

“The Golden Rule”

Matthew 7:12-14

In this great sermon we have learned that we are to be happy as we studied the beatitudes. To be happy, we were told by Jesus to do the will of God. That is where God’s people will find true happiness. That is the teaching, look how we have made the application. We are addicted to materialism, drugs, sin of all kinds. This is exactly the opposite of what Jesus says will make us happy!

Throughout the sermon up to this point Jesus has illuminated many of the problems the people of His time were up against because of false teaching and confusion. Jesus tells them that what they have been taught is not the truth – here is the truth. Adultery, divorce, sin of all kinds are exposed as He teaches them what God truly said – not what man had tried to make God say.

As we reach the end to the Sermon on the Mount, we come to 7:12 which some have called the “capstone of the Sermon.” Beginning in Matthew 7:12 and continuing to the end of the chapter is the fitting conclusion and summary to a great sermon. In this morning’s text we are faced with a command and a choice.

The Command, v. 12. *“Therefore, whatever you wish that others would do to you, do also to them, for this is the Law and the Prophets.*

The command, of course, is what is commonly known as the Golden Rule. As I was preparing this week I was a bit surprised to find that the idea of this command is expressed in a **negative** form in many ancient cultures. For example, Confucius (551-479BC) said, “What you **do not** want done to yourself, **do not do** to others.” And, the fourth century Athenian orator Isocrates (436-338 BC) said, “Whatever angers you when you suffer it at the hands of others, **do not do** it to others.” **But this idea is never presented in a positive form by anyone before Jesus.** What difference does it make?

The difference is, all that the negative form of this idea requires **is for the individual to do nothing! A corpse can fulfill it.** But Jesus requires more, namely, active service to others. Too often we view the Golden Rule in the way it was expressed by the ancient philosophers: Don't bother anyone else, if you don't want to be bothered. **The standard that Jesus sets is much higher: Pursue the highest good of others, just as you would want them to do for you.**

We usually take the Golden Rule out of context and use it as a stand-alone cliché – *“Do unto others . . .”*. However, it was originally spoken by Jesus in a specific context. Notice that verse 12 begins with the word *“Therefore.”* (in some translations “so”). **This word refers us back to the entirety of the Sermon on the Mount.** A clue that this is the case is found in the expression at the end of verse 12 that adherence to the Golden Rule *“is the Law and the Prophets.”* This is the second bookend on this sermon by Jesus. The first is found in 5:17 where Jesus states that He came to fulfill the Law and the Prophets.

In between these two bookends, Jesus explains exactly what actions and attitudes fulfill and summarize the Law and the Prophets. In Matthew 7:12 we have the entire Sermon on the Mount in a nutshell. If you want to know what to do in any given situation, do whatever you want done to you. This one command would change the world if everyone were to obey it. What a different world would this world be if each one did to everyone else whatever they would want done to them. This is exactly what the apostle Paul teaches in Romans 13:8-10,

⁸Owe no one anything except to love one another, for he who loves another has fulfilled the law. ⁹For the commandments, “YOU SHALL NOT COMMIT ADULTERY,” “YOU SHALL NOT MURDER,” “YOU SHALL NOT STEAL,” “YOU SHALL NOT BEAR FALSE WITNESS,” “YOU SHALL NOT COVET,” and if there is any other commandment, are all summed up in this saying, namely, “YOU SHALL LOVE YOUR NEIGHBOR AS YOURSELF.” ¹⁰Love does no harm to a neighbor; therefore love is the fulfillment of the law.

If everyone loves their neighbor as themselves, there would be no need for any further laws. If you love your neighbor you won't lie, steal, be angry, murder, lust, commit adultery, etc. against them. If you love your neighbor, you will do what is best for them in every situation – at times to your own loss. That is diametrically opposed to the philosophies taught in our time – and in Jesus time as well.

When we lived in Fort Knox, KY we lived on an Army base. Every neighbor had exactly the same house, the same flowers in the flower beds, the same amount of yard. Each also had the same storage shed attached to the back of the house. These were very small storage areas so what each family decided was to cooperate with their neighbor. One neighbor would own and loan a lawnmower; one would own all the small garden tools, one would have the fertilizer and such; one would have a garden hose and that way through cooperation, no one had to have all those things. I remember Dad owned the lawnmower (not powered!) and each time before he loaned it he made sure the blades were sharp, and that everything worked. He did this for someone else. Consequently, when the mower was brought back, it was clean and in good repair. One time a neighbor ran over something in the yard and it chipped a blade. Those two men worked together till nearly dark to repair that blade for the next one to borrow it. Now fast forward to our current time.... Most of the time we don't even know our neighbor!!!

The problem is that obedience to the simple command of the “Golden Rule” **is impossible for sinful human beings**. This short command, rather than being the solution to the world's problems, drives us to the One who is the solution to the world's problems: Jesus. This brings us to the narrow gate and the choice which each of us must make.

The Choice, vv. 13-14. ***¹³Enter by the narrow gate. For the gate is wide and the way is easy that leads to destruction, and those who enter by it are many. ¹⁴For the gate is narrow, and the way is hard that leads to life, and those who find it are few.***

In the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus has been describing the characteristics of those who believe in God and follow Him. He has told us that the poor in spirit, those who see themselves as spiritual beggars, will enter the kingdom of heaven. Those who mourn over their sin, are gentle, hunger and thirst for righteousness, are merciful, are pure in heart, are peacemakers, and are persecuted for the sake of righteousness will someday live in heaven. We have been told that we should forgive those who offend us and seek to make peace with another who has been offended by us. We have been warned not to lust, not seek revenge, not love money, and not to be judgmental of others. We have been encouraged to pray, to love God, to love others, and to trust God.

Now Jesus has given us the Golden Rule which is a call to lovingly treat others just as we would like to be treated. He has repeatedly called us to action, **but nowhere did He ever say that we should believe. Nowhere in the Sermon on the Mount did Jesus ever tell us that we had to believe in God to go to heaven.** His focus has always been on our conduct.

So, now we learn that there are two gates, two roads, two destinies, and two groups of people. The gates open to roads, these long roads end at distant destinations, but only some of the people will find God and live with Him forever. One gate opens to a wide way or wide road and the other gate opens to a narrow way or narrow road.

The Greek word that Jesus used for “narrow” in the phrase “narrow way” is *thilbo*. The word refers to a road that is “narrow and troublesome” to travel. The road is not difficult because it has potholes, debris, or rocks on it. It is difficult because it is too narrow. As a result, it is very undesirable for the few people who are traveling it. The Greek word implies that the road is so narrow that people are crushing one another as they walk. Yet the choice between the two gates and the two ways is a choice for eternity. Someone once said, “He who chooses the beginning of a road chooses the place it leads to.” In other words, choose where you begin wisely because the road you choose to travel has eternal consequences!

If at the I-77 and I-70 split you take I-70W toward Indianapolis, you've chosen to go to Indianapolis if you don't stop, turn off or make a U-turn. But there are no stopping places, no turn offs, and no U-turns allowed on the wide road to hell. The only hope is to change roads by repenting and confessing your sins.

Although a recent report says that 73% of Americans believe in God, it is clear from Jesus' words that this number cannot be correct. Many are walking the wide road. The wide road is the main road. It is the road on which everyone starts. One must find and choose the narrow path in order to escape the wide road.

Consider this, all you must do to get yourself on the wide road is – NOTHING! If you do nothing about your soul, if you care not about spiritual matters then you are on the wide road and you will end up at the destination that it leads to.

So, which gate have you chosen? You are by default born on the broad way that leads to destruction. You don't have to do anything to get on it. If you are to have your sins forgiven you must enter the narrow gate of faith in Jesus Christ in obedience to the gospel!

In our text this morning we have been confronted with a command and a choice. The command summarizes the entirety of the Sermon on the Mount. The choice is between living our own way or entering through faith in Christ into the way that leads to everlasting life. It is only by entering through Christ that one can walk on the narrow way described in the Sermon on the Mount.