

Mathew 7:1-12
(Psalm 84:1-12; Philippians 4:4-9)
“Doing to Others As You Would Have Them Do to You”

Introduction

We return this morning to our study of Jesus’ Sermon on the Mount, and once again find Jesus describing for us the life of grace, life lived in communion with him, the life that he wants his disciples increasingly to live by grace. To the degree that we begin to live this new life, we will give those around us reason to believe that the gospel is true.

These particular verses that open chapter seven may at first sound like a collection of unrelated wise sayings with little thematic connection. However, the little word “so” at the beginning of verse twelve gives us a clue that what we know as the “golden rule” is a sort of summing up of the previous verses, and when seen in this light, the common theme becomes clear.

The golden rule was well known among ancient people, with parallels in the collected sayings of such diverse teachers as the Chinese sage, Confucius, and the great Jewish Rabbi Hillel, who taught just a generation before Jesus. However, prior to Jesus, the saying was always cast in the negative form: “What you would hate to have done to you, do not do to others.” But Jesus significantly improves it by stating it in a more compassionate, proactive form: “So whatever you wish that others would do to you, do also to them” (7:12). In other words, we are not only to resist doing bad things to people, but should do those good things that we would love to have done for us.

If we begin to let these words work on us, we will soon see how counter-cultural and wonderfully subversive they are. They apply to everything, because they are, as Jesus says here, a summary of “the law and the prophets,” in other words, a summary of the great commandment to love God and to love others. And that is the common thread that ties these verses together: Jesus shows us how the golden rule may be applied to all of our relationships, informing both our words and our deeds.

So, I invite you this morning to join me in considering this text by asking it the three questions that it seems to be answering:

What would it look like if our conversations with one another were controlled by the golden rule?

What would it look like if our conversations with God (in other words, our prayers) were controlled by the golden rule?

And, what would it look like if our actions were controlled by the golden rule?

Body

1. What would it look like if our conversations with one another were controlled by the golden rule (7:1-6)?

- Don't play God with people. Only God knows their hearts.
- Judge others only as you wish to be judged:
 - Know when to speak: only after you have dealt with your own sin.
 - Know when not to speak: when a person is not ready to hear.

2. What would it look like if our conversations with God (our prayers!) were controlled by the golden rule (7:7-11)?

- It is right and good to ask and seek and knock.
- However, only ask for those good things that you would give to your own children, especially for God's Spirit to fill you (see Luke 11:13).

3. What would it look like if our actions were controlled by the golden rule (7:12)?

- Do to others only what you would want them to do to you.
- This is what the Bible is all about: God's grace aims to make us gracious!

Conclusion

If God is so very willing to give good things – even his own Spirit – to those who ask and seek and knock, and if we are learning to seek the very best things from his gracious hand, should that not make us willing to offer to others the grace and mercy that we have received?

If you then, who are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father in heaven give good gifts to those who ask him! So whatever you wish that others would do to you, do also to them, for this is the law and the prophets (7:11-12).