

Some time ago, I was working in the city and took the train to get there. One day there was a snowstorm and all the evening trains were severely delayed. My train was so late, that it left after the scheduled time for the following train to leave. So, there were about twice as many people as normal wanting to get on that train. **The aisles were packed solid with tired, wet, standing passengers.** And, what was scheduled to be an express train, was changed to a local train, making stops at every station. Adding to that, delays due to the weather turned what was normally an hour ride into a very uncomfortable 2 hour and 15 minute commute. Well into the trip, the crowd thinned enough so that most people could enjoy their own seat. That relief was quite welcomed by all. From my seat at the front of the car, I looked back and saw that nearly all the seats had one occupant; most of them were sitting sideways with their feet up on the seat. It was striking to see so many pairs of dirty, wet boots carelessly resting on the seats where commuters were sitting just minutes ago. On that train, I was obviously in the minority thinking such behavior was not right. Maybe the passengers just figured that the seats would be cleaned before the next morning's commuters would need to sit there. They were not considering the riders that might want a seat before the cleaning crew did their job. Nor were they considering the extra work they were creating for the cleaning crew. In my mind, **they were being inconsiderate.** They were self-serving.

And another thing... My daughter stays up later than I do and frequently she will close a door in the house loudly enough to wake me up. And my son and I are usually the first people in the house to wake up on the weekends. I regularly I need to remind him to walk softly and consider the others who are still sleeping. Come on people, let's be considerate of others! Yes, I know, I know, I need to take the log out of my own eye here. Surely my habits are inconsiderate of others at times.

Wait. What does all of this have to do with charity? Today, **we equate "charity" with "giving to the poor."** But the word means more than that. We get the word from the Latin "caritatum," which also is translated as "affection" or "love." This was used many times to translate the Greek "agape" in the oldest English translations of the scriptures to distinguish it from the other Greek words for love, "phileo" and "eros."

And if I give all my possessions to feed the poor, and if I surrender my body to be burned, but do not have {love, charity, agape} it profits me nothing. (1 Corinthians 13:3)

Here we see that "giving to the poor" is not necessarily an example of "charity." Today, one could give lots of money to charity, and not be exhibiting any true charity. Know what I mean?

So, what about muddy boots on train seats, slamming doors at night, and stomping feet in the morning? Those are examples of annoying, "non-charitable," behaviors. But there are more troublesome and dangerous examples that have potentially dire consequences. There is a story in 1Samuel 25 where Nabal is inconsiderate of David and his request for some food for his men. Nabal is self-serving and refuses to help. Even with the benevolent intervention of his wife, Abigail, he does not fare well in the end. If you want to be charitable in this life, please **use the story of Nabal as a bad example to follow.**

Nabal's example of how not to exhibit charity is an extreme case. Denying the direct request for support from a righteous man of God is a poor decision. If there were some "spectrum of charity" that rated how good an act was, this might not even register. It might measure below zero. Certainly, we are smarter than that and would never be so boldly callous. Remember **my whining about people putting their dirty boots on a train seat?** Where does that fall on the "spectrum?" Is there a spectrum of charity that we can measure up to? Are we judged according to how good our charity is? My answer is that it should not matter to us. Certainly, some sins are worse than others, and some charitable acts are better than others.

If Messiah died to take all the sin away, regardless of the severity, **is there a better reward for more benevolent acts of charity?** 1 Corinthians chapter 3 might hint at that, but I do not think so. Without being explicitly told in the scriptures, this is surely a good question to meditate on.

*For whoever keeps the whole law and yet stumbles in one point, he has become guilty of all.
(James 2:10)*

We should always be considering our actions and words from the perspective of how they will affect others – and this only works if we do so before committing. **(you cannot put the toothpaste back in the tube!)** You have probably heard the phrase “perception is reality.” Whatever the other person perceives your intention to be is what they will believe to be true, regardless of your actual intention. Here is some good advice that is rarely followed: “Never attribute to malice that which can be explained by ignorance.” Many times, we tend to perceive what others do as malicious. But the reality is that many people just are not considering how their actions will be perceived. They are likely operating out of ignorance. Please remember that **we are always on either one side of this exchange or the other.** We are either (potentially) causing one to stumble due to our actions, or we are (potentially) stumbling over another’s actions.

*For he who in this way serves Christ is acceptable to God and approved by men. So, then we **pursue the things which make for peace** and the building up of one another. (Romans 14:18-19)*

Knowing, understanding, considering, and committing God’s will over our own self will is one element of success that we need to be striving for. A second element that would serve us well is considering and understanding another’s motive or intent before judging them or reacting. If we are feeling offended by something, first consider whether that action was committed out of either malice or ignorance. Regardless of the answer, we are instructed to forgive the offense; would you agree that **forgiving ignorance is easier than forgiving malice?** For us, yes – but for God, probably not.

*Do nothing from selfish ambition or conceit, but in humility count others more significant than yourselves. Let each of you look not only to his own interests, but also to the interests of others.
(Philippians 2:3-4)*

Messiah walked with perfect compassion toward others – all others, not just the “church.” And, we are called to be imitators of Him. Our compassion and consideration and effort to not offend should be broadcast to all who we encounter. We are the salt of the earth, the light of the world, the example of His love.

Walk in wisdom toward outsiders, making the best use of the time. Let your speech always be gracious, seasoned with salt, so that you may know how you ought to answer each person. (Colossians 4:5-6)

Could there be a better, more effective method to preach the gospel to another than to show compassion and charity to them through all our actions and words? **To the extent that you did this to one of His children, you did it to Him.**

Set your mind on the things above, not on the things that are on earth. (Colossians 3:2)

Peace to you and glory to God!

-Nate

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