

Matthew 7:12 *In everything, therefore, treat people the same way you want them to treat you, for this is the Law and the Prophets.*

THE GREATNESS OF THE RULE

This is likely the most remembered statement that Jesus ever made. It is one that Christians and non-believers alike regard as excellent moral teaching. It is that statement that is the pinnacle of ethical relationship with others. And it is rightly called “The Golden Rule” – that is, “golden” in its universal value and “rule” in its simply stated measure of how we should best treat another.

I like what the great Bible commentator, William Barclay, calls it: “The Everest of Ethics.”

There are many similar statements of wisdom from Jewish Rabbinical teaching and from the teaching of other religions, but they are all stated in the negative. For instance Hillel, often called the “gracious Rabbi”, taught: “what is hateful to yourself, do to no other.” Confucius was asked if there was one word that would serve as a rule of practice in relationships, and he responded: “reciprocity,” going on to say: “what you do not want done to yourself, do not do to others.”

Jesus is the only great teacher who puts this precept into the positive. He does not simply want us to avoid doing wrong to another, but to actively do good. The positive form implies creativity, compassion, involvement, sacrifice, selflessness and love. He wants us to “give a cup of cold water” and “help the old lady across the street” and “visit those in prison” and “be a light” to others. We are to do to others that which we would want done to ourselves. And this takes more than withholding that which is evil. It means supernaturally giving that which is good.

THE LINK TO THE PREVIOUS

Most translations have this Golden Rule beginning with “therefore” or “so...” linking it to what has come previous. In other works, this rule is the natural consequence and summary of what has preceded it. So what has come before? Well, this is the subject of much commentary.

- a. What has come immediately before, in verse 11, is the teaching on the goodness of our Heavenly Father, who always gives what is good. So in this sense, the Golden Rule is saying “therefore” as the Father responds in good, so should you so respond to others.
- b. Chapter 7 to this point has been about how we as kingdom citizens are to relate to others in judging rightly – not condemning, but gently helping to correct and remove sin. In this sense, the Golden Rule is saying “therefore” you can best judge others rightly by always treating them (judging them) as you would want to be treated (judged). This is very similar to what Jesus taught in verse 2:

Matthew 7:2 *For in the way you judge, you will be judged; and by your standard of measure, it will be measured to you.*

- c. But most agree that the “therefore” of the Golden Rule is linked to the whole of the Sermon on the Mount that has preceded it. We are to apply the true meaning of the Old Testament laws of murder (anger) and adultery (lust) as we would want them applied to ourselves. And we are to “practice our righteousness before men” as we would want that righteousness practiced before us. And we are to judge others (treat others) as we would want to be judged (treated).

Note that this Golden Rule concludes “for this is the Law and the Prophets,” meaning that this “Rule” is the summing up of the Old Testament Law. We remember that in 5:17 of this Sermon, when Jesus had finished the Beatitudes and was launching into the practical teaching of relationships He said: *“Do not think that I have come to abolish the Law or the Prophets; I did not come to abolish but to fulfill.”* So the Golden Rule appears to link its “therefore” back to the beginning of the Sermon as the summation of what Jesus came to fulfill.

ANOTHER KEY LINK

“This is the Law and the Prophets” following the Golden Rule should also cause us to remember the other great statement of Jesus that is linked to “the Law and the Prophets,” and therefore linked also to the Golden Rule. In Matthew 22:35-40 Jesus is asked *“Which is the great commandment in the Law?”* And Jesus answers *“You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul. And with all your mind. This is the greatest and foremost commandment.”*

But then Jesus goes on to say: “The second is like it, *“You shall love your neighbor as yourself.”* And then remember that He concludes this interchange with: *“On these two commandments depend the whole Law and the Prophets.”* This is another way of saying: “You could sum up the whole Old Testament Law with these two greatest commandments.

And it is clear that to *“treat others as you would want others to treat you”* is another way of saying *“love your neighbor as yourself.”* Both are a simple yet profound summary of God’s Law.

THE END OF A SECTION

We know that the Sermon on the Mount continues after “The Golden Rule.” Yet, in a real sense this “Golden Rule” concludes the Sermon with regards to what constitutes a kingdom citizen. That makes the “therefore” as a true concluding statement to kingdom citizen responsibility as we live out our lives.

What follows in the sermon is now an extended evangelistic call to salvation and call to discern the true spiritual walk as opposed to a false one.

HOW DO YOU WANT TO BE TREATED?

We come now to the practical application of this Golden Rule. How do you want to be treated? Your answer to this question is how you are to treat others. If I were to ask you to complete the following in one word, what would you say?: I want to be treated with ...” I am confident that the #1 answer by far would be with “respect.”

1. WITH RESPECT

With RESPECT is how we are to treat a celebrity or a beggar. With RESPECT is how we are to treat our spouse or a stranger. With REPECT is how we are to treat an elder or a child.

RESPECT implies treating with human dignity as a special creation of God, and implies valuing their person. It implies a willingness to engage, listen and give attention to.

In this regard, Philippians 2:3-4 offers great insight.

Philippians 2:3-4 *Do nothing from selfishness or empty conceit, but with humility of mind regard one another as more important than yourselves. Do not merely look out for your own personal interests, but also for the interests of others.*

This teaches of humility and selflessness in relationship, but I want to focus particularly on two words beginning with the letter “i” that relate to the practical way we should treat others: IMPORTANT and INTERESTS.

- (1) We must treat others as one who is IMPORTANT – even more important than ourselves at that moment. We must treat them in what they have to say as important. That means really listening and caring. Isn’t that how we want to be treated in conversation? We may not agree with their opinion, but it should be listened to with respect as that which is important to them. And when they offer a story or example, we should not try to “one up” them with our “better” story or example. And yet how often we do just that, showing that our story or example is more important and worthy of attention. Eye contact shows they are IMPORTANT. Listening shows they are IMPORTANT. Engaging shows they are IMPORTANT. And Christians should be those who INITIATE conversations that show the recipient their importance. A friendly greeting and sincere question or complimentary comment can go a long way to humbly and selflessly show we really care.
- (2) We must treat others as if their INTERESTS are of value and of interest to us. Their interests must become our interests, if only for the moment – but perhaps beyond the moment as we have opportunity to help. This is how we want to be treated, so this is how Jesus wants us to treat others. Our “how are you” ‘s should be sincere – we must truly show interest. Our “how

can I help?" must be genuine, truly making their interests ours. Now this cannot be for everyone who encounter, but it must be our goal in every possible encounter.

To demonstrate true IMPORTANCE of their person and true interest in their INTERESTS is to show RESPECT. It is what we want, and therefore it is what we are to give.

2. WITH FAIRNESS

But what about when we are being appraised (as in a content) or judged (as in a courtroom)? What then is how we want to be treated? With Most, I believe would say something like with FAIRNESS. I certainly want to be treated fairly, and so Jesus wants me to treat others in that way.

We must not look at externals such as the color of skin or the clothing they wear. We must be as unbiased as possible in our assessment and impartial in our determination. That's what we would want from a judge, jury or prospective employer. So that is what we must give as we "judge" another rightly in any matter – with FAIRNESS as best we can.

3. WITH COMPASSION

We all make mistakes – often big ones. And we all sin and find ourselves reaping the consequences. Sometimes we find ourselves in dire need of assistance. How then do we want to be treated? With ... COMPASSION, or some might say "mercy" or "forgiveness." Whether we deserve the "pickle" we are in or not, we would want to be treated with compassion for our circumstance and receive a truly sympathetic and caring response – and if possible, help to alleviate or minimize the situation. That is how we want to be treated, so that is how Jesus wants us to treat others.

You could add to this 3-fold list of **RESPECT, FAIRNESS and COMPASSION**, but I think this pretty well encompasses how most of us want to be treated.

EXAMPLES OF HOW JESUS TREATED OTHERS

1. With respect despite difference in status (Samaritan woman – John 4)
2. With compassion (Bethesda cripple – John 5) *"do not sin anymore, so nothing worse happens"*
3. With no condemnation (adulterous woman – John 8) – *"I do not condemn you; go and sin no more."*
4. With fairness for the truth (blind man – John 9) – *"It was not this man's sin or his parent's sin"*
5. With compassion (Mary & Martha – John 11) – "Jesus wept"

QUOTE FROM WILLIAM BARCLAY

The only man who can even begin to satisfy the positive form of the [Golden] Rule is the man who has the love of Christ within his heart. He will try to forgive as he would wish to be forgiven, to help as he would wish to be helped, to praise as he would wish to be praised, to understand as he would wish to be understood.

He will never seek to avoid doing things; he will always look for things to do. Clearly this will make life much more complicated; clearly he will have much less time to spend on his own desires and his own activities, for time and time again he will have to stop what he is doing to help someone else. It will be a principle which will dominate his life at home, at work, in travel, in the street, in his recreation and within his heart.

To obey this commandment a man must become a new man with a new center to his life; and if the world was composed of people who sought to obey this rule, it would be a new world.

Dear Heavenly Father, please aid and enable me to be that man, that woman, that kingdom citizen. Help me to daily empty me of myself and fill me with You, dear Lord. Help me to be a living and consistent example of the "Golden Rule" in all my relationships. Amen.