

The Golden Rule

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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.

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).

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).

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?”

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.

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.

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.

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.

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.

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).