

The Commands of Christ

Sermon # 15

"The Golden Rule"

Matthew 7:12

Have you ever found yourself in a situation where you were faced with the need to make an important moral decision on the spur of the moment? Because you were unable to recall any specific scripture that addresses the moral dilemma in which you found yourself, were you left wondering what is the right way to act? As a part of the Sermon on the Mount Jesus provided a tool to help in such a situation. It seems well suited for just a situation for it is a quick and easy way to know what to do and it is also easy remembered.

In our last examination of the commands of Christ we looked at his command about prayer, that we are to *"ask...seek...and knock."* In Matthew 7:11 Jesus concluded that the reason that we should go to God in prayer is because God gives us good gifts. The next imperative command is found in verse 12 (*poiete*) where it is translated, *"you do to them."* So the next command is tied to the preceding with the word *"therefore"* and refers to our relationship to God. Therefore we are to not let our conduct be determined by how others treat you, but rather by how God treats you.

The Golden Rule, which is found in the seventh chapter of the book of Matthew, verse 12, is probably the most universally praised statement that Jesus ever made.

"Therefore, whatever you want men to do to you, do also to them, for this is the Law and the Prophets."

First, The Golden Rule Requires Positive Action

Much has been made by various commentators of the fact that this principle is found in other religions prior to being stated by Jesus, although previously it has always stated negatively. Confucius for example, is credited with having said, *"Do not to others what you would not wish done to yourself."* [John Stott. *Essential Living: The Sermon the Mount*. Leicester, England: InterVarsity Press, 1988) p. 190]

What we don't want others to do to us, we shouldn't do to them. All that is required is that we not harm other people. Now that is not a bad rule, but there is nothing particularly religious about it. We don't have to embrace any religion to recognize that it makes sense. We do not have to endorse any ethical standard, or any theological frame of reference to understand its usefulness in society. But it is really little more than a calculated effort to avoid retaliation.

The difference between these former rules of conduct and Jesus' Golden Rule is dramatic. In the story of the Good Samaritan (Luke 10:30-36) we can see a good illustration of the application of Golden Rule applied negatively. A traveler was traveling from Jerusalem to Jericho was mugged, stripped and left in a pool of blood beside the road to die. Two men come by and saw him but went on about their business. One was a priest and the other was a Levite. They practiced the silver rule. They did not do this man any evil, but they did not help him either. If we were the victims in this story we would want someone who would help us.

The Golden Rule Requires Positive Action And ...

Secondly, The Golden Rule is a Guide not a Goal.

Jesus was not saying, "You need to nice to others so that they will be nice to us." Although the Golden Rule expressed the way we are to behave it does not guarantee any reciprocal results. We find a good example of this in the great philosopher Charlie Brown. "Charlie Brown is a kind-hearted, do-good kind of character. Despite the abuse he receives from the other inhabitants in Charles Schultz's cartoon strip, Peanuts, Charlie Brown continues to practice the Golden Rule. Even though it rarely works to his advantage, Charlie Brown keeps on doing for others what he would have them do for him.

In one strip Charlie and Lucy are lined up behind a bunch of other kids to see a movie. "Have you been here long, Charlie?" Lucy asks. "No, I just got here. Actually, I shouldn't be going to the movies at all. I have homework to do. If it weren't for the fact that they are giving away free candy bars to the first fifteen hundred kids, I wouldn't even be here."

Lucy, who has been listening to the ticket agent counting kids while Charlie Brown talked, asked him, 'Do you mind if I get ahead of you Charlie Brow?'

'No, please do.' 'Ladies first that is always my motto. I don't think this is a very good movie. I just came because of the free candy bars for the first fifteen hundred kids. I really should be home doing my reading, but you know how it is when they are giving something away free,' Charlie continues as Lucy pays for her ticket.

'Fifteen hundred!' announces the ticket agent. 'Sorry kid, that's the way it goes. The world is full of Lucy's.' [Haddon W. Robinson. The Sold Rock Construction Company: How to Build Your Life On the Right Foundation. (Grand Rapids: Discovery House, 1989) pp. 16-117]

The Golden Rule is a Guide not a Goal And...

Third, The Golden Rule Results in Changed Relationships

In Romans 12:17-21 the Apostle Paul expresses the very thought of the Golden Rule in practice, "Repay no one evil for evil. Have regard for good things in the sight of all men. (18) If it is possible, as much as depends on you, live peaceably with all men. (19) Beloved, do not avenge

yourselves, but rather give place to wrath; for it is written, "Vengeance is Mine, I will repay," says the Lord. (20) Therefore "If your enemy is hungry, feed him; If he is thirsty, give him a drink; For in so doing you will heap coals of fire on his head." (21) Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good."

John Stott says, *"It is a remarkably flexible ethical principle.... All we have to do is use our imagination, put ourselves in the other person's shoes and ask, 'How would I like to be treated in this situation?'"* [Stott p. 191]

J.C. Ryles says, *"It settles a hundred difficult points...It prevents the necessity of laying down endless little rules for our conduct in specific cases."* [as quoted by Stott. p. 191]

Let me give you a some illustrations of how this "Golden rule" can be applied.

In Dealing With the Lost

If you were a lost man or woman with a life bound up in sin, how would you want to be told? No one likes to be told that they are wrong, and especially we don't like to be told in an unkind or uncaring way. In 1 Timothy 2:24-26 the Apostle tells his young friend Timothy how this should be approached. *"And a servant of the Lord must not quarrel but be gentle to all, able to teach, patient, (25) in humility correcting those who are in opposition, if God perhaps will grant them repentance, so that they may know the truth,(26) and that they may come to their senses and escape the snare of the devil, having been taken captive by him to do his will."*

In Correcting One Another

Even spiritual ones like you and I do not like to be corrected. When don't like to be told that we have made a mistake or an error in judgment, but if we are going to be confronted we would rather it be with a meek and patient spirit. Paul instructs the believers for such an eventuality in Galatians 6:1-2, *"Brethren, if a man is overtaken in any trespass, you who are spiritual restore such a one in a spirit of gentleness, considering yourself lest you also be tempted. (2) Bear one another's burdens, and so fulfill the law of Christ."*

It Can Help In Dealing With Those Who Mistreat You. (Luke 6:27-28) *"But I say to you who hear: Love your enemies, do good to those who hate you, (28) bless those who curse you, and pray for those who spitefully use you."*

In Dealing With Feeling Of Revenge And Retaliation (Romans 12:19) *"Beloved, do not avenge yourselves, but rather give place to wrath; for it is written, "Vengeance is Mine, I will repay," says the Lord."*

But the person who would obey the Golden Rule must first get their minds entirely off of themselves and fix at all moments on the needs, cares, loves, joys, hopes and dreams of other people.

Let me illustrate. *“Little Chad was a shy, quiet young man. One day he came home & told his mother to make a valentine for everyone in his class. Her heart sank. She thought, “I wish that he would do that!” because she watched the way the other children treated him.*

Nevertheless, she decided she would go along with her son. So she purchased the paper & glue & crayons. For 3 whole weeks, night & day, Chad painstakingly made 35 valentines.

Valentines Day came & Chad was beside himself with Excitement. He carefully stacked them up, put them in a Bag & ran out the door. His mother decided to bake him his Favorite Cookies & Serve them up Warm when he got home. She just knew that Chad would be disappointed. It hurt her to think that he worked so hard on all of those Valentines & he might not get any in return.

That afternoon when she heard the School Bus, she looked out the Window, waiting for Chad. Sue enough here they came, laughing & having the best time. And as always, there was Chad in the Rear.

He was walking a little faster than usual. She fully expected him to burst through the door with Tears because his Arms were Empty. When the doors opened, she chocked back the Tears. “Mommy has some warm cookies & milk for you Chad.” But he hardly heard her words. He just marched right on by, his face was aglow, & all he could say was; “Not a one...not a one.” Her Heart Sank. And then he added, “I didn’t forget a single person in my class mom.” [Carl Kelleher. “How Do You Like To Be Treated?’ Sermon on Matt. 7:12-14 - Sermon Central (8/3/2003 - Sermon ID 43397) p.9]

To really obey the Golden rule we must take our eyes off of ourselves.

Remember that:

The Golden Rule Requires Positive Action

The Golden Rule is a Guide not a Goal.

The Golden Rule Results in Changed Relationships.