

The Golden Rule

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11/1/2009

Introduction

The golden rule is twice set forth in the gospels (Matt. 7:12; Luke 6:27-31). In some respects the concept was not unknown before Christ. The renowned Jewish rabbi Hillel said: "That which is hateful to you, do not do to your fellow." Confucius said, "Never impose on others what you would not choose for yourself." However, these negative formulations cannot rival the positive statement of Jesus. Declaring this a principle of supreme importance, the Lord demonstrated the golden rule in His own life, and demands that it be reflected in ours.

Matthew 7:12 ... 12 Therefore all things whatsoever ye would that men should do to you, do ye even so to them: for this is the law and the prophets. (KJV)

Matthew 7:12 ... 12 "In everything, therefore, treat people the same way you want them to treat you, for this is the Law and the Prophets. (NASB95)

Luke 6:27-31 ... 27 "But I say to you who hear, love your enemies, do good to those who hate you, 28 bless those who curse you, pray for those who mistreat you. 29 "Whoever hits you on the cheek, offer him the other also; and whoever takes away your coat, do not withhold your shirt from him either. 30 "Give to everyone who asks of you, and whoever takes away what is yours, do not demand it back. 31 "Treat others the same way you want them to treat you. (NASB95)

One could heed the counsel of Hillel or Confucius by avoiding hurtful and harmful actions. One could satisfy the negative formulation by simply doing nothing. Sir Thomas Browne once said, "We are beholden unto everyone we meet that he doth not kill us." Perhaps so, but this is not a very high view of man's nobility. The negative expression of this rule does not begin to promote good behavior as does the positive expression of Jesus Christ. If we stopped with the prohibitive formula, we would never be truly useful to others.

The golden rule places a great responsibility upon Christians. We must actively do to others what we would have them do to us. This makes life more complicated. We have less time to spend on our own wants and wishes. Time and time again we will have to stop what we are doing to help someone else. It is one thing to say, "I must not harm people." It is quite another thing to say, "I must go out of my way to help another person."

Characteristics

It Is A Fulfillment Of The Law

The golden rule is an expression of the second most important principle in the Bible. The greatest commandment of Scripture is that we must love God with all our heart, soul, mind and being. The second is that we must love our neighbor as our self. The golden rule summarizes how God expects us to treat our fellow man (Matt. 22:37-40; Rom. 13:8-10; Gal. 5:13-15).

Matthew 22:37-40 ... 37 And He said to him, “ ‘You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind.’ 38 “This is the great and foremost commandment. 39 “The second is like it, ‘You shall love your neighbor as yourself.’ 40 “On these two commandments depend the whole Law and the Prophets.” (NASB95)

Romans 13:8-10 ... 8 Owe nothing to anyone except to love one another; for he who loves his neighbor has fulfilled the law. 9 For this, “You shall not commit adultery, You shall not murder, You shall not steal, You shall not covet,” and if there is any other commandment, it is summed up in this saying, “You shall love your neighbor as yourself.” 10 Love does no wrong to a neighbor; therefore love is the fulfillment of the law. (NASB95)

Galatians 5:13-15 ... 13 For you were called to freedom, brethren; only do not turn your freedom into an opportunity for the flesh, but through love serve one another. 14 For the whole Law is fulfilled in one word, in the statement, “You shall love your neighbor as yourself.” 15 But if you bite and devour one another, take care that you are not consumed by one another. (NASB95)

It Is Based On Love

The golden rule is based on love. Our fellowman should be treated, not as the law allows, but as love demands (1 Cor. 13:1-7). This carries us beyond mawkish sentiment to a love anchored in action (1 John 3:16-18). Pursuing active good will, we should treat others as we would like to be treated (2 Tim. 2:22).

1 Corinthians 13:1-7 ... 1 If I speak with the tongues of men and of angels, but do not have love, I have become a noisy gong or a clanging cymbal. 2 If I have the gift of prophecy, and know all mysteries and all knowledge; and if I have all faith, so as to remove mountains, but do not have love, I am nothing. 3 And if I give all my possessions to feed the poor, and if I surrender my body to be burned, but do not have love, it profits me nothing. 4 Love is patient, love is kind and is not jealous; love does not brag and is not arrogant, 5 does not act unbecomingly; it does not seek its own, is not provoked, does not take into account a wrong suffered, 6 does not rejoice in unrighteousness, but rejoices with the truth; 7 bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things. (NASB95)

1 John 3:16-18 ... 16 We know love by this, that He laid down His life for us; and we ought to lay down our lives for the brethren. 17 But whoever has the world's goods, and sees his brother in need and closes his heart against him, how does the love of God abide in him? 18 Little children, let us not love with word or with tongue, but in deed and truth. (NASB95)

2 Timothy 2:22 ... 22 Now flee from youthful lusts and pursue righteousness, faith, love and peace, with those who call on the Lord from a pure heart. (NASB95)

It Is Reasonable and Clear

The golden rule is reasonable and clear (Matt. 13:9-16; Acts 28:23-28; Rev. 2:7). We know how we would like to be treated. Instead of letting self-interest blind us to our duty, it becomes the standard of proper conduct: If you have trouble figuring out what to do in a given situation, simply ask, "How would I like to be treated?"

Matthew 13:9-16 ... 9 "He who has ears, let him hear." 10 And the disciples came and said to Him, "Why do You speak to them in parables?" 11 Jesus answered them, "To you it has been granted to know the mysteries of the kingdom of heaven, but to them it has not been granted. 12 "For whoever has, to him more shall be given, and he will have an abundance; but whoever does not have, even what he has shall be taken away from him. 13 "Therefore I speak to them in parables; because while seeing they do not see, and while hearing they do not hear, nor do they understand. 14 "In their case the prophecy of Isaiah is being fulfilled, which says, 'You will keep on hearing, but will not understand; You will keep on seeing, but will not perceive; 15 For the heart of this people has become dull, With their ears they scarcely hear, And they have closed their eyes, Otherwise they would see with their eyes, Hear with their ears, And understand with their heart and return, And I would heal them.' 16 "But blessed are your eyes, because they see; and your ears, because they hear. (NASB95)

Acts 28:23-28 ... 23 When they had set a day for Paul, they came to him at his lodging in large numbers; and he was explaining to them by solemnly testifying about the kingdom of God and trying to persuade them concerning Jesus, from both the Law of Moses and from the Prophets, from morning until evening. 24 Some were being persuaded by the things spoken, but others would not believe. 25 And when they did not agree with one another, they began leaving after Paul had spoken one parting word, "The Holy Spirit rightly spoke through Isaiah the prophet to your fathers, 26 saying, 'Go to this people and say, "You will keep on hearing, but will not understand; And you will keep on seeing, but will not perceive; 27 For the heart of this people has become dull, And with their ears they scarcely hear, And they have closed their eyes; Otherwise they might see with their eyes, And hear with their ears, And understand with their heart and return, And I would heal them." ' 28 "Therefore let it be known to you that this salvation of God has been sent to the Gentiles; they will also listen." (NASB95)

Revelation 2:7 ... 7 'He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches. To him who overcomes, I will grant to eat of the tree of life which is in the Paradise of God.' (NASB95)

Application

Our Neighbors

The golden rule should be shown toward our neighbors (Exod. 20:12-17; Luke 10:29-37; Gal. 6:10). If we love our neighbor, we will not cheat him, covet his possessions, lie about him, etc. If we love our neighbor, we will desire the best for him, both physically and spiritually. We must treat our neighbor as we would like to be treated.

Exodus 20:12-17 ... 12 "Honor your father and your mother, that your days may be prolonged in the land which the Lord your God gives you. 13 "You shall not murder. 14 "You shall not commit adultery. 15 "You shall not steal. 16 "You shall not bear false witness against your neighbor. 17 "You shall not covet your neighbor's house; you shall not covet your neighbor's wife or his male servant or his female servant or his ox or his donkey or anything that belongs to your neighbor." (NASB95)

Luke 10:29-37 ... 29 But wishing to justify himself, he said to Jesus, "And who is my neighbor?" 30 Jesus replied and said, "A man was going down from Jerusalem to Jericho, and fell among robbers, and they stripped him and beat him, and went away leaving him half dead. 31 "And by chance a priest was going down on that road, and when he saw him, he passed by on the other side. 32 "Likewise a Levite also, when he came to the place and saw him, passed by on the other side. 33 "But a Samaritan, who was on a journey, came upon him; and when he saw him, he felt compassion, 34 and came to him and bandaged up his wounds, pouring oil and wine on them; and he put him on his own beast, and brought him to an inn and took care of him. 35 "On the next day he took out two denarii and gave them to the innkeeper and said, 'Take care of him; and whatever more you spend, when I return I will repay you.' 36 "Which of these three do you think proved to be a neighbor to the man who fell into the robbers' hands?" 37 And he said, "The one who showed mercy toward him." Then Jesus said to him, "Go and do the same." (NASB95)

Galatians 6:10 ... 10 So then, while we have opportunity, let us do good to all people, and especially to those who are of the household of the faith. (NASB95)

Our Brethren

The golden rule should be manifested toward our brethren (Eph. 4:1-3, 29-32; Col. 3:12-14). We should constantly look for ways to edify and encourage one another. We should set the right example before each other. We should help one another in time of need. We should be kind and considerate, respectful and patient. This should be seen in our words and deeds. We must treat our brethren as we would like to be treated.

Ephesians 4:1-3 ... 1 Therefore I, the prisoner of the Lord, implore you to walk in a manner worthy of the calling with which you have been called, 2 with all humility and

gentleness, with patience, showing tolerance for one another in love, 3 being diligent to preserve the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace. (NASB95)

Ephesians 4:29-32 ... 29 Let no unwholesome word proceed from your mouth, but only such a word as is good for edification according to the need of the moment, so that it will give grace to those who hear. 30 Do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God, by whom you were sealed for the day of redemption. 31 Let all bitterness and wrath and anger and clamor and slander be put away from you, along with all malice. 32 Be kind to one another, tender-hearted, forgiving each other, just as God in Christ also has forgiven you. (NASB95)

Colossians 3:12-14 ... 12 So, as those who have been chosen of God, holy and beloved, put on a heart of compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience; 13 bearing with one another, and forgiving each other, whoever has a complaint against anyone; just as the Lord forgave you, so also should you. 14 Beyond all these things put on love, which is the perfect bond of unity. (NASB95)

Our Family

The golden rule should be evident in the home (Eph. 5:25-33; 6:1-4; Col. 3:18-21). Husbands and wives, parents and children, should be considerate of one another. When we take our family for granted, the home becomes a place of conflict. Let us realize the need for courtesy and understanding. We must treat our family as we would like to be treated.

Ephesians 5:25-33 ... 25 Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ also loved the church and gave Himself up for her, 26 so that He might sanctify her, having cleansed her by the washing of water with the word, 27 that He might present to Himself the church in all her glory, having no spot or wrinkle or any such thing; but that she would be holy and blameless. 28 So husbands ought also to love their own wives as their own bodies. He who loves his own wife loves himself; 29 for no one ever hated his own flesh, but nourishes and cherishes it, just as Christ also does the church, 30 because we are members of His body. 31 For this reason a man shall leave his father and mother and shall be joined to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh. 32 This mystery is great; but I am speaking with reference to Christ and the church. 33 Nevertheless, each individual among you also is to love his own wife even as himself, and the wife must see to it that she respects her husband. (NASB95)

Ephesians 6:1-4 ... 1 Children, obey your parents in the Lord, for this is right. 2 Honor your father and mother (which is the first commandment with a promise), 3 so that it may be well with you, and that you may live long on the earth. 4 Fathers, do not provoke your children to anger, but bring them up in the discipline and instruction of the Lord. (NASB95)

Colossians 3:18-21 ... 18 Wives, be subject to your husbands, as is fitting in the Lord. 19 Husbands, love your wives and do not be embittered against them. 20 Children, be obedient to your parents in all things, for this is well-pleasing to the Lord. 21 Fathers, do not exasperate your children, so that they will not lose heart. (NASB95)

The Lost

The golden rule should be shown toward the lost (Gal. 6:1-2; 2 Tim. 2:1-2; James 5:19-20). We should be kind, but not withhold the truth. The kindest thing you can do for another person is to teach them the truth. Put yourself in their position. If you were lost, wouldn't you want someone to share the gospel with you? We must treat the lost as we would like to be treated.

Galatians 6:1-2 ... 1 Brethren, even if anyone is caught in any trespass, you who are spiritual, restore such a one in a spirit of gentleness; each one looking to yourself, so that you too will not be tempted. 2 Bear one another's burdens, and thereby fulfill the law of Christ. (NASB95)

2 Timothy 2:1-2 ... 1 You therefore, my son, be strong in the grace that is in Christ Jesus. 2 The things which you have heard from me in the presence of many witnesses, entrust these to faithful men who will be able to teach others also. (NASB95)

James 5:19-20 ... 19 My brethren, if any among you strays from the truth and one turns him back, 20 let him know that he who turns a sinner from the error of his way will save his soul from death and will cover a multitude of sins. (NASB95)

Our Enemies

The golden rule should govern our relationship with our enemies (Matt. 5:43-48; Rom. 12:18-21). We may not appreciate or condone their actions. However, remember that Christian love is not rooted in emotion, but is a principle by which we live. We must treat our enemies as we would like to be treated.

Matthew 5:43-48 ... 43 "You have heard that it was said, 'You shall love your neighbor and hate your enemy.' 44 "But I say to you, love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, 45 so that you may be sons of your Father who is in heaven; for He causes His sun to rise on the evil and the good, and sends rain on the righteous and the unrighteous. 46 "For if you love those who love you, what reward do you have? Do not even the tax collectors do the same? 47 "If you greet only your brothers, what more are you doing than others? Do not even the Gentiles do the same? 48 "Therefore you are to be perfect, as your heavenly Father is perfect. (NASB95)

Romans 12:18-21 ... 18 If possible, so far as it depends on you, be at peace with all men. 19 Never take your own revenge, beloved, but leave room for the wrath of God, for it is written, "Vengeance is Mine, I will repay," says the Lord. 20 "But if your enemy is hungry, feed him, and if he is thirsty, give him a drink; for in so doing you will heap burning coals on his head." 21 Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good. (NASB95)

Conclusion

Christianity is a religion of life. We must treat all men as we would like to be treated. However, full application of the golden rule is hopelessly beyond our reach until we become disciples of Christ. Men in the world can observe the negative form of the golden rule, but only those who have the love of God within their hearts can fully satisfy the positive formulation of Jesus Christ. To fully obey this command, we must be born again (Gal. 2:20; Rom. 12:1-2; 1 Pet. 1:22-25).

Galatians 2:20 ... 20 "I have been crucified with Christ; and it is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me; and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave Himself up for me. (NASB95)

Romans 12:1-2 ... 1 Therefore I urge you, brethren, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies a living and holy sacrifice, acceptable to God, which is your spiritual service of worship. 2 And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, so that you may prove what the will of God is, that which is good and acceptable and perfect. (NASB95)

1 Peter 1:22-25 ... 22 Since you have in obedience to the truth purified your souls for a sincere love of the brethren, fervently love one another from the heart, 23 for you have been born again not of seed which is perishable but imperishable, that is, through the living and enduring word of God. 24 For, "All flesh is like grass, And all its glory like the flower of grass. The grass withers, And the flower falls off, 25 But the word of the Lord endures forever." And this is the word which was preached to you. (NASB95)