

039: Measuring With the Golden Rule (based on Sermon #34 in the Life of Christ Series)

Have you heard of the Golden Rule?

- Are you able to recite it?
- All disciples of Jesus should have it memorized, for it is yet another qualification for kingdom inheritance shared by Jesus in the Sermon on the Mount.
- Matt 7:12 Therefore, whatever you want men to do to you, do also to them, for this is the Law and the Prophets.
- The Golden Rule in a nutshell is: *Do to others as you would have them do to you.*
- Jesus said it was a simple summary of what had been taught in the Old Testament law and prophets.

Commentator William Barclay said:

- “This is probably the most universally famous thing that Jesus ever said. With this commandment, the Sermon on the Mount reaches its summit. This saying of Jesus has been called “the capstone of the whole discourse.” It is the topmost peak of social ethics, and the Everest of all ethical teaching.”
- How did it become known as the *Golden Rule*, seeing that Jesus did not call it that?
- The moniker originated with "the Roman Emperor Alexander Severus (A.D. 222-35), who, though not a Christian, was reputedly so impressed by the comprehensiveness of this maxim of Jesus ... that he had it inscribed in gold on the wall of his chamber.”

Ungodly people — including some children of God — live by the opposite adage: *Do to others as they do to you.*

- Though this may be the natural response of our flesh, believers are to submit to be filled with the Spirit, and thereby live in Christlikeness, producing the fruit of the Spirit, not works of the flesh.
- The negative version of the Golden Rule is sometimes called the Silver Rule.
- *Do not do to others what you would not have them do to you.*
- Barclay said this form of the rule “is not an essentially religious rule at all. It is simply a common-sense statement without which no social intercourse at all would be possible.”
- In fact, societal laws are in large part based on this principle.
- Though Jesus did not teach the so-called Silver Rule, it is often how Christians apply His Golden Rule.
- They soften it in this manner.
- While this altered form of the rule is good as far as it goes, it does not go far enough.

Barclay describes the difference:

- “It is perfectly possible for people to observe the negative form of the Golden Rule. They could without very serious difficulty so discipline their lives that they would not do to others what they did not wish others to do to them; but the only people who can even begin to satisfy the positive form of the rule are those men and women who have the love of Christ within their hearts. They will try to forgive as they would wish to be forgiven, to help as they would wish to be helped, to praise as they would wish to be praised, to understand as they would wish to be understood. They will never seek to avoid doing things; they will always look for things to do. Clearly this will make life much more complicated; clearly

they will have much less time to spend on their own desires and their own activities, for time and time again they will have to stop what they are doing to help someone else. It will be a principle which will dominate their lives at home, in the factory, on the bus, in the office, in the street, on the train, in their leisure activities — everywhere. They can never do it until self withers and dies within their hearts. To obey this commandment, we must become new men and women with a new centre to our lives; and if the world was composed of people who sought to obey this rule, it would be a new world.”

Many commentators hold, and I would concur, that Matt. 7:12 is the end of a lengthy section of the Sermon on the Mount that Jesus started in 5:17.

- Notice the common elements in these two verses:
- Matt 5:17 Do not think that I came to destroy the Law or the Prophets. I did not come to destroy but to fulfill.
- Matt 7:12 Therefore, whatever you want men to do to you, do also to them, for this is the Law and the Prophets.
- Notice the reference in both verses to *the law and the prophets*, which Jesus did not come to destroy or abolish; He came to fulfill.
- In the intervening verses Jesus explains and expands *His law* — *the law of Christ* — which is a more comprehensive treatment of the Old Testament law and prophets.
- Unlike the manner in which the Pharisees were living — *outwardly* obeying the *letter* of the law — Jesus wants His disciples to *inwardly* obey the *spirit* of the law.

- He continues in ch. 5-6, and then into the early part of ch. 7, summarizing the heart of the Old Testament law and prophets.
- Living according to the law of Christ is what qualifies disciples to inherit the kingdom.
- Everything Jesus has said in detail in Matt. 5:1-7:11 can be summed up in one statement in 7:12 — the Golden Rule.
- *Do to others as you would have them do to you.*

An expanded understanding of the golden rule is found in the parallel text in Luke 6:

- Luke 6:31-36
- 31 Just as you want men to do to you, you also do to them likewise.
- 32 But if you love those who love you, what credit is that to you? For even sinners love those who love them.
- 33 And if you do good to those who do good to you, what credit is that to you? For even sinners do the same.
- 34 And if you lend to those from whom you hope to receive back, what credit is that to you? For even sinners lend to sinners to receive as much back.
- 35 But love your enemies, do good, and lend, hoping for nothing in return; and your reward will be great, and you will be sons of the Most High. For He is kind to the unthankful and evil.
- 36 Therefore be merciful, just as your Father also is merciful.

Here Jesus gives some examples of the golden rule in action.

- Notice v. 36 above in connection with v. 37:
- Luke 6:37 Judge not, and you shall not be judged. Condemn not, and you shall not be condemned. Forgive, and you will be forgiven.

- Keeping the connection in mind, return to Matt. 7 and look at v. 1:
- Matt 7:1 Judge not, that you be not judged.
- Considering the two texts in tandem, notice the principle Jesus is teaching: *Don't judge; rather, be merciful*. Other Scriptures expound on the same principle:

Rom 14:10-13

- 10 But why do you judge your brother? Or why do you show contempt for your brother? For we shall all stand before the judgment seat of Christ.
- 11 For it is written: "As I live, says the LORD, every knee shall bow to Me, and every tongue shall confess to God."
- 12 So then each of us shall give account of himself to God.
- 13 Therefore let us not judge one another anymore, but rather resolve this, not to put a stumbling block or a cause to fall in our brother's way.
- Jas 4:11 Do not speak evil of one another, brethren. He who speaks evil of a brother and judges his brother, speaks evil of the law and judges the law. But if you judge the law, you are not a doer of the law but a judge.
- Jas 4:12 There is one Lawgiver, who is able to save and to destroy. Who are you to judge another?
- Both of these texts warn of the rightful Judge who will judge all men. It is not our place to judge others.

Returning now to the main text in Matt. 7, we find that Jesus gives four ways to carry out the golden rule.

- **1. Treat others mercifully rather than judgmentally.**
- Does this mean we should never make judgments about people? Of course not!
- Parents have to make judgments all the time about their children's behavior and punish or reward accordingly.

The same is true of teachers with their students and even employers with their employees.

- The policeman makes a judgment when he determines that you were breaking the law and writes you a ticket or, worse yet, arrests you.
- A courtroom judge, who is a higher-level authority, determines whether the policeman was correct in his judgment, and if he thinks you are guilty, the judge will sentence you to appropriate punishment.
- Churches have to make judgments about the behavior of wayward members, who are in violation of the Scriptures, and in some cases, they must carry out church discipline.
- All of this comes with rightful, biblical authority.

For that matter, *everyone* has to make judgments about others in life.

- Otherwise, we could not fulfill the commands of Scriptures, such as:
- Prov. 22:24 Make no friendship with an angry man.
- Eph. 5:11 Have no fellowship with the unfruitful works of darkness, but rather expose them.
- To fulfill these commands, judgments must be made about people.
- Is this person angry?
- Is that person ungodly?
- Answering those questions requires that judgment calls be made, and rightly so.
- "Judge not" is obviously not a command to accept whatever people do without any criticism.
- We must *all* make judgments.

A common phrase used in our culture today, particularly by young people is: "Don't judge me!"

- Many say that to their parents or other authorities, and use it to try to sidestep their behavior.
- For example, if counseling an immoral Christian couple, I might say to them: “You should not live together apart from being married.
- “Immorality is sin, and will result in your being disinherited from the kingdom of the heavens, based on what God says in 1 Cor. 6:9-10.”
- If that couple responds to me, “Don’t judge us, because Matt. 7:1 says *judge not*,” then they are misusing the text.
- My pastoral counsel is biblically correct, and they should take heed to it humbly, since we are to be exhorting one another to love and good works.
- In that case, I would be judging in a proper, biblical sense.

If a parent says to their teenage child, “You shouldn’t listen to rock music,” and the child responds, “Don’t judge me,” then they have misused the text.

- For parents are God’s divinely-appointed judges of sorts in a child’s life.
- It is appropriate to make judgments, and particularly for authorities to do so!
- Even the Scriptures tell us to judge, but with certain conditions attached. For instance:
- John 7:24 (Jesus said), “Do not judge according to appearance, but judge with righteous judgment.”
- 1 John 4:1 Do not believe every spirit, but test the spirits, whether they are of God; because many false prophets have gone out into the world.
- Paul made a judgment, when he said, “Demas has forsaken me” (2 Tim. 4:10).

- Even in the Matt. 7 text, Jesus instructs us to make judgments:
- Matt 7:6 Do not give what is holy to the dogs; nor cast your pearls before swine, lest they trample them under their feet, and turn and tear you in pieces.
- Determining if someone is acting like a dog or a pig is making a judgment.
- I will explain that more fully in a moment.
- The point is, we must make judgments — even about people — all throughout life.

What, then, is Jesus talking about here when he says, “Judge not?”

- What is the meaning of the phrase?
- He is teaching that we must not have a judgmental spirit.
- How are we to avoid having a judgmental spirit?
- Jesus gives two words of guidance.
- First, don’t be hypocritical.
- In verses 3-5 Jesus talks about the *speck* in your brother’s eye when you have a *plank* in your own eye.
- The “speck and plank analogy” will be explained fully a bit later in this study.
- But for now, what is important to understand is that you must not judge the faults of others unless you are blameless — not sinless, of course, but without reproach, having all past offenses dealt with.
- Otherwise, you will be acting inconsistently and not taken seriously by the one being judged.

In other words, you only have the right to judge if you are living righteously.

- Even then, judging is to be tempered by another factor.
- Second, don’t have a condemning spirit.
- The word *judge* in vs. 1-2 literally means *to condemn*.

- The parallel text in Luke 6 that was quoted earlier, teaches the importance of having a *merciful* spirit, rather than a *condemning* one.
- A good application of this is in the area of preferences in the Christian life.
- In Paul's day he worked with many Gentiles who had been accustomed to eating meat offered to idols.
- After initial salvation, some could no longer in good conscience eat meat, lest it had been offered to idols, so they became vegetarian.

How did Paul deal with this delicate problem?

- Did he rebuke their personal choices and urge that they return to carnivorous eating?
- No, in Rom. 14:3 he said, "Let not him who eats despise him who does not eat, and let not him who does not eat judge him who eats; for God has received him."
- In other words, if you eat meat in good conscience, then don't look down upon, or treat contemptibly, those who are uncomfortable doing so.
- In like manner, those who cannot eat meat in good conscience should not despise those who are comfortable eating meat.
- The Greek word translated *judge* in this verse is the same as in Matt. 7:1.
- Don't have a critical, condemning spirit toward people, particularly in matters of preference.

Christians and churches must be very careful not to assume their own preference choices — oftentimes called "separational standards" or simply "convictions" — are "one-size-fits-all" for every believer and church.

- In matters where God's Word has not clearly spoken on a particular matter, room must be given to allow others to apply the Scriptures as they see fit.
- God does not expect all Christians to look like you or your church's way of applying Scripture.
- Condescending to other believers and churches who have made different preference choices in areas such as music, clothing, entertainment, hair styles, Bible versions, etc. — by treating them as disobedient or less spiritual or as having "lesser" standards — is judgmental, and a violation of Christ's admonition!
- Incidentally, those believers and churches who do not hold to those same convictions should also be careful — on the basis of Rom. 14:3 — not to treat their brethren disdainfully.

Granted, the Bible gives principles for making good spiritual decisions.

- But, in many cases, it doesn't tell us what decisions to make, and so it leaves some room for making judgments.
- We are all free to make preference choices, as long as they are in line with the principles of God's Word.
- Whether or not our choices are in line with God's Word is not for others to determine, but will be judged by God one day, to whom all will give an account.
- In the interim we should be gracious and merciful to each other, not having a condemning spirit, giving room for personal preferences, recognizing that having a non-judgmental spirit is a qualification for kingdom inheritance.

Jesus gives the primary reason why believers should not be judgmental.

- Matt 7:2 For with what judgment you judge, you will be judged; and with the measure you use, it will be measured back to you.
- If you are harsh and critical and condemning of others instead of showing mercy, God will deal with you in the same manner of harshness — with the same measure of judgment — in which you judge others. What a dreadful thought!
- Better to lean toward mercy and grace, not condemnation or criticism.
- For if you are harsh in judging others, then you will be treated in like manner at the Judgment Seat of Christ.
- Those who are merciful, on the other hand, will be shown mercy.
- That leads to a second way to carry out the Golden Rule.

2. Deal with your own faults before pointing out the faults of others.

- Matt 7:3 And why do you look at the speck in your brother's eye, but do not consider the plank in your own eye?
- Matt 7:4 Or how can you say to your brother, "Let me remove the speck from your eye;" and look, a plank is in your own eye?
- Matt 7:5 Hypocrite! First remove the plank from your own eye, and then you will see clearly to remove the speck from your brother's eye.
- It's not wrong to point out — and in that sense, to judge — the faults of others, *if* you do so in the right way, at the right time, and in love, for the purpose of helping them.
- Incidentally, if someone comes to you with some matter that needs to be corrected in *your* life, God wants you to

be just as gracious to *them* as you would want them to be to you. Is that not the Golden Rule in action?

Before judging someone, first be sure your heart is right, that you are not acting hypocritically.

- Sometimes we have difficulty seeing our own faults, our own failures, our own sins.
- They seem like mere specks (or splinters) in the eye, so to speak, no big deal to us.
- But for some reason, we can see faults clearly in others. They are like planks (or logs) — a very big deal!
- However, from the reverse perspective, the opposite is the case.
- The person you are faulting can see the plank in *your* eye and thinks *his own* shortcomings are mere trifles, little specks.
- Those who apply the Golden Rule, look at their own faults and failings as major, and seek forgiveness and reconciliation from the Lord, before ever going to someone else to point out their issues.
- We come now to a third way to carry out the Golden Rule.

3. Refuse to pick fights.

- Matt 7:6 Do not give what is holy to the dogs; nor cast your pearls before swine, lest they trample them under their feet, and turn and tear you in pieces.
- Many commentators interpret the *dogs* and *swine* here as unbelievers, but that is not contextually correct.
- Dogs and pigs were both unclean animals to the Jews, and, for that reason, they could not eat them.
- But it's important to understand that the concept of being unclean in the Old Testament was not equated with being an unbeliever.

- It was associated with defilement, and often the Jews became defiled for a period of time.
- When the Jews became unclean because of leprosy, or having a bodily emission, or touching a dead body, or accidentally eating something unclean, they would have to stay out of the tabernacle or temple until the appropriate time, and then carry out a specified cleansing ritual before they could return.

Giving what is holy to dogs (or, casting pearls before swine) is giving precious truth to those believers who are unclean and therefore unworthy of hearing it.

- They are unworthy as a result of uncleanness in their life, which is the consequence of sinful choices.
- Thus, Jesus is teaching that we should not continue giving truth about the kingdom of the heavens — for that is the context of Matt. 5-7 — to those who have rejected it.
- Otherwise, we will be picking a fight.
- The precious truth about qualifying for kingdom inheritance (otherwise called the Gospel of the Kingdom) will be trampled by these rejecters of truth.
- They will devour you, like feral dogs or pigs, which can be vicious.

Sometimes this happens even when you mean well and have no intention of picking a fight, when you simply desire to share the truth with others about the kingdom.

- I have experienced this firsthand, and find it amazing how otherwise likeminded Christians turn viciously against their brethren who teach the doctrine of kingdom inheritance.
- Even pastors, missionaries, and Christian college professors are sometimes guilty of this, while fooling

themselves into thinking they are “earnestly contending for the faith.”

- Meanwhile, those with whom they disagree are ridiculed, separated from, and even branded as heretical.
- Jesus predicted this would happen.
- Despite the natural tendency to want to fight back, Jesus instructs us to ignore dissenters and move on.
- Don’t try to convince them.
- Don’t continue giving that which is holy to dogs.
- Don’t keep casting your pearls before swine.

That is, don’t push the Gospel of the Kingdom on those who are resistant to it.

- Incidentally, Christ’s teaching here in Matt. 7:6 is consistent with His teaching in the parable of the wheat and tares (Matt. 13).
- In that parable Jesus said to leave the tares — i.e., those who teach an unbiblical kingdom message — alone, for in the harvest at the end of the age, Jesus will judge them at the Bema.
- Following that principle has helped me tremendously.
- It has kept me from getting into unproductive fights with Christian brethren and has helped me to obey the Golden Rule.
- That leads to a fourth and final way to carry out the Golden Rule.

4. Ask for God’s enablement.

- Matt 7:7 Ask, and it will be given to you; seek, and you will find; knock, and it will be opened to you.
- Matt 7:8 For everyone who asks receives, and he who seeks finds, and to him who knocks it will be opened.
- The way this is rendered in Greek is:
- v. 7 Keep asking ... keep seeking ... keep knocking.

- v. 8 For everyone who is asking ... and who is seeking ... and who is knocking ...
- Those who continue asking God for His divine help will receive it.
- Those who continue seeking will find Him.
- Those who continue knocking, will find God's door opened to them.
- God wants continued asking, seeking, and knocking, because it demonstrates durative faith on our part.
- So many ask once or twice and stop asking.
- They lose heart or get confident on their own the next time.
- They don't have faith that endures.
- But God rewards those who continue, by faith, to ask, seek and knock.

On that note, God makes another promise:

- Matt 7:9 Or what man is there among you who, if his son asks for bread, will give him a stone?
- Matt 7:10 Or if he asks for a fish, will he give him a serpent?
- Matt 7:11 If you then, being evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father who is in heaven give good things to those who ask Him!
- What a gracious God we serve!
- When you ask Him for something, He won't play tricks or treat you cruelly.
- Good parents don't trick their kids when the children have needs and ask their parents to meet the needs.
- Good parents will not give their children a stone for dinner when they need bread.
- They will not give their children a snake when they need meat.

In like manner — and how much more! — God gives good gifts to His children, when they ask.

- He even enables His children to carry out the Golden Rule.
- God is always ready and willing to give you good things when you ask Him.
- He will not reject your requests when you come to Him on the right terms, when you keep asking, seeking and knocking.
- We come now full circle, back to v. 12, where this study began.
- Matt 7:12 Therefore, whatever you want men to do to you, do also to them, for this is the Law and the Prophets.

Notice that verse starts out with the word *therefore*.

- It is a word of conclusion and application.
- It concludes not only the immediate section (Matt. 7:1-12) that has been discussed in this study, but also the broader section from Matt. 5:17 through 7:12.
- Jesus sums up the law and the prophets in one sentence, which He refers to as the Golden Rule.
- *Do to others as you would have them do to you.*
- This is another qualification for inheriting the kingdom of the heavens.
- Make sure you are measuring with the golden rule.
- I challenge you to THINK ON THESE THINGS