



Luke 6:31

31 Do to others as you would have them do to you.

Reflection

Today's passage comes from Luke 6:31. Let me read it to you.

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And with these eleven short words Jesus

hands down a principle which many consider a majestic summary of all his ethical teaching, and indeed, all the ethical teaching in the Old Testament. The verse has famously come to be known as the 'Golden Rule' along with its counterpart in Matthew 7:12 which reads,

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

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 Luke's Gospel, 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 (who trained the apostle Paul) 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. And yet what a gift! We’ve been struggling through some very difficult teachings these past few days – yet somehow today’s passage makes Jesus’ radical teaching attainable. ‘Love your enemy’; ‘Turn the other cheek’; ‘If someone takes your coat, do not withhold your shirt from them’; ‘Give to everyone who asks of you’; ‘If anyone takes what belongs to you, do not demand it back’; somehow, all of these are softened and deepened and made possible by this overriding eth-

ic, this 'Golden Rule',

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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?

Pray

And then commit these thoughts and meditations 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.