

Sermon Outline

“The Golden Rule,” Matthew: The Life and Words of Jesus, Part 23 – Matthew 7:12 – Joshua Harris – November 11, 2012

1. Introduction

- A. The name “The Golden Rule” (Matthew 7:12) originated about 200 years after Jesus’ ministry with the Roman Emperor, Alexander Severus. He wasn’t a Christian, but he was so impressed with Jesus’ words that he had them inscribed *in gold* on the walls in his home.
- B. It’s a lot easier to put these words on your wall than it is to live according to them. It’s much less costly to write them in gold on your walls than to write them on your heart. So what does Jesus want to teach us? What does it mean for this to be the rule of our lives? The Golden Rule is...

2. A Simple Rule of Love

- A. What is so striking about the Golden Rule is its powerful simplicity: it is not complex, but it is profound. Even kids can understand it: if you really want to care for someone, if you really want to do right by them, then treat them the way you would want to be treated.
- B. When Jesus says, “for this is the Law and the Prophets” he’s saying that this *sums up* the teaching of the Old Testament about how we should treat one another. (Matthew 7:12 is a literary “bookend” for the entire section of the Sermon on the Mount beginning in Matthew 5:17.) Jesus distills laws about not lying, not committing adultery, not cheating, not coveting, and so forth, into a single sentence. He’s showing us the essence, the heart of all the commandments and teaching about how we relate to our fellow man. He’s showing us what love for others looks like in action.
- C. This commandment is taught elsewhere by Jesus and in other places in the New Testament. For example:
 - 1) A lawyer asked Jesus, “Teacher, which is the great commandment in the Law?” And he [Jesus] said to him, “You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind. This is the great and first commandment. And a second is like it: *You shall love your neighbor as yourself*” (Matt. 22:36-39). The second great commandment is the same principle as the Golden Rule.

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- 2) The Apostle Paul echoes Jesus words in Romans 12:8-10: "Owe no one anything, except to love each other, for *the one who loves another has fulfilled the law*. For the commandments, "You shall not commit adultery, You shall not murder, You shall not steal, You shall not covet," and any other commandment, are *summed up in this word: "You shall love your neighbor as yourself."* Love does no wrong to a neighbor; therefore, love is the fulfilling of the law.
- D. Doing unto others as you would have them do to you is the fulfilling of the law. The Golden Rule is a simple rule of love.
- 1) Do you wish others would be honest with you? Then be honest with them.
 - 2) Do you wish others would believe the best about you? Then stop judging them and believe the best.
 - 3) Do you wish others would be patient with and overlook your weaknesses? Then extend mercy and grace toward them.

3. An "impossible left to myself" rule

- A. If we're honest, we see that this isn't our natural disposition. This isn't how we live left to ourselves and our desires and strengths. There's something about the clarity and simplicity of the Golden Rule that reveals how self-centered and unloving we often can be. We want people in authority over us to be just and fair. Yet, when we have power over someone else, we can use it for our own advantage. We want others to give us the benefit of the doubt, but so often we are quick to judge other peoples' motives. We want others to forgive us when we ask forgiveness and stop focusing on our mistakes, but when other people cross us we hold it against them.
- B. None of us can say that we have perfectly upheld this rule of doing unto others as we would have them do to us. Jesus wants us to come to this humbling realization. Jesus is not giving us the Golden Rule so that we might attempt to earn our salvation by our good works. He gives us the Golden Rule to expose the folly of trying to be justified by the law. Jesus loves us so much he wants to rescue us from the lie that we can save ourselves by being good enough. Jesus loves us so much he's knocking the legs out from under our dead, man-centered, performance based religion.
- C. Throughout the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus has shown us that we need more than just rules to make it to heaven. We need salvation. We need inner transformation. God's standard is so far beyond us we could never win his love by meeting it.

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4. A “possible in Christ” rule

- A. Every major religion has some version of the Golden Rule in it’s teaching. It is a universally acknowledged principle of how to treat others that is not unique to Christianity. But what is unique Christianity is God becoming a man and through his death and resurrection giving people like us the power and grace to live a new life.
- B. It is only half the story to realize that we can’t earn our way to God by keeping the Golden Rule. But God has come down to us. Jesus humbled himself, took on our humanity and lived a perfectly righteous life before God in our place. And because he died as our substitute to make us right with God and rose from the dead conquering death forever, we are not the same. We have been born again. The power and grace of God is at work in us. We can obey. We can love. What we can not do in ourselves is possible in Christ.

5. Conclusion

- A. It’s so important that we read the Sermon on the Mount and this verse in particular through the lens of the power of grace. We can never be justified by obedience to the law. We are only justified through faith in Jesus. (Gal. 2:16). But through faith in Jesus, what we read in the Sermon on the Mount is the new life we’ve been freed to live. We don’t strive to obey the Golden Rule out of fear that if we fail God won’t love us. We strive to obey it in the confidence of his love and the power of the Holy Spirit at work in us. We can love like this. We can love others as we love ourselves, because God has loved us. Jesus has come to rescue us.

6. Fellowship Starters

- 1. Take time as a Care Group to read Matthew 5:17 - 7:12.
- 2. How does the Golden Rule sum up the second great commandment: “You shall love your neighbor as yourself” (Matthew 22:39)?
- 3. How well do you keep the Golden Rule? Why is it an “impossible left to myself” rule to keep?
- 4. How is obedience to the Golden Rule made possible by your union with Christ? In what specific ways has the Lord transformed your heart to enable you to keep this rule?
- 5. What opportunities is God giving you to love others as you love yourself, to do to others what you wish they would do to you?

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6. Are there any situations in which the Spirit is bringing conviction in which you have failed to love, to forgive, to extend mercy, or to lay down your rights, desires or plans? What would it look like to walk out repentance and/or reconciliation?