

The Heart of the Golden Rule

December 31, 2017 Matthew 7:12

Sermon by Kelly Larsen

Matthew 7:12 - New American Standard Bible (NASB)

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

1. What is the golden rule?

a. *Love your neighbor as yourself:*

- i. Read Leviticus 19:18, Matthew 22:35-40, and Galatians 5:14. What command is common to all three of these passages? How does this command relate to the "golden rule"?

- ii. How do the above passages relate to the "Law" referred to in Matthew 7:12?

- iii. Explain the following statement: "The heart of the golden rule is love, and your love for others is made visible by how you treat them."

- iv. If you claim to love someone, but consistently treat them poorly, what is the true quality of your love?

b. *Love your neighbor as yourself in all things:*

- i. Re-read Matthew 7:12. What portion of this verse makes clear that you are to love your neighbor as yourself in "all things"?

- ii. "In everything" must include your thinking, your attitudes, and your actions:

(A) If you harbor hatred in your heart for someone, but outwardly treat them well, are you obeying the heart of the "golden rule"? If no, why not?

(B) If you view yourself as superior to others, rather than having humility and recognizing your poverty of spirit, are you obeying the heart of the "golden rule"? If no, why not?

(C) If you see someone in need or hurting and turn a blind eye, are you obeying the heart of the "golden rule"? If no, why not? What might it look like to actively engage others or move toward others in kindness when they are in need or are hurting?

c. Love your neighbor as yourself in keeping with the law:

- i. How might the command to “treat others the way you want to be treated” be used to justify mistreatment of others?
- ii. If you have a “leave me alone” attitude when you are in need or are hurting, would you be fulfilling the heart of the golden rule in doing the same to others who are in need or are hurting? If no, why not? Did God “leave us alone” when we were estranged from Him?
- iii. If a certain statement doesn’t bother you, but clearly bothers someone else when you say it to them, would it be in keeping with the heart of the golden rule to continue saying it? If no, why not?
- iv. Read Galatians 6:2. How can keeping the “golden rule” within the context of the law of Christ or the law of love help you to avoid using it to mistreat others?

2. Why does Jesus say the golden rule is the law and the prophets?

a. *Because they explain and illustrate this rule:*

- i. Read Exodus 20:13-17. How do these commands explain and illustrate the golden rule?
- ii. “You shall not murder...commit adultery...steal...bear false witness...” How are all of these “shall nots” fulfilled by obedience to the law of love or the “golden rule”?

b. *Because this rule is the summation of the underlying law:*

- i. Read Genesis 1:26. We have been made in God’s image (likeness) with an intention and purpose in life. The “underlying law” is that we are to be like God (in character) in the way we engage with people and interact with His creation. How does being made by God as His image-bearers or representatives relate to our call to fulfill the law? (Ref. Leviticus 19:2, Ephesians 5:1-2, and 1 John 4:7-8)
- ii. God does not murder, lie, or steal. He does not sin. If we are to be imitators of God, how should God’s moral perfection guide us as we interact with others? (Ref. Matthew 5:48)
- iii. Explain the following statement: “Love is the heart of the law because God is love and we were created to be like Him.”

3. How should you respond?

It can be tempting to respond to this teaching in wrong ways. Firstly, you can be tempted to despair when confronted with the command to imitate God's moral perfection. This can lead to a life of wanton self-pleasure and self-gratification or to a life of giving up because you feel you can never measure up anyway. Secondly, you can be tempted to resolve to "do better" at this by your own strength and will-power. Neither response is what the Lord wants. God has something different in mind:

a. *Acknowledge your brokenness in these things:*

- i. Re-read Matthew 7:12. Is it possible to live out this command perfectly? In what areas or relationships do you fall short? How does the gospel apply when you fail to "treat others the way you want to be treated"?

b. *Persistently seek for help in these things:*

- i. Read Matthew 7:7. What does this passage teach is the proper response to a kingdom-related need in your life? Does an understanding of your brokenness in how you treat others drive you to despair or to prayer? What should it drive you to?

c. *Learn to rely upon the Holy Spirit in these things:*

- i. Read Luke 11:9-13. According to this passage, after you've persisted in asking God to meet your kingdom-related need, what is it that He provides?
- ii. For what purpose does the Father promise the Holy Spirit to those who ask?
- iii. Can you, in your own strength, obey Christ's command to "love your neighbor as yourself" in thought, word, and deed? If no, why not?
- iv. Explain the following statement: "Grace is given to those who give up on themselves [for righteousness]."

Closing Thought:

*The key to the Christian life is to give up on yourself and to give yourself over to God who gives grace.
Have you?*