

=THE CHRISTIAN LIFE=

Lesson 11

Our Behavior Toward our Circle of Acquaintances

AIM: to teach my pupils how a Christian ought to behave toward his acquaintances.

POINT OF CONTACT: Let's put on a garment of Christian behavior. This garment could be a jacket. The main part of the garment is slipped over the shoulder, the second part goes on the right arm, and the third part goes on the left arm. The three parts of the jacket can be the three main points of the lesson. (There are "jacket-vests" with detachable sleeves which could be used to illustrate this.) The jacket of Christian behavior toward acquaintances will not fit right until all three parts are properly worn.

INTRODUCTION: An acquaintance is "a person whom one knows but who is not a particularly close friend." For our lesson this week we are going to think about what the behavior of a Christian ought to be in relationship with those people who are not members of his family, who are not his close friends, who are not in authority over him, and who are not a part of the impersonal crowds of society. We are going to discuss the Christian's behavior toward those whom the Christian knows by name—those with whom he attends school, those with whom he works, those near whom he lives in the neighborhood, those with whom he attends Sunday school and church—his acquaintances. Once again, kindness, honesty and thoughtful behavior ought to be the possession of every Christian. They ought to be part of the new garments which he wears as a "new man" in Christ.

I. KINDNESS IN FACE-TO-FACE BEHAVIOR, Proverbs 11:11.

1. Be friendly. Upon meeting your acquaintances, greet them. Do not treat some better than you do others, thus looking for possible gain or reward, Proverbs 19:6. As examples of cordiality, there are many Bible greetings.
 - 1) For children and teenagers in school. An appropriate greeting to childhood or teenage acquaintances would be, "Good morning" or "Hello" or "Hi."
 - 2) For children and teenagers as they come to attend Sunday school and church. A little warmer tone to their "Good morning" or "Hello" or "Hi" would be appropriate.
 - 3) For children who come face to face with adults. An appropriate greeting would be, "Good morning, Miss/Mrs./Mr.____," or "Hello, Miss/Mrs./Mr.____."
 - 4) For adults who are greeting their acquaintances. A "Good morning, Miss/Mrs./Mr.____," or a "Hello, Miss/Mrs./Mr.____, how are you?" is appropriate.
2. Be gracious.
 - 1) Do not examine their appearance while greeting them. This could give the impression that you are not approving of their appearance. A sincere, quick compliment would be in order. The compliment, of course, would have to do with some item of clothing or with a hairdo that is instantaneously noticed.
 - 2) If your acquaintance does not respond to the greeting quite as you expected him to respond, forgive him. Perhaps he had something on his mind at the moment that you greeted him and could not therefore react to your greeting swiftly enough to make it as cordial as he would have liked it to be.
3. Be restrained.
 - 1) In the manner of speaking. Do not shout a greeting across a room or across the heads of other people. Do not speak aloud if recognizing an acquaintance after a church service or another meeting has started. (In this case, you could simply nod and smile as a greeting.)
 - 2) In the manner of action. Do not accompany the greeting with a slap on the back! Men and sometimes ladies shake hands with each other. Keep your hands to yourselves otherwise! Young people and children should especially remember this last statement, as well as men acquaintances to ladies and vice versa.
4. Prefer them, Romans 12:10.
 - 1) While walking together. After greeting an acquaintance, there may be occasion to go in the same directions as he is going. If there is a place where two acquaintances would go through the door at the same time, a Christian will try to honor his acquaintance by holding the door and letting him go through first in the case of the same sex and nearly the same age and position. If, however, the two acquaintances differ in age and rank, the inferior will honor the

superior by holding the door, the younger will honor the older, the man will honor the lady or the girl. (If it is proper for someone else to hold the door for you, move to the side giving him room and opportunity to do so. Then say, "Thank you," for this courtesy.)

- 2) While talking together. The younger or inferior will let the older or superior lead in conversation. The lady will let the man lead in conversation. If the two acquaintances are nearly equal age and rank and are of the same sex, the Christian will remember to be a good listener, not monopolizing the conversation. If both start to say something at the same time, the Christian will stop and say, "Excuse me. You may speak first." The Christian will never interrupt his acquaintance's speaking.
- 3) While the other is engaged in conversation with someone else. In this case the acquaintance needs to talk with one who is already talking with someone else. He waits at a discreet distance until the first is finished with his first conversation. If it is only a break in conversation, he says, "Excuse me. I would like to talk with you for just a moment."
5. Be appropriate.
 - 1) Let the greeting fit the occasion. For example, if two acquaintances meet in church after a normal service, their greeting could be joyful. If they meet, however, in a funeral home, their greeting should be more subdued, but not necessarily with sad or frowning expression.
 - 2) Let the conversation be of common interest. Two Christian acquaintances can speak of how good the church service was; they can also speak together of how good God is, I John 1:7. God delights in this conversation among His own, Malachi 3:16. If the Christian is following through on an opportunity to witness, then he may speak of the goodness of the Lord by way of example or to clarify the points that he is making. A Christian acquaintance will not give news about his family whom the acquaintance does not know; he will not talk about his own accomplishments; he will not talk about anything personal to him unless it is in response to an inquiry by his acquaintance. A Christian acquaintance will talk with his fellow worker or his classmate about the job or the subject common to them.
6. Be polite, Ephesians 4:32.
 - 1) When making some necessary request, remember to say, "Please," or, "If you please."
 - 2) When a courtesy has been paid or a favor or a job has been done for your benefit, say, "Thank you."
 - 3) If it is necessary to cross in front of an acquaintance or to walk between two acquaintances who are talking, say, "Excuse me, please," or, "Pardon me, please."
 - 4) If you should bump into an acquaintance, you should say, "Pardon me," or "Excuse me," or "I am so sorry."
 - 5) If the Christian should cause any kind of inconvenience to an acquaintance, he should apologize, making the apology a sincere one. By the same token, the Christian should graciously accept any apologies from his acquaintances.
7. Respect his privacy. The Christian should never read papers that are on the desk of an acquaintance. The Christian should never pry for information that an acquaintance knows and cannot divulge to others. The Christian should never eavesdrop on the conversations of an acquaintance. He should never pry into his personal life or business affairs.
8. Have concern for your acquaintance. If you can be of help with any of his problems, help him. The Christian should be in a position to bring warmth, joy and help whenever such opportunities cross his path. Psalm 142:4 contains a sad line: "No man cared for my soul." The Christian should never be guilty of judging an acquaintance for anything that he does and, most of all, of then gossiping about him. (Luke 10:37)
9. Never be unkind to him. To the person whom the Christian does not know well, he could find it easy to be impudent, disrespectful, hasty, brazen, and in other ways non-Christian in behavior. Setting aside old things and putting on the "new man" (Ephesians 4:22-24) does not leave room for improper behavior.

II. HONESTY IN BEHAVIOR CONCERNING AN ACQUAINTANCE'S PROPERTY. Do not borrow without his permission. The first dictionary definition of "steal" is: "to take property of another." Even

though the Christian plans to return the property to its rightful place, unless the acquaintance gives permission for its use, the “borrowing” is very close to stealing. At the very least, it is not considering the feelings nor the privacy of the acquaintance.

III. GRATITUDE EXPRESSED IN THOUGHTFUL BEHAVIOR.

1. Praise God for Christian acquaintances. We could take Philippians 1:3-5 as an example for us. Here are recorded words of thanksgiving that were expressed by Paul for the joy of the fellowship that he enjoyed with the Philippian Christians. Paul prayed for his Christian acquaintances.
2. Show gratitude for services or favors or gifts from acquaintances. To write thank-you notes is a must after you have received any gifts from acquaintances. A box of candy or a home-baked cake is an appropriate gesture of appreciation to fellow workers after some important group project has been completed.
3. Give help of a monetary or material nature to acquaintances, especially other Christian acquaintances, who are unfortunate. Romans 12:13 teaches us that Christians ought to help supply the necessities of life for Christian acquaintances.

CONCLUSION: Christians meet and spend time with people who are their acquaintances, those whom they know by name but whom they do not consider to be close friends. In these situations Christians are to be aware that there is a code of behavior which will either bring praise to Jesus or will dishonor His name.