

VIRTUE 20

COURTESY

We work hard with our own hands. When we are cursed, we bless; when we are persecuted, we endure it; when we are slandered, we answer kindly.

—1 Corinthians 4:12-13

Let us not become weary in doing good, for at the proper time we will reap a harvest if we do not give up. Therefore, as we have opportunity, let us do good to all people, especially to those who belong to the family of believers.

—Galatians 6:9-10

Do not gloat when your enemy falls; when he stumbles, do not let your heart rejoice, or the LORD will see and disapprove and turn his wrath away from him.

—Proverbs 24:17-18

Most definitions of *courtesy* will include simple action terms, such as “displaying polished manners” or “showing respect for others.” More elaborate definitions may describe courtesy as “sophisticated conversation and intellectual skill.” The original term comes from the twelfth century term *courteis*, which meant “gentle politeness” and “courtly manners.”⁴⁹ Regardless of

My dad let me vent for a while, but then he asked me to do the impossible. “Dan, I know that what she said to you was disrespectful, and I can see that it made you very angry, but I’d like you to go see her before you go home today, apologize to her that the heating system has not been working, and tell her that we’ll be sure to get it fixed as soon as possible.”

“What?” I exclaimed. “Are you out of your mind? She treated me like an eight-year-old—telling me to ‘go find my daddy’ while stuffing her finger in my face—and you want me to go apologize to *her*? Give me a break!”

He then explained that sometimes in life you can be right but also be dead right. In other words, yes, she offended me, and I did not deserve her condescending speech. But for me to demand an apology from her, a person who had been paying rent for good service that we were not providing, was not a strategically beneficial move. No matter how unpleasant her message was, it was a valid message nonetheless, and one that we needed to act upon to be diligent landlords.

From my dad’s vantage point, our company needed their rent money and the tenant was right: as one of our tenants, it was our job to provide them with top-quality service. Allowing her heating system to go for a few days without working (especially in the winter) was unacceptable. We needed to get it fixed—and fast. She never did apologize to me for the way she acted, but that was okay because the experience helped me grow immeasurably.

Proverbs 26:4-5 provides an apparently contradictory set of proverbial pairs (Proverbs that are topically similar or appear close together in the text). Verse 4 says that we should not answer a fool according to his folly, or we will be just like the fool himself. Verse 5, however, says if we do not answer a fool according to his folly, he will be wise in his own eyes. This seems like quite the conundrum—we’re told that the wise should answer a fool and also instructed not to answer the fool. Fortunately, there is a reason for this apparent contradiction. Consider the following truths that are brought out only by the combination of both verses:

- No matter what the circumstances involve, the fool must be kept in his place.
- The folly, but not necessarily the fool bringing the folly, must be answered by the wise.
- There is no routine approach for handling a fool.
- Discernment on the part of the wise is needed in all circumstances.
- Entering into dialogue with a fool is both an obligation and a threat for the wise.

Sometimes a fool needs to be put into his place. In some circumstances, even answering a fool is not a wise choice. In still other circumstances, the allegations of a fool need to be rebutted.

Other important aspects of courtesy when it comes to knighthood include being slow to anger, treating women with respect and gentleness (as the modern term *chivalry* would depict), and having a clean mouth.

BEING SLOW TO ANGER

A true knight does not act, work, or fight battles in anger:

My dear brothers, take note of this: Everyone should be quick to listen, slow to speak, and slow to become angry, for man's anger does not bring about the righteous life that God desires. Therefore, get rid of all moral filth and the evil that is so prevalent and humbly accept the word planted in you, which can save you (James 1:19-21).

The end of a matter is better than its beginning, and patience is better than pride. Do not be quickly provoked in your spirit, for anger resides in the lap of fools (Ecclesiastes 7:8-9).

A man's wisdom gives him patience; it is to his glory to overlook an offense (Proverbs 19:11).

Through patience a ruler can be persuaded, and a gentle tongue can break a bone (Proverbs 25:15).

If a ruler's anger rises against you, do not leave your post; calmness can lay great errors to rest (Ecclesiastes 10:4).

TREATING WOMEN WITH RESPECT AND GENTLENESS

A true knight treats women with respect and gentleness:

Husbands love your wives and do not be harsh with them (Colossians 3:19).

Husbands, in the same way be considerate as you live with your wives, and treat them with respect as the weaker partner and as heirs with you of the gracious gift of life, so that nothing will hinder your prayers (1 Peter 3:7).

HAVING A CLEAN MOUTH

Finally, a knight keeps his mouth clean:

With the tongue, we praise our Lord and Father, and with it we curse men, who have been made in God's likeness. Out of the same mouth come praise and cursing. My brothers, this should not be. Can both fresh water and salt water flow from the same spring? My brothers, can a fig tree bear olives, or a grapevine bear figs? Neither can a salt spring produce fresh water (James 3:9-12).

Bless those who persecute you; bless and do not curse (Romans 12:14).

Do not let any unwholesome talk come out of your mouths, but only what is helpful for building others up according to their needs, that it may benefit those who listen (Ephesians 4:29).

REFLECT

It belongs to a Knight to speak nobly and courteously, to have fair armor and be well clad, and to maintain a good and honest household. All of these things are necessary to the honor of knighthood.⁵⁰

—Ramon Lull

Courtesy and knighthood belong together, for villainous and foul words are against the rule of the Order. Loyalty, truth, hardiness, generosity, decency, humility, mercy, and other similar virtues are also essential to knighthood.⁵¹

—Ramon Lull

RESPOND

1. How is it possible to be courteous to those who treat us rudely?
2. When do you find it most difficult to be courteous to others?
3. In situations that grow tense, how many seconds do you have to choose between making a courteous response and one loaded with anger and no tact?

4. In this century, we have many different ways to respond to people on delicate topics—e-mail, texting, phone, or face-to-face. How can how we respond to someone promote courtesy?
5. Do we owe someone a courteous response even when they treat us rudely?