

Walking with Jesus - Part 10
The Golden Rule
Dr. Derek Morris

Preaching passage: Matt 7:12
Subject: How should you treat others
Complements: the way that you would like to be treated.
Exegetical idea: You should treat others the way that you would like to be treated.
Homiletical idea: **Treat others the way that you would like to be treated!**
Purpose: To encourage my hearers to actively do good in their interactions with other, treating others the way that they would like to be treated.

Introduction

My wife has an interesting family history, especially on the Chinese side of her family. Her Chinese grandfather was an opium smuggler when he was a little boy. My wife's Chinese grandmother on the other hand, was the daughter of a physician to the Emperor of China. How they met is another story!

Grandma grew up in a Christian family, though they had originally been Moslems. They had a simple rule for life that guided them: Love God, work hard, and get as much education as you can. That simple rule blessed their lives and has blessed future generations. Love God, work hard, and get as much education as you can. My wife and I also follow that simple rule for our family rule.

Jesus also gave a simple rule for life in His Sermon on the Mount. If we live in harmony with that rule our lives will be blessed, our families will be blessed, and our world will be blessed. This rule that Jesus shared in His Sermon on the Mount is not the only principle that Jesus gave to guide our lives, but it is certainly an important one. In fact, this rule of Jesus does away with the need for hundreds of other more specific rules about our relationships with others.

Perhaps that is why some have referred to rule of Jesus as The Golden Rule. We are going to study this Golden Rule today as we continue our series on Walking with Jesus.

If you have your copy of the great sermon of Jesus, turn to Matthew 7:12. Let's read this Golden Rule of Jesus: "....." The way that I memorized the Golden Rule of Jesus, it sounded like this: **Do unto others what you would have them to do unto you.** Is that how you learned it? **Do unto others what you would have them to do unto you.**

This Golden Rule of Jesus has been misunderstood by many. I remember one occasion when our two sons were little, and they were having a heated disagreement. Christopher got upset and pushed his younger brother. Jonathan responded with a similar act of aggression, while at the same time quoting, or should I say misquoting this Bible verse from Matthew 7:12: "Do unto others!" I needed to have a little conversation with my boys! I explained to them that Jesus didn't say "Do unto others what they **do** to you!" Jesus said, "Do to others what you would have them do to you." At least at that time in their lives, our two boys misunderstood the Golden Rule of Jesus!

Others besides my two young sons have misunderstood the Golden Rule of Jesus. Some have viewed this rule of Jesus from a negative perspective. In other words, when they hear the Golden Rule of Jesus they think "Don't do mean things to other people if you don't want them to do mean things to you."

Now that's not a bad principle for life. In fact, many great teachers have shared a similar principle with their students:

Rabbi Hillel, a Jewish Rabbi in the generation just before the life and ministry of Jesus said: "What is hateful to you, do not to your neighbor; that is the whole Torah, while the

rest is commentary thereon.”

-Confucius, (551-479) at the end of the 6th century BC and the beginning of the 5th century BC taught his students: “Never impose on others what you would not choose for yourself.” Doctrine of the Mean, Xiii, pp. 3-4

-Mahavira, a contemporary of Confucius living in India, shared a similar rule: “Refrain from afflicting upon others such injury as would appear undesirable to us if inflicted upon ourselves.” Sayings of Lord Mahavira, p. 6.

That’s not a bad rule for life. Not a bad life principle to guide your behavior. But we misunderstand if we think that this negative rule captures the full meaning of the Rule of Jesus—the Golden Rule.

Let’s look at the words of Jesus again, recorded in Matthew 7:12. “.....” Notice the clear difference between this rule of Jesus and the rules that I just quoted from Hillel, Confucius and Mahavira. The rule of Jesus is positive. Active. Don’t just refrain from negative conduct. Rather, actively do good! Treat others the way that you would like to be treated.

Jesus tell us that this simple principle to guide our interaction with others “is the Law and the Prophets.” In other words, the Hebrew Scriptures, the Word of God that was available to the people of God at that time, testifies to the truth of this life principle.

Can you think of anywhere in the Hebrew Scriptures, the Old Testament, that confirms this Golden Rule of Jesus: Do to others what you would have them do to you? Certainly, there is the Word of the LORD in Leviticus 19:18, which is later quoted by Jesus: “You shall love your neighbor as yourself.” Isn’t that how we really want to be treated? We want to be loved. To be cherished. To be treated with respect and care.

Jesus says, “Do to others what you want them to do to you.” In another place, Jesus says, “Love one another.” That’s really another statement of the same rule, isn’t it? Demonstrate love in the way that you relate to each other. Don’t just avoid doing bad things to each other. That’s important, but walking with Jesus involves more than just avoiding doing bad things. Rather, actively seek to do good. Treat each other the way that you want to be treated. Love each other. That’s a wonderful rule for life, isn’t it?

I like Eugene Peterson’s translation of these words of Jesus, found in the Message Bible. Listen: “Here is a simple, rule-of-thumb guide for behavior: Ask yourself what you want people to do for you, then grab the initiative and do it for them. Add up God's Law and Prophets and this is what you get.”

That’s a great way of putting it in contemporary English, isn’t it? “Here is a simple, rule-of-thumb guide for behavior: Ask yourself what you want people to do for you, then grab the initiative and do it for them. Add up God's Law and Prophets and this is what you get.”

Unfortunately, Eugene Peterson fails to translate one very important word that’s found in this saying of Jesus. It is seem like a minor omission, but actually this one word is very important if we are going to understand the Golden Rule of Jesus. What is that one word that Eugene Peterson failed to translate? It’s the one word that we haven’t yet considered in our study of this Golden Rule of Jesus, found in Matthew 7:12. What is the one word? **Therefore.**

The NIV translates use the word “So...” Someone once told me that whenever you see the word “therefore”, you should always ask what it’s there for?! Therefore is a conjunction. It joins what comes before with what comes after. “The tour bus is going to leave at 1:00 PM sharp. We are not going to be delayed for any reason. Therefore, you need to be on the bus and

in your seat by 12:55 PM at the latest!” Did you see how the “therefore” joined what came after with that which came before?

Do let’s go back to the great sermon of Jesus, the Sermon on the Mount. In His Golden Rule, Jesus says, “Therefore, whatever you want men to do to you, do also to them, for this is the Law and the Prophets.” Therefore, do to others what you want them to do to you. What is the “therefore” there for? Well, what has Jesus just been talking about?

Look at the beginning of Chapter 7, beginning with verse 1. “.....” Jesus begins this section of His great sermon by saying, “Don’t treat others like this!” Don’t judge. Jesus isn’t saying “Don’t use any common sense!” He isn’t saying, “Don’t use good judgment when making decisions.” We know that because just a few sentences later, Jesus says, in Matthew 7:6, “Don’t give what is holy to the dogs; nor cast your pearls before swine, lest they trample them under feet, and turn and tear you to pieces.” We need to use common sense in our interaction with others, especially those who have no appreciation for that which is holy, for that which is precious.

So Jesus isn’t saying, “Don’t use any common sense. Don’t use any judgment.” Rather Jesus is saying, “Don’t have a critical spirit!” “Don’t always think that it’s your job to correct people!” And then Jesus gives a humorous word picture! Listen to the words of Jesus, recorded in Matthew 7:3-5. “.....” I’m sure that those listening to Jesus there on the mountainside were chuckling! It’s a funny picture that Jesus paints. But it’s also sad. Because we see people who act like that.

Some people try to take a speck out of someone else’s eye while having a huge plank, a huge log in their own eye! And that huge plank, that log, that obscures their vision is that

critical, condemning spirit. Jesus says, “Don’t act like that!” Why not? Because that kind of behavior doesn’t reflect the beautiful character of our loving Father in heaven.

And what does the character of our loving Father in heaven look like? Well, we studied Matthew 7:7-11 last week. Our loving Father in heaven is generous and kind.

“.....” And what did we discover to be the primary good gifts that our loving heavenly Father longs to give to us? Do you remember from last week’s study? The gift of His own Son, Jesus. What did Jesus say in John 3:16? “God so loved the world that He gave....” What did our loving Father in heaven give? He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life?

And with the gift of Jesus, received by faith, comes salvation. With the gift of Jesus comes forgiveness and cleansing. With the gift of Jesus comes citizenship in the kingdom of heaven. There is no greater gift from our loving Father in heaven than the gift of Jesus.

And what did we learn is the secondary primary good gift that our loving Father in heaven longs to give to us? The gift of the Holy Spirit, to be with us and in us. How do we know that? Jesus told us, in Luke 11:13. “.....”

Our loving Father in heaven is pouring out His love to us. He is emptying heaven for us in the giving of His own Son and the giving of His Holy Spirit. Ask, seek, knock for these good gifts! I pray that someone here today, that someone joining us on our web church or via radio or television, I’m praying that you would decide to say “Yes” to our loving Father in heaven’s good gifts today! Say “Yes” to Jesus today. Say “Yes” to the Holy Spirit today.

“If you, then,” Jesus says, “being evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father who is in heaven give good things to those who ask Him!” And

then comes the Golden Rule—therefore....in the light of the amazing love that your heavenly Father has poured out for you, therefore.... Do you see the connection? **Therefore.**

We don't just actively seek to do good to each other, to treat each other the way that we would like to be treated, because it's the right thing to do. It is the right thing to do, but that is not our motivation. We live by the Golden Rule of Jesus because that's how our loving Father in heaven has related to us. Our loving Father in heaven has treated us not as we deserve, but how He would like to be treated if He were in our situation. Our loving Father in heaven has treated us with grace, with mercy, with love. Bless His holy name.

Now go, He says, and live like that!

When Jesus met in woman caught in the very act of adultery, He didn't stone her. He didn't humiliate her publically, like the religious leaders were doing. Jesus practiced the Golden Rule. He treated her the way He would like to have been treated...with grace and mercy and love. "Neither do I condemn you," Jesus said to her. "Go and sin no more."

After Simon Peter had publically denied with curses that he even knew Jesus, the Savior didn't reject him. Jesus did have a private conversation with Simon Peter after Jesus was raised from the dead. That conversation was so private that it is not even recorded in the Scriptures. Our Savior is merciful, isn't He? And then publically, Jesus reinstated Peter and said, "Feed my sheep." Jesus practiced the Golden Rule with Peter. He treated Peter the way that He would like to have been treated, with grace and mercy and love.

I remember hearing the story of a young man who came to church for the worship service. This young man didn't dress like everyone else. He didn't smell like everyone else. He actually looked like he'd had some hard days, and hard nights. When he arrived at church, the

sanctuary was full. We know what that feels like here at Forest Lake Church, especially at 3rd service. There wasn't a seat available, at least not that this young man could see. So he walked up quietly up to the front and sat down on the carpet. He seemed quite interested in the message that the preacher was sharing from the Word of God. That's when an elderly gentleman came walking up to the front from the back of the church. The church members recognized him. He was a long time church member. This elderly gentleman walked right up to where the young man was sitting on the carpet, sat down next to him, shook his hand, and whispered, "I'm glad you came to church!" That, my friends, is living the Golden Rule! That is treating someone the way that you would like to be treated...with grace and mercy and love.

When I heard that story, I began to wince as I pictured that elderly gentleman walking up to the front. You know what I was thinking, don't you? It's sad, but I was expecting that elderly church member to criticize that young man for not being dressed right, or not smelling right, or not sitting in the right place. But that grey haired church member was walking with Jesus. He knew how much grace and mercy and love had been shown to him. And He was walking with Jesus. He treated that young man the way that he would want to have been treated!

So when you see someone come to church who is struggling in his marriage, don't just bash him over the head for being such a terrible husband and father. It's true that he may have made some mistakes, but he doesn't need you to judge him, to criticize him, to make him feel bad. Practice the Golden Rule of Jesus. Treat that brother how YOU would like to be treated! Treat that brother with the grace and mercy and love that your loving Father in heaven has shown to you. Practice the Golden Rule. Go and live like that!

Our son and daughter in law will be finishing dental school in a few weeks and moving to

Dallas, Texas. I found the closest church to where they are going to be living and I called the pastor. I told him what it meant for me that my children could find a church home where they could continue to feel loved and welcomed, a church where they could grow spiritually and walk with Jesus. Our son and daughter in law visited that church a few weeks ago, and my son called me to tell me what had happened. I held my breath as I listened to his report! “Dad,” he said, “we’ve never felt more welcomed in our whole lives!” And I said, “Praise the Lord! Thank you, Jesus.” Those people in Texas were living by the Golden Rule!

I pray that we could have the same report when people visit our church family, don’t you? “I’ve have never felt more welcomed in my whole life!” I try to shake some hands. But I can’t shake everyone’s hand. I try to invite some people to lunch. But I can’t have all of you over, especially with my wife out of town! You’d be cooking for me! We need to work as a team. We all need to live the Golden Rule of Jesus: Treat others the way that we want to be treated! Love others, just as our loving Father in heaven has shown love to us.

Go, and live like that! And when people ask you why you are so generous, when people ask you why you are so kind, when people ask you why you are so loving, you tell them that you are not trying to work your way to heaven. You are already a citizen of the kingdom of heaven. You tell them how good your loving Father in heaven has been to you, and that, by His grace, you are reflecting the beauty of His character to others. That’s what Jesus did when He walked on this earth. And you are walking with Jesus! So, go and live like that!