

The Golden Rule

Introduction. Matthew 7:12 is one of the best known verses in the Bible. All agree that if everyone lived by its teaching the world would be a better place. Yet, few people apply this principle when they deal with others.

The principle set forth in this passage is not unique to Jesus. He carves out no new ethical ground. It is simply a restatement of Leviticus 19:18, 34. But Jesus brought a new intensity to this principle by living it before the people of His day (John 13:34-35).

I. ***A Consideration Of The Context***

- A. Matthew 7 is not several disjointed teachings but rather an application of the principle set forth in Matthew 6:33.
 - 1. Jesus explained how seeking the kingdom first applies in several relationships.
 - a) Possessions (6:25-34).
 - b) Other people (7:1-12).
 - c) Way of life (7:13-14).
 - d) False doctrine (7:15-20).
 - e) Jesus and His word (7:21-27).
 - 2. The righteousness of a citizen of the kingdom of heaven is determined by his attitudes and actions in relation to all of these areas.
- B. In the section which deals with the Christian's relationships to other people (Matthew 7:1-12), several principles govern action.
 - 1. Our understanding of the kingdom and its righteousness should not produce a spirit of harsh judgment toward others (vss. 1-5).
 - a) While people need to see the nature of true righteousness, an uncaring, self-righteous hypocrite is not the one who can do it.
 - b) The self-righteous person is disqualified because he refuses to acknowledge and remove his own sins.
 - c) It is the one who has humbly submitted his life to the will of God that can properly influence others (Matthew 5:14-16).
 - 2. Time should not be wasted sharing the gospel of the kingdom and its righteousness on those who have no interest in it (vs. 6).
 - a) The kingdom of God is not spread by careless, undiscerning zealotry anymore than by harsh judging.
 - b) The kingdom and its righteousness is foolishness to the swine and dogs of the world (1 Corinthians 1:18, 23).
 - 3. Since the kingdom and its righteousness are a gift of God's love, the Christian ought to love others in the same manner (vss. 7-12).
 - a) The love of God was so great that He provided salvation through His Son (John 3:16; Romans 5:8).

- b) The Old Testament law was given to prepare mankind for that gift; therefore, it was undergirded by God's love (Galatians 3:24).

II. ***A Classic Illustration Of The Principle***

- A. The parable of the good Samaritan was spoken in response to the questioning of a lawyer who was testing Jesus (Luke 10:25-37).
 - 1. The lawyer acknowledged that in order to have eternal life he must possess two characteristics.
 - a) Love God with all his heart, soul, strength, and mind.
 - b) Love his neighbor as himself.
 - 2. After Jesus told him to apply this teaching, the lawyer, seeking to justify himself, asked, "And who is my neighbor?"
 - 3. Jesus then related the parable showing that the "neighbor" of the one who fell among thieves was the one who showed mercy on him.
- B. The parable illustrates three basic attitudes toward others.
 - 1. The iron rule: "What's yours is mine and, if I can, I will take it."
 - a) This rule is illustrated by the thieves.
 - b) They had no concern for their fellow man.
 - 2. The silver rule: "What's mine belongs to me and I'm going to keep it."
 - a) This rule is illustrated by the priest and Levite, two religious people.
 - b) This is the attitude most people seem to have: non-involvement. However, the passive are condemned (Matthew 25:41-46).
 - 3. The golden rule: "What I have belongs to God and I will use it according to His will."
 - a) The Samaritan lived this principle and Jesus epitomized this rule. It sums up the law and the prophets (cf. Romans 13:9). In the context of fulfilling the scriptures, it provides a handy summary of the righteousness to be displayed in the kingdom (cf. Matthew 5:20).
 - b) The verse emphasizes the need for positive action that brings benefit to another, not simply restraining oneself from negative activities that hurt another.
 - c) The sentiment was in use among the Jews. The Rabbi Hillel said to a man who wished to become a proselyte, and who asked him to teach him the whole law, "Whatever is hateful to you, do not do to another." A similar sentiment was found among the religions of India, Greece, and China. It is perhaps the most religiously universal thought in existence.

III. **Practical Applications Of The Principle**

- A. Negatively: Why don't more people practice this principle?
1. Most people are selfish and self-centered. Only when the old self-serving way is broken will people be free to treat others the way they themselves wish to be treated.
 2. How can people be released from selfishness?
 - a) Our fascination with ourselves can only end when we become fascinated with God (Matthew 22:36-39).
 - b) When an absolute love of God has driven out an absolute love of self, one is free to love others as he loves himself (1 John 4:19).
 3. In Matthew 7:9-11, the basis for our treatment of others is God's gracious treatment of His children.
 - a) God's mercy and generosity are not what man deserved but what he needed.
 - b) Those who have received God's grace should be gracious to others even if it is not what they deserve (Matthew 18:23-25; Luke 6:31-35).
- B. Positively: How can we practically use this principle every day?
1. Not by:
 - a) Constantly griping and complaining about others.
 - b) Being overly and unjustly critical.
 - c) Blaming others and never never yourself.
 - d) Delighting in making life miserable for others.
 2. By:
 - a) Thinking about how others feel (Philippians 2:3-4).
 - b) Complimenting others (Acts 4:36).
 - c) Noticing people and being kind to all (Philippians 3:12-13).
 - d) Being a true friend (Proverbs 17:17).
 - e) Being sympathetic and compassionate (Romans 12:15).
 - f) Loving others (Colossians 3:14).
 - g) Teaching others the gospel (Acts 8:35).

Conclusion. By stating it positively, Jesus made it more significant. It is not very hard to refrain from harming others; it is much more difficult to take the initiative in doing good for them. The golden rule is the foundation of active goodness and mercy -- the kind of love God shows to us every day.

Christians should try hard to make practical application of this rule each day. True righteousness demands a selfless love for men which rests upon God's gracious love for us.