

Peter & Jesus Discuss Forgiveness, Matt 18:21-22; Forgiveness Is Grace by the Aggrieved; Trust of the Antagonist Must be Earned; Blake on Manners & Good Breeding

1. A few chapters back in Matthew, the Lord was asked this question by Peter:

Matthew 18:21 - Peter came and said to Him, "Lord, how often shall my brother sin against me and I forgive him? Up to seven times?"

v. 22 - Jesus said to him, "I do not say to you, up to seven times, but up to seventy times seven."

2. Forgiveness is a mental-attitude response by an offended party to the comments and/or behaviors of an antagonist. The one in error may or may not ask for forgiveness, nevertheless, the commandment is for the believer to do this a limitless number of times.
3. Forgiveness on the part of the protagonist does not necessarily resolve the issue, for the antagonist must first admit having committed an offence and then have a desire to seek reconciliation.
4. If reconciliation is sought, the offended party has no problem cooperating since forgiveness has already been granted.
5. However, forgiveness does not imply restored trust. For example, in our legal system a first offender often receives more lenient treatment than does a career criminal.
6. The former individual may be judged to have had a temporary lapse of judgment while the latter has demonstrated facilitated behavior patterns and thus receives little consideration for leniency.
7. So it is in personal relationships. We all sin, make bad decisions, and say or do things off the cuff in a moment of frustration. It is easy to forgive a person for an occasional faux pas.
8. But to be the recipient of someone's repeated offenses causes a person to discern a gross lack of unconditional love in the soul of the offender. Forgiveness is still in order but even if reconciliation is sought, it does not necessarily result in restored trust.
9. To have someone's trust is a virtue. It is something that must be earned and once established a person should strive to never damage it.
10. Here are some definitions of this virtue from the *Oxford English Dictionary*:

Trust. 1. Confidence in or reliance on some quality or attribute of a person. 4. The quality of being trustworthy; fidelity, reliability; loyalty. 5b. The obligation or responsibility imposed on one in whom confidence is placed or authority is vested.



11. Every believer should strive to become trustworthy. This virtue is observed in the character of God. His attributes may be trusted to never deviate, to always operate under the principle of righteousness and function under the principle of justice. He is immutable and inerrant. Thus His love never fails.
12. As we grow in grace and acquire knowledge of God's integrity we realize that what He expects of us is trustworthiness. We must acquire the virtue to do those things He instructs us to do.
13. This personal love for God, which is recognition of divine integrity and loyalty to His mandates, is then reflected toward our fellowman. A key aspect of Christian integrity is trustworthiness: you can be trusted to do what you say you are going to do.
14. However, if God cannot trust you to be loyal to Him, then you will find that you cannot be trusted by your fellowman. God forgives the believer when sins are confessed to Him and each of us are commanded to forgive those who wrong us.
15. But the ultimate issue that must be faced by a person who repeatedly demonstrates a lack of trust is to learn that he is not trusted. This quote from seventeenth-century British clergyman and historian Thomas Fuller states this clearly:
"If we are bound to forgive an enemy, we are not bound to trust them."
16. To "love your neighbor as yourself" puts emphasis on one's spiritual growth to the level of personal love for God so that unconditional love for one's fellowman can be authentic instead of putting on an act.
17. Since my arrival in the Union some 24 years ago, I have observed on the part of some the opinion that to be courteous to everyone is hypocritical; that you must never hide your feelings but rather be blunt and coarse.
18. But it is far better to be courteous than rude to a person in a public gathering. Yet the better approach is the expression of unconditional love toward all, regardless of the situation. In the Confederacy we refer to this as having good manners.
19. And amplifying the relationship between good manners and royal law is an essay by Mary Elizabeth Blake that appeared in volume 5 of the 1906 publication, *Self Culture for Young People*. Instructions in courtesy begin in childhood and it is good manners that are later transformed into virtue love should the child believe in Christ.

The Meaning of Manners and Good Breeding

Probably no boy or girl has ever reached maturity without more or less revolt against the authority of elders, especially when it concerns that vague something known as Good Breeding, with its rules and regulations depriving one of so many innocent pleasures. Why should one be forced to keep his elbows off the table when they so readily rest upon it; or wait until a speaker finishes, before breaking in with a better suggestion; or give up a comfortable seat and interesting book when an older person enters the room?

Why should such minor matters as cleanliness, or a cheerful face, or a yielding of the best place to another be demanded, when it is much simpler to go comfortably dirty, to growl out one's anger, or to push directly in front? What good is it, always to do the hardest thing, and then to have only one's labor for one's pains?

In the golden time of childhood this is apt to be one of the clouds in an otherwise bright horizon. There is so much of manners and deportments; there is so often, "You must!" or "You must not!" guarding the doors of apparently rightful adventure, that a spirit of rebellion is aroused. Only for a certain sense of justice in the youthful mind the situation would be lost. But it feels, without knowing why, that a subject so much insisted on must be important, and it submits. For a very young person can see in his own case the difference between the stranger whose quiet voice greets him courteously, whose ease of manners puts him also at ease, and who lends an appearance of interest to him and his affairs and the other stranger who frankly ignores all these. It is not possible to resist the charm of that sympathetic attention which is characteristic of what we call the gentleman or gentlewoman. It is easy then to transfer his feelings to others, and recognize what the sweetness and kindness of habitual courtesy adds to daily life. And comprehending what pleasure a bright face, a kindly gesture or a swift impulse of helpfulness awakens in the minds of one's associates, he understands the emphasis laid upon their acquirement and no longer regards them as trivial.

A little farther on, when he realizes that instead of being senseless conventions, most good manners are but the outer forms by which real respect, sympathy, and usefulness assert themselves, he will know that the cultivation of such attributes is worth much more trouble than he has ever given it.

Some upright natures, by reason of their very sincerity, are repelled by a dread of affectation from adopting habits which have not been natural to them. But when one stops to reflect how many acts and expressions have been adopted by society, outside their literal sense, to make intercourse easier between mankind, even the most violently conscientious scruples must be appeased. It is like the "My Dear Sir" at the beginning of a letter, or the "Sincerely Yours" at its close. The letter may neither be addressed to, or written by a real friend, but custom has, so to speak, decreed the forms, and they are taken without violating truth. So in the other accepted usages, only a certain slight knowledge of ordinary rules is taken for granted in repeating them. And very often it will be found that they have no less honesty or more pretence than the brutal disregard for other persons' feelings which is hidden sometimes under the title of "frankness," but which is as vulgar and coarse as a knock-down blow in conducting an argument.

The young man who elevates and refines his nature by considering noble aims and high ideals, will learn that good breeding springs from within, and he is apt to make few mistakes as to good manners. He will never need to read the columns of the Sunday paper to find whether or no he should assist a woman, or offer his place to age and misfortune, or give up the end seat of a car rather than force others to stumble over him. As to which fork he is to use first at a formal dinner, or whether he will eat asparagus from his fingers, good sense—which is also a large part of good breeding, will teach him by the use of his eyes, if he knows no other ruling. The simplest and most obvious method is usually the most correct.

Nor will the young woman of thoughtful habits, who looks for the best in those about her, and tries to return it, need to be told that not all the spurious etiquette in the world can make vanity, pretensions, a foul tongue, or an unkind judgment, anything but vulgarity.

At its best, good breeding has the same traits everywhere. Generosity distinguishes it, and leniency toward weakness; dignity and self respect regarding one's own position, and kindness in judging that of others. Sir Philip Sydney [English aristocrat, poet, diplomat, and soldier (1554-1586), was fatally wounded at the Battle of Zutphen \zuet'-fa\ on September 22, 1586. A biography tells how Sidney was vulnerable because he had generously lent a part of his protective armor to a fellow knight.¹], offering to the dying soldier the cup of cold water that was to quench his own thirst, and Napoleon yielding the narrow path to the burdened washerwoman both showed their right to be considered gentlemen, although one descended from generations of nobility, and the other was son of a Corsican peasant. The final test to apply to its genuineness is whether it springs from the old command of Christ “—and thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself.”

At its best again, it is the flower and perfume of moral loveliness. It adds grace to life that is like virtue. Indeed it is virtue, for it is a development of gentleness, self-denial, and brotherly feeling. Its substitute, of fashionable etiquette, may sometimes deceive and be taken for the original. But its falseness is soon detected. The genuine quality is so beautiful an addition to character, that it merits the most careful and loving training. For once well rooted it withstands all the changes of time and of fortune.²

¹ “Philip Sidney: Biography,” from Answers.com, <http://www.answers.com/topic/philip-sidney>.

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² Mary Elizabeth Blake, “The Meaning of Manners and Good Training,” in *Self-Culture for Young People: Morals, Manners, Business and Civics*, ed. Andrew Sloan Draper (St. Louis: Twentieth Century Self Culture Association, 1906), 5:111-113.