



Matthew 7:12

12 So in everything, do to others what you would have them do to you, for this sums up the Law and the Prophets.

Reflection

The 'Golden Rule,' one of the most famous verses in the bible and Jesus' majestic summary of the body of the Sermon on the Mount. 'So in everything, do to

others what you would have them do to you.’ You’ll remember that the Sermon on the Mount began with the Beatitudes in Matthew 5:1–12, those heady statements about how radically countercultural the kingdom of God is when compared with the kingdom of the world. Jesus then gave us those famous overarching pictures of who we are as members of kingdom of God; we’re salt and light. And then the body of the sermon, the sermon proper, began in Matthew 5:17 with these words,

17 “Do not think that I have come to abolish the Law or the Prophets; I have not come to abolish them but to fulfill them.

And with these words and throughout the rest of chapter five Jesus began his mas-

terclass on the Old Testament Law. He laid bare its deepest implications and showed us how he has come to both fulfill it and to fill out its teaching. In doing so he not only exposed the incompetency of the Jewish leaders in their teaching, but he also demonstrated their hypocrisy. In Chapter 6 Jesus then turned on their hypocrisy, focussing on the three pillars of Jewish religious practice: giving to the needy, prayer and fasting. Jesus condemned their self-righteous outward show in these areas and instead taught us how to give, pray and fast as members of the kingdom of God should; to great effect both in this life and the life to come. In the second half of chapter six Jesus turned his sights to the Gentile world. The Jews' problem was hypocrisy, for the Gentiles it was materialism. 'Don't chase after material things

like the pagans do; members of the kingdom of God serve God, not money. And we don't need to be anxious and worry about these things because our Heavenly Father knows what we need and he will provide for us. Seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well. And then Jesus brings the body of his sermon to a conclusion at the start of chapter seven showing us how judgmentalism has no place in kingdom of God, and teaching us further about the power of prayer, as we've seen over the past few days.

Today Jesus concludes the body of his sermon with the majestic summary of its ethical content which has famously come to be known as the Golden Rule. From a literary perspective we know that it is the

conclusion this section because it mentions the ‘Law and the Prophets.’ The body of the sermon opened in Matthew 5:17 with a reference to the Law and the Prophets and now this second mention closes the section, working as bookends (the technical term is *inclusio*).

Why call it the Golden Rule? Well if you think about it, it is the rule to end all rules. If you were to take out a pen and attempt to list all the rules, commands and ethical implications within even just the Sermon on the Mount, you’d find that there are so many that you’d fill a book trying to write them all down – let alone the thought of memorising them, recalling them to mind and trying to regularly apply them in your life. And if you were to expand this exercise to all of the Law and the Prophets,

the whole Old Testament, this work would become the work of many lifetimes. That's why the Golden Rule is the rule to end all rules. If you keep the Golden rule then you'll be keeping all the others. If you 'do to others what you would have them do to you,' *in everything* mind you (!), then by following this one rule you are fulfilling all of the bible's ethical commands. It's very similar to Jesus' command to love your neighbour as yourself, they're both rules to end all rules, they're both foundational Christian teachings upon which we can confidently base our lives.

Some really interesting studies have been done tracing the Golden Rule through many other religions. Close parallels to it come from Confucius, Epictetus, the Stoics, Buddhism and several Jewish writings

– but all with one major difference: they are all stated in the negative. For example, the great Jewish Rabbi Hillel said ‘What is hateful to yourself, do to no other; that is the whole Law; the rest is a commentary.’ All of them are stated in the negative, basically saying ‘Do not do to others what you would not want them to do to you.’ But there is such an incredible and profound difference between teaching simply ‘don’t harm people’ and teaching, ‘in everything, treat people with the same level of love and care and respect and consideration that you would like to be treated with.’

The Golden Rule is so much wiser – and so much more difficult. Jesus is again showing us how radically countercultural being a member of the kingdom of God is. He’s showing us how radically the motivations

of our minds and hearts have been, and are continuing to be, transformed by the Holy Spirit.

In giving us the Golden Rule, Jesus is summarising his teaching on how we are to live as members of the kingdom of God in the following way: in everything, fix your attention on the needs, cares, loves, joys, hopes and dreams of other people, and treat them as you would be treated yourself in all these areas. I don't know about you but this blows my mind! Stop for a moment and think about it. Such radical other-person-centred love takes me straight to the cross of Christ and his sacrificial love in laying down his life for us. But in the same breath my mind races to what a community of believers would look like if we all practiced the Golden Rule with

all our hearts. That's the Kingdom of God, what a powerful witness this would be to the kingdom of this world!

Think

Take some time now to keep thinking down this track on your own. Can you imagine the love and peace and harmony and fellowship and friendship that would characterize a community of believers who each made the Golden Rule their first priority? Or even just within your household at home? What would your family look like if in everything each member put the needs, and hopes, and aspirations of each other member on par with their own? Imagine how this type of living would bind your family together in love and what witness they would be to the so many struggling

and broken families all around us. 'In everything, do to others what you would have them do to you.' On a personal level, how can you increasingly obey the Golden Rule in your life? What opportunities does this morning, the day ahead, this evening, this week hold for you in terms of treating those around you as you would have them treat you? How can you prioritise their hopes, their fears, their needs and joys and dreams? What's stopping you doing so? What obstacles are there in your life and heart that are stopping you from loving people like this? Is it busyness, is it selfishness, is it a chasing after the things of this world in place of the things of God?

Prayer

And then commit these thoughts and med-

itations of your heart to God in prayer. Pray that by the transforming power of his Holy Spirit the Golden Rule would become for you as natural as breathing. And then pray that it would be contagious to those around you so that your Christian friendships and family life and church relationships might experience the peace and harmony and love that Christ intends for us, and that you and them together might powerfully become salt and light to our world.