

The Golden Rule(r)

Matthew 7:12

- I. A Disciple’s Characteristics: 8 Blessings (5:1-12)
 - II. A Disciple’s Influence: 2 Metaphors (5:13-16)
 - III. A Disciple’s Righteousness: Six Contrasting Illustrations (5:17-48)
 - IV. A Disciple’s Piety: Three Religious Practices (6:1-18): Giving, Praying, Fasting
 - V. A Disciple’s Commitments: Four Contrasting Choices (6:19-34)
 - VI. A Disciple’s Relationships (7:1-20)
 - A. To siblings (7:1-5)
 - B. To God’s enemies (7:6)
 - C. To God (7:7-11)
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Introduction:

- Who is Jesus? A great teacher
- What did he teach? “Do unto others as you would have them do unto you.”
- What is that called? The Golden Rule
- What does it mean? What if the thing I want for myself is inappropriate? Does this apply to a Christian on jury duty?

I. The “Golden Rule” = a guide for practicing true righteousness

A. Some qualifications

1. It is positive, not negative
 - a. The negative statement is sometimes called the “silver” rule. It is a good approach to help people to get along without undo conflict. [Quote Robinson]
 - b. The Pharisees would have embraced the silver rule. Their system of righteousness focused on outward behavior – perfectionism defined by performance. For that system to work, they had to keep the rules manageable.
 - c. Quote Barclay.
2. It is active rather than passive
 - a. The “silver rule” permits me to “live and let live.” This is illustrated in the Parable of the Good Samaritan. The priest and Levite did no evil to the man; they didn’t walk over and kick him.
 - b. The golden rule calls for initiative and involvement – to move toward people constructively.
 - c. This is the difference between rules and relationships.
3. It is ministering rather than manipulative
 - a. Some might read this statement, “Do unto others *in order to* get them to do unto you.”
 - b. This is a guide; not a goal. ILLUSTRATION: “Why Courtesy Counts”
 - c. Fact: People do not always respond to right behavior with right behavior (5:10-12!)

c. Jesus does not give the potential response of others as the reason for the guideline. The reason Jesus gives is: “For this sums up the law and the prophets.” In other words, this is the proper expression of true righteousness.

4. It is related to its context, not isolated.

a. This statement is the other “bookend” to Matthew 5:17-20. As such, it serves as a summary statement for the whole discourse on “true righteousness.”

b. It is this context that makes Jesus’ “golden rule” unique. He is saying that as we treat others in the way we want others to treat us, we will do so in a way that reflects true righteousness.

5. It is normative, but not superficially absolute.

a. If it was “superficially absolute,” people would apply it to every situation on the basis of their subjective evaluation of the situation. Example: A person might interpret this statement along these lines: “Since I want people to give me what I want, I am to give others what they want.” If parents operate that way with respect to their children, we say they are “spoiling” them.

- It wouldn’t work for a Christian on jury duty.
- It can’t be applied to every person in our sphere of awareness. (I have to be careful when giving this sermon to “rescuers.”)
- Sometimes we encounter a situation that might call for our attention, but we have to pass it by because we have other obligations that have a higher priority. We cannot let the urgent crowd out the important. We can’t operate our lives on the basis of constant emergencies.

b. The reason we rule out this misinterpretation of the rule is that, in its context, it is about true righteousness – fulfilling the law and the prophets.

6. It is practical, not merely theoretical.

- Useful in difficult social situations
- Useful in difficult ministry situations

B. A Test Question: How do I want others to treat me?

1. With Dignity (Luke 7:36-50)

a. How I see a person will govern my feelings about him and my actions toward him.

b. An extension of respect is appreciation.

c. The one who treats me with dignity will do what is good for me – not just what I want him to do.

2. With Grace

a. I need for others to make allowances for my limitations and my failures.

b. Justice reacts to the offense; grace responds to the need.

II. The “Golden Ruler” (Straightedge) = a standard to measure the genuineness of righteousness

A. Our treatment of others is an indicator of the influence of God’s grace in our lives.

1. Recent context: One response we are to make to God's forgiveness of our sins is to forgive the offenses of others against us. It's a package deal. It's not just a rule; it's how things are. You cannot simultaneously apply mercy to yourself and judgment to others (Matthew 18:23-35).
 - Why was the king able to forgive the indebtedness of his servant? Because he was rich – he could absorb the loss.
 - Why did the servant not forgive the indebtedness of his fellow servant? Because he believed he needed that payment in order to pay back the king. Though the king had forgiven him, he had not received the forgiveness.
2. Immediate context: We are the recipients of the good gifts of God, our Father.
 - Why can we afford to extend grace to other people? Because we have received grace from God. We can afford to forgive thousands because we have received billions.
3. In the context then, Jesus is implying another layer of meaning: “Do unto others as God in his goodness has done unto you.”
4. Throughout Jesus' teaching, love of others is directly related to love of God. Matthew 22:36-40.

B. Coming up “short” sends me back to the beatitudes.

- On my own, I am spiritually bankrupt. But in Christ, I have received the kingdom of God.

APPLICATIONAL PRINCIPLE

(“If I am to remain faithful to God in the assignments of my life, the influence of the goodness of God must be greater than the influence of difficult circumstance and/or sinful people.”)