-27 HCSB (25)** But now, why should we die? This great fire will consume us and we will die if we hear the voice of the LORD our God any longer. **(26)** For who out of all mankind has heard the voice of the living God speaking from the fire, as we have, and lived? **(27)** Go near and listen to everything the LORD our God says. Then you can tell us everything the LORD our God tells you; we will listen and obey.'

God heard their request and complied. From that day forward, He has only spoken through chosen prophets. They had the opportunity to be a nation of priests with direct access to God and they allowed their fears to squander that opportunity. Let's not do the same.

c. Good Manners preceded the giving of the Torah (Genesis 13:5-9; 18:2-5; 6:11-13)

Back to the subject at hand. An ancient rabbi once wrote "*kadmah derech' erez et ha-Torah*" which means "the commandment of good manners preceded the Torah." You see the Torah was not given to us until Moses descended from Mt. Sinai around 1552 BC. However,

the need for good manners was illustrated long before that time - particularly by our father Abraham. He demonstrated a tremendous amount of civility toward his nephew Lot.

- [Genesis 13:5-9 HCSB](#) Now Lot, who was traveling with Abram, also had flocks, herds, and tents. (6) But the land was unable to support them as long as they stayed together, for they had so many possessions that they could not stay together, (7) and there was quarreling between the herdsmen of Abram's livestock and the herdsmen of Lot's livestock. At that time the Canaanites and the Perizzites were living in the land. (8) Then Abram said to Lot, "Please, let's not have quarreling between you and me, or between your herdsmen and my herdsmen, since we are relatives. (9) Isn't the whole land before you? Separate from me: if *you go* to the left, I will go to the right; if *you go* to the right, I will go to the left."

He further demonstrated hospitality for some strangers one of whom turned out to be a theophany - the Lord God incarnate!

- [Genesis 18:2-5 HCSB](#) He looked up, and he saw three men standing near him. When he saw them, he ran from the entrance of the tent to meet them and bowed to the ground. (3) Then he said, "My lord, if I have found favor in your sight, please do not go on past your servant. (4) Let a little water be brought, that you may wash your feet and rest yourselves under the tree. (5) I will bring a bit of bread so that you may strengthen yourselves. This is why you have passed your servant's way. Later, you can continue on." "Yes," they replied, "do as you have said."

It's as though God could imagine humankind existing for thousands of years without the Torah but could not imagine humans existing without civility! In fact, we need to take heed of the fact that it was humanity's universal violence that led Yahweh Shaphat to deem them worthy of death!

- [Genesis 6:11-13 HCSB](#) Now the earth was corrupt in God's sight, and the earth was filled with violence. (12) God saw how corrupt the earth was, for all flesh had corrupted its way on the earth. (13) Then God said to Noah, "I have decided to put an end to all flesh, for the earth is filled with violence because of them; therefore I am going to destroy them along with the earth."

d. Bad manners will divide us, weaken us and make us vulnerable to defeat.

- i. Because they did not treat each other with respect, 24,000 of Rabbi Akiva's disciples died. When they joined Bar Kochba's rebellion against Rome, their long-brewing ill will made it impossible for them to coordinate their efforts, and this inability made them more vulnerable to Roman attacks.
- ii. During the early days of WWII, Leo Baeck, the leading Reform rabbi in Germany (who was later arrested by the Nazis and sent to Theresienstadt), sent Rabbi Frank Rosenthal on a special mission to the Jews in the Lodz ghetto in Poland, outlining a suggestion as to how some Jews could be saved from the Nazis. Rosenthal met with the Jewish leaders there, but they wouldn't listen to him. Much of their distrust stemmed from him being a German Jew from Berlin. The Lodz Jews had been treated with contempt by their fellow Jews from Berlin years before and now, at this crucial moment, those bad manners came to roost. The Lodz Jews could not bring themselves to trust this Berliner Jew and Rosenthal's mission was a failure. 250,000 Jews were confined by the Germans to the Lodz ghetto, approximately 60,000 people per square kilometer.

Now, let me say it again – because the Lodz Jews could not bring themselves to trust Rabbi Rosenthal because of the lack of manners that the Berlin Jews had shown them 250,000 of them ended up getting crammed into about 4 acres. When the Russians liberated the Lodz ghetto, only 870 Jews remained.

1. Good manners are not just surface politeness; they are truly sacrificial. (Philippians 2:3-4; Romans 12:3)

Good manners consist of far more than merely saying "please" when we request something, or "thank you" when we receive it. Good manners are rooted in the humble willingness to make sacrifices so that we can live together with others without unnecessary conflict. Isn't that what the Messiah did for us? He humbled Himself and became a living sacrifice so that we could be reconciled with God and each other. How can we do less than our Savior?

- **Philippians 2:3-4 HCSB** Do nothing out of rivalry or conceit, but in humility consider others as more important than yourselves. (4) Everyone should look out not *only* for his own interests, but also for the interests of others.
- **Romans 12:3 HCSB** For by the grace given to me, I tell everyone among you not to think of himself more highly than he should think. Instead, think sensibly, as God has distributed a measure of faith to each one.

So:

- Don't cut in line even when you are impatient, thinking that your time is more important than another's.
- Offer your seat to one who is old or weaker even though it may mean your discomfort.
- Treat those with whom you interact as though they matter.
- Treat even those with whom you disagree with respect and fairness.

2. Good manners are not selective.

a. Good manners should be shown to children as well as adults. (Ephesians 6:4)

- **Ephesians 6:4 HCSB** And fathers, don't stir up anger in your children, but bring them up in the training and instruction of the Lord.

b. Good manners should be shown to all people regardless of their nationality.

(Exodus 23:9)

- **Exodus 23:9 HCSB** You must not oppress a foreign resident; you yourselves know how it feels to be a foreigner because you were foreigners in the land of Egypt.

c. Good manners should be shown as much to strangers as to family members.

(Hebrews 13:2)

- **Hebrews 13:2 HCSB** Don't neglect to show hospitality, for by doing this some have welcomed angels as guests without knowing it.

3. Good manners mean acting in a way that makes others feel respected and appreciated. (Colossians 4:6)

a. Maimonides wrote in his commentary on the Ethics of the Fathers 1:15 that "One is obligated to conduct his affairs with others in a gentle and pleasing manner."

- b. **Colossians 4:6 HCSB** Your speech should always be gracious, seasoned with salt, so that you may know how you should answer each person.

4. Good manners do not imply excusing sin or failing to combat evil. (Proverbs 3:17; 2 Timothy 4:2; Exodus 23:2)

- a. **Proverbs 3:17 HCSB** Her ways are pleasant, and all her paths, peaceful.
- b. This is not to say that everyone around Wisdom feels pleasant or that everything around Wisdom is at peace. Righteousness cannot exist in an unrighteous world without either causing a stir or compromising.
- c. **2 Timothy 4:2 HCSB** proclaim the message; persist in it whether convenient or not; rebuke, correct, and encourage with great patience and teaching.
- d. **Exodus 23:2** You must not follow a crowd in wrongdoing..."

- e. In order to promote healing, a doctor must at times cut into the body, bringing tremendous damage and pain to the body. But it must be done in order to, in the long-term, bring about healing. Good manners require that in the process of cutting out the spiritual cancer, we do the least amount of damage as possible.

5. Good manners mean looking to the potential consequences and choosing our ways appropriately. (Proverbs 19:2; 22:3)

- a. [Proverbs 19:2 HCSB](#) Even zeal is not good without knowledge, and the one who acts hastily sins.
- b. [Proverbs 22:3 HCSB](#) A sensible person sees danger and takes cover, but the inexperienced keep going and are punished.