

The Golden Rule

Matt. 7:12

Everybody knows the Golden Rule. "Do unto others as you would have them do to you." I think that we would all also agree that the Golden Rule is a very good idea, a principle worthy of our attention and one that we would want to practice. I think we could pose that the Golden Rule finds itself among others of Jesus' teachings that we regard as admirable, that we may view as more of a positive option than as an authoritative command. When you do practice the Golden Rule by means of some selfless act you may even do so with the conscious thought that you are in that moment following the rule but few if any of us would be so bold as to say that we always practice the rule or that we even try to. That would be impossible, right?

So, our object today is to make the rule less impossible and more practical in each of our lives. Notice first, the context of the rule. The rule is introduced by the word, "therefore," and one of the first rules of Bible study is that when you find the word, therefore, you are to look to see what it is there for. The sermon is nearing its conclusion and so you could take the therefore to be a summation of all that Jesus has said to this point. The rule is a logical outcome of a life that is lived consistently with the be-attitudes, that makes the law a matter of the spirit rather than just the flesh, and that practices the freeing commands like turn the other cheek and go the extra mile. It is also what one might expect from one who practices the disciplines of almsgiving, prayer, and fasting secretly, keeping them for the one on one relationship between oneself and God. The rule is a practical way to lay up treasure in heaven and to seek first the Kingdom of God knowing that our heavenly Father cares for His own.

More immediately, the rule follows the invitation to ask, seek and knock. We thought about how there are some matters that we routinely ask, seek and knock about and others that we are less apt to do so. The one who does ask, seek, and knock about everything with a spirit that always seeks conformity to His will with

the confidence that it is always best. That person will be best positioned to follow the rule in any given situation.

So, it might be useful to ask 3 questions of ourselves in respect to the rule. The first question is are you rich or poor? Are you full or empty? When I ask, are you rich or poor, the question is not about finances. It is about attitude. The rich, who think of themselves as poor, cannot afford to give. The poor, who think of themselves in terms of what they have, rather than in terms of what they don't have, are very generous. The widow of Zarephath was down to her last meal that she was to eat with her son but she was rich enough to share that meal with Elijah. Jesus observed another widow

at the temple who gave an offering of two mites which was all that she had. No one else at the temple that day was rich enough to give all that they had.

It is not that we have to think of ourselves as so full that we cannot take another bite and so I can give the rest of my food away. Or, that we are so rich that we have nowhere to store our harvest and so we can then afford to give away the excess. Being full in my spirit means that I am satisfied to the point that I am able to look outward and see the needs of others and respond to those needs without fear. This assurance or security is characteristic of those who have a genuine relationship with God in which they have learned to depend upon God and trust Him to meet their needs. Since God has met their needs before and they have every confidence that He will do so again, they are free to be generous with others. It is not necessary to guard every penny to make it. Take your penny, give it to someone who is in need and trust God to give you as many pennies as you will need.

In order to follow the rule, you must see yourself as full, as rich, as someone who is more than able to concern himself with the affairs of others and not just those that are your own. In order to do unto others as you would have them do toward you, you will need to set your own needs aside and pay attention to those of others. You will need to be full enough to share.

The second question is, Who is your neighbor? Jesus told the story of the Good Samaritan in answer to this question and we are all familiar with what happened.

The Samaritan was a neighbor to the injured man when the Levite and the priest were not. The Levite and the priest were of the same race and religion as the injured one but they did not trouble themselves to be of help to him. The sight of the man and his trouble did not move them to break away from their schedule or routine. They would not adjust their lives to meet the need of a desperate and injured man. The Samaritan who was not of the same race or religion was moved with compassion for the helpless and broken figure and he set his life on hold in order to meet his need. The Samaritan was not a neighbor to everyone - just to the broken and helpless man. Jesus' answer to the question, Who is my neighbor focuses attention on those in need.

Practicing the rule requires that the act of doing unto others be applied specifically to someone. A good choice of who that someone might be to practice the rule with your neighbor. Your neighbor is the person in your life whether familiar or stranger who presents the opportunity of doing unto them because they have a need.

The third question is, are you blind or can you see? It is not unusual for us to be obtuse to the needs of others. Tell tale signs are there. We just miss them. We are just not alert or are too caught up in our own problems or fail to actually care. Again, the

rule must be specifically applied to be followed. To whom should the rule be applied? If you think about what you would like others to do for you, wouldn't you want them to come alongside of you when you have a need and help you to come to a resolution of your problem? But in order to practice the rule, you will have to be able to see the needs around you in a way that allows you to become a part of the solution or the answer that is needed.