

Learning from the Sermon on the Mount #36 “The Golden Rule”

October 24, 2021 Message Notes

Matthew 7:12 “So in everything, do to others what you would have them do to you, for this sums up the Law and the Prophets.”

■ The Meaning of the Golden Rule

- Excellence: The teaching “Do not do anything that others would not like (that would be a nuisance to them) is found in many cultures, including Japan, but this proactive, affirmative teaching of Jesus is unique. It requires that we act in the best interest of the other person, hoping for the best for them.
- The requirement of praxis: Just because Christianity has such an outstanding message does not imply that this teaching is easily implemented. We actually spend most of our time thinking only about ourselves and we take little interest in other people. Jesus is not instructing us about the superlativeness of Christian ethics, but calling us to put them into practice.
- So in everything: With these words, Jesus begins to sum up his message and call us to action.
- Flow: To summarize the message so far, those who face their true nature and feel sorrow over the poverty of their own hearts will meet the Lord, who awaits each one with tenderness. Only as they are raised up by the grace of the Lord (not just once, but continuously) can they live out this Golden Rule.
- Motivation: The Golden Rule is predicated on my having the experience of God doing for me what I really wanted (needed) him to do for me, so that I can now do the same thing for others. Last week I shared about how relieved I am that God did not answer (affirmatively) all of the prayers that I prayed. His motivation for action is always love, so He always acts in my best interest. In the same way, I will act in the best interests of others.
- God’s Love: “The Law and the Prophets” refers to the Old Testament, which can be summed up in one word: Jesus, who personifies compassion and love for people. Some may say that the Old Testament is mechanical and somehow cold, but this is not true (Matthew 22:34-40, “The spirit of the law is love”). The Bible consistently reveals God’s love to us.

■ Jesus Never Preaches without Application

- The Sermon on the Mount draws to its conclusion (application) by giving four different examples which emphasize praxis.
- Jesus always intends that His messages be put into practice. He wants us to live out what we know, and He is confident that we are able to do so.
- His ultimate goal is for people to change (for lives to change). How about each one of us? Have our lives been changed by placing our trust in God?

■ What Do We Actually Want People to Do for Us?

- Christian maturity is revealed in our attitude towards others. It is measured by how far a self-centered person is changed to have the heart of Jesus.

Galatians 5:14 “For the entire law is fulfilled in keeping this one command: “Love your neighbor as yourself.”

- How can we, as selfish people, become kind and sympathetic towards others?

Mark 12:29-31 ²⁹“The most important one,” answered Jesus, “is this: ‘Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God, the Lord is one. ³⁰Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind and with all your strength.’ ³¹The second is this: ‘Love your neighbor as yourself.’ There is no commandment greater than these.”

- The goal is to love our neighbors, but an ordered process is required to reach the goal. The Sermon on the Mount makes it clear that all things (relationships) start with a relationship with God. When that relationship is right, our relationship with ourselves and with others will also be restored.
- In a moment of desperation in your life, have you experienced a miracle of God? What truths about God and about life have you learned as a result? What you have learned through life's crises has shaped your character and nature. What message has God taught you through life's hardships?

■ True Consideration: Paul's Example

- Paul's compassion for Philemon and Onesimus (Letter to Philemon)

Letter to Philemon ¹⁰that I appeal to you for my son Onesimus, who became my son while I was in chains. ¹¹Formerly he was useless to you, but now he has become useful both to you and to me. ¹²I am sending him—who is my very heart—back to you. ¹³I would have liked to keep him with me so that he could take your place in helping me while I am in chains for the gospel. ¹⁴But I did not want to do anything without your consent, so that any favor you do would not seem forced but would be voluntary. ¹⁵Perhaps the reason he was separated from you for a little while was that you might have him back forever— ¹⁶no longer as a slave, but better than a slave, as a dear brother. He is very dear to me but even dearer to you, both as a fellow man and as a brother in the Lord. ¹⁷So if you consider me a partner, welcome him as you would welcome me. ¹⁸If he has done you any wrong or owes you anything, charge it to me.

- Here, Paul is doing for Philemon and Onesimus what he would have wanted them to do for him (God's will). Where did Paul learn/experience this compassion?
- Paul's experience of Barnabas' compassion was very influential in his life—being received by the Jerusalem Church (Acts 9:26-28) and invited to join the work of the Antioch Church (Acts 11:22-26). Paul had actually spent three years alone with God in the wilderness before going to the Jerusalem Church (Galatians 1:11-18) That experience formed the foundation of his life.

Galatians 1:15-18 ¹⁵But when God, who set me apart from my mother's womb and called me by his grace, was pleased ¹⁶to reveal his Son in me so that I might preach him among the Gentiles, my immediate response was not to consult any human being. ¹⁷I did not go up to Jerusalem to see those who were apostles before I was, but I went into Arabia. Later I returned to Damascus. ¹⁸Then after three years, I went up to Jerusalem to get acquainted with Cephas and stayed with him fifteen days.

- What did Paul learn in his wilderness? This wilderness experience is something that Christians must undergo in order to become usable to God (Moses, Joseph, David, Elijah, etc.), but there is one experience common to all of them: the stripping away of all that they had prided themselves on, so that they came to the point of only having faith in God.
- Paul's experience is recorded in Philippians 3, where he says that because of the greatness of knowing Christ, all he had learned and accomplished seemed like "dust" to him.

Philippians 3:7 But whatever were gains to me I now consider loss for the sake of Christ.

- What lessons have you learned in your life so far, and on whose behalf will you put them into practice?