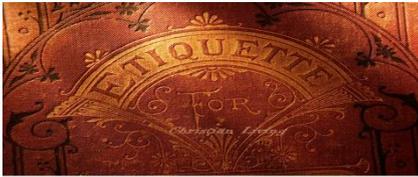


Australind Vineyard Christian Fellowship

from the Pastor's heart  The Sword of the Spirit the Word of God

Christian Etiquette



Definition: a conventional but unwritten code of practice followed by members of any of certain professions or groups: **i.e Christians /Believers**

Christian etiquette has long been a difficult concept amongst Christians because of varying social behavioural, patterns that present themselves through differing denominations and ethnic cultures. A Christian in Australia differs vastly from a Christian in India or Germany because of culture and spiritual understanding through denominational grasp. As a result, often times there are differences, offenses, and difficulties that arise which are hard to resolve. In many Indian Pentecostal churches, women and men sit apart even though they may be married and the women cover their hair. This is not readily accepted in a western society and hence there will be difficulties understanding these differences and the possibility of judging them for doing so.

Added to the problem of nationality, culture and spiritual understanding is the everyday expectation people have as to what may be regarded as appropriate etiquette. There is a saying that goes like this; **'One man's food is another man's poison'**. What we allow and what we practise can be two different things and when others observe it, even though allowed by us through a clear conscience, there arise problems. Therefore, it brings us to the question; "what is Christian etiquette?"

I believe the Bible teaches us many things about Christian etiquette. These teachings are critical to employ in our journey, if we are to progress in our Christian faith and be effective. One such teaching is to give no offense, and take no offense. In addition to this, we are expected **not** to weaken the faith of another by our liberality of what we allow in speech, food, drink, dress, or visible actions. In order to correct these areas in a Biblical context, it requires restoring another in the spirit of meekness. This is a courtesy that we need to extend lest we ourselves are consumed by another's sin. Then, there is the area of how we behave in the presence of other Christians when we are in their presence. This requires considering the boundaries they have established in their homes whether we like it or not and the extent one can go into their personal lives in conversation. When one woman went on missions to another country, she helped herself to a cup to make tea without prior permission and was rebuked by an angel for doing so. What was that wrong with her actions? It seems she had no permission to do this in another's house.

I have travelled to 16 countries and lived in numerous houses and have always observed a strict rule of being asked before asking what I need or expect to have. When my hosts say 'treat this home as your own', I automatically have permission to do so and therefore do not need permission to help myself within reason. In addition to this, I recognise their authority and allow the overriding of their prior permission to me in case they change their mind in any circumstance, thereby, submitting to their authority over me in their own home.

Saying, "thank you", "please" and such considerations of etiquette allows for pleasantness in relationships in any situation. Observing and considering the value of another's property and furniture and use of the same is another etiquette that needs to be observed. When we are asked to treat their home as ours, we are expected to take the same care they would or even more care to fulfil that freedom which is extended to us. ***Familiarity breeds contempt and bad manners corrupt good behaviour.***

When Christian etiquette is practised properly, it goes a long way toward promoting spiritual growth in oneself because it has the power to curb our desires, freedom, and expectations. This releases the fruit of self-control in us.

When a Christian goes to Africa from Australia, he will find that his level of expectations will be drastically reduced by the sheer state of affairs in a continent like Africa. This will bring him into contention with his own feelings and Christianity as things will be done differently, and attitudes and behaviour will certainly be different. One person who went on missions to India from Australia was appalled at Christian living and behaviour and belief

system because the Indian Christians behaved in a manner that did not suit him at all. He felt compromised and did not know what to do about it. This taught him many things about missions, his personal shortcomings and about Christians in other parts of the world.

Paul rebuked Peter because he ate with the Christians until the Jews turned up and then behaved as though the Christians were not to be considered because of fear of what the Jews may say. Peter's grasp of the love and freedom of Christianity was certainly in question and his etiquette only extended to the point of fear that he had of someone else's opinion. Christians often face cultural issues in relationships, in a world that is now shrinking through travel, internet, and media. This forces Christians to look at the world in a different light. Giving up culture entirely does not seem to be an option in Christian thinking and practise because of the hold of tradition and ethnicity. You will find it in food, speech, personal hygiene and worship of God that can have great bearing on the understanding of another and acceptance of that person even as a Christian. It would be wise to understand what the background of each person who accepts Christ is and what it is that one has been through in life before judging or forming an opinion about his or her identity as a Christian. ***Don't throw the baby out with the bathwater.***

God does not judge a person by his ethnicity or traditions that are practised in areas of food, dressing, or shelter but certainly teaches all His children to walk in the Spirit for the purpose of edification of another and to the glory of God. That is why God has given us the word, fruit, and gifts of the Spirit in order to bring about this edification. Added to this, He has given us a renewed conscience that tells us how to think and behave like Him. When Jesus rebuked the Jews He plainly told them that they were hypocrites because they washed the outside of their vessels (symbolically speaking of their bodies) but were filthy inside (their hearts) and that they had made God's word void through their tradition.

When we walk according to the letter of the word we will lose out on the Spirit life in the word. The New Testament does not carry in it any law but has commandments of practice. The problem is, when we do not walk according to the commandments of conduct in the NT we fall into the condemnation of the law. The law is established; thereby it acts as a safety net to bring us to Christ like behaviour through recognition of sin by the law. Let us understand that liberty is the way of the NT, which produces in us, increased understanding of how to express this freedom in a natural world. Not all will understand this freedom and therefore will condemn or misunderstand our freedom. Yet, we can walk in a manner that will allow for the codes of the NT to be operational in our lives without compromise to our own lives, which can be governed partially, or largely by our own ethnicity and ways of life. In other words, we can still maintain our cultural identity but remain Christians.

Christian behaviour is always in question. Hence, it is a serious subject, which needs to be considered by all. Christian conduct inside the Church especially, is of great concern. The way we talk, eat, and dress is important so as not to tempt another. Yet, we need to consider another in love and not by their ethnicity, dress, speech or what they eat. We do not have the right to judge others by the freedom you have obtained. Our freedom has to be in submission for the sake of the weak Christian.

May the God of discretion teach us all discretion (MATURITY) because discretion is the better part of valour and valour is the power to heal and do miracles.

With love

Pastor Noble