

# Golden Rulers

*Disclaimer: this is an automatically generated machine transcription - there may be small errors or mistranscriptions. Please refer to the original audio if you are in any doubt.*

Date: 25 June 1995

Preacher: Darrell Johnson

[ 0 : 00 ] Our text today is Matthew chapter 7, verses 1 through 12. In this text, Jesus brings his Sermon on the Mount to its climax. In this text, it all comes together.

Up to this point in his sermon, Jesus has been describing the character traits, the behavior patterns, the habits of the heart, of those upon whom the kingdom of God comes.

Then in this text, he sums it all up, and he does so in one little sentence. Many scholars call the text before us today the Mount Everest of the Sermon on the Mount, because it's from here that we can see everything else clearly.

If you are able, will you please stand for the reading of the Word? Jesus is speaking to us. Do not judge, lest you be judged.

For in the way you judge, you will be judged, and by your standard of measure, it will be measured to you. And why do you look at the speck that is in your neighbor's eye, but do not notice the log that is in your own eye?

[ 1 : 11 ] Or how can you say to your neighbor, let me take the speck out of your eye, and behold the log that is in your own eye? You hypocrite, first take the log out of your own eye, then you will see clearly to take the speck out of your neighbor's eye.

Do not give what is holy to dogs, and do not throw your pearls before swine, lest they trample them under their feet and turn and tear you to pieces. Ask, and it shall be given to you.

Seek, and you shall find. Knock, and it shall be opened to you. For everyone who asks receives, and the one who seeks finds, and to the one who knocks it shall be opened. Or what man is there among you when his son shall ask him for a loaf will give him a stone?

Or if he shall ask him for a fish, he will not give him a snake, will he? If you then, being evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more shall your Father who is in heaven give what is good to those who ask him?

Therefore, however you want people to treat you, so treat them. For this is the law and the prophets. Spirit of the living God, we believe that you worked with Matthew the tax collector long ago to write these words down on the page.

[ 2 : 26 ] And we pray now that in your mercy and grace, you will cause these words to come alive in us as never before. For we pray it in Jesus' name.

Amen. You may be seated. Two things about Jesus himself stand out to me as he brings this sermon to its climax.

The first is Jesus' sense of humor. All of this talk about log beams in the eye and pigs trampling over pearls, aren't we supposed to chuckle along with him?

Elton Trueblood begins his book, *The Humor of Christ*, with a story about this text. He writes, The germ of the idea that finally led to the writing of this book was planted many years ago when our eldest son was four years old.

We were reading to him from the seventh chapter of Matthew's gospel feeling very serious when suddenly the little boy began to laugh. He laughed because he saw how preposterous it would be for a man to be so deeply concerned about a speck in another person's eye that he was unconscious of the fact his own eye had a beam in it.

[ 3 : 40 ] Because the child understood perfectly that the human eye is not large enough to have a beam in it, the very idea struck him as ludicrous. His gay laughter was a rebuke to his parents for their failure to respond to humor in unexpected places.

Trueblood goes on to say that this child's observation then served to sensitize him to other examples of Jesus' humor scattered throughout the Gospels.

And he ends the first chapter of his book with this healthy reminder, Any alleged Christianity which fails to express itself in gaiety at some point is clearly spurious.

Jesus and his gospelized disciples can have a sense of humor, not because they are blind to injustice or not because they are callous to suffering, but because they are convinced that in light of the sovereignty of God, injustice and suffering do not have the last word.

Jesus' sense of humor is not due to a denial of brokenness and pain, but it is due to the conviction that brokenness and pain do not have ultimate reality in our lives.

[ 4 : 47 ] The second thing about Jesus himself that stands out to me in this text is his brilliance. I stand in awe of the sheer brilliance of the carpenter from Nazareth.

As I said before reading this text, up to this point in the sermon, Jesus has been describing the character traits, the behavior patterns, the habits of the heart of the gospelized. And then he focuses it all in one sentence, in one deceptively simple sentence.

In the one sentence, which from the 8th century A.D. on has been called the golden rule. I like how the New International Version renders it. So in everything, do to others what you would have them do to you, for this sums up the law and the prophets.

It's brilliant. Earlier in his sermon, Jesus said, I have come not to destroy the law and the prophets, but to fulfill. And now he gives us the fulfillment. However you want people to treat you, so treat them.

It's brilliant. Simply brilliant. Now at this point, someone might say, excuse me, excuse me, but why does this one sentence reveal Jesus' brilliance?

[ 6 : 06 ] Isn't Jesus basically saying what other people have been saying? It is true that others make similar sounding statements. For example, Confucius. Confucius was asked, is there one word which may serve as a rule for the whole of my life?

And Confucius said, is not reciprocity such a word? What you do not want done to yourself, do not do to others. And there are the lines from the so-called Buddhist hymns of faith.

All men tremble at the rod, all men fear death. Putting oneself in the place of others, kill not nor cause to kill. All men tremble at the rod, unto all men life is dear, doing as one would be done by, kill not nor cause to kill.

And there's Socrates, who said, what stirs your anger when done to you by others, that do not do to others. And there's the philosopher Epictetus, who condemned the institution of slavery on the principle that what you avoid suffering yourself, do not inflict on others.

And there's the two great ethical leaders of Judaism, the Rabbi Shammai and the Rabbi Hillel. As the story goes, a Gentile came to the Rabbi Shammai and said, I'm prepared to be received as a convert, as a proselyte, on the condition that you teach me the whole law while I'm standing on one leg.

[ 7 : 32 ] Rabbi Shammai drove him away. The man went to Rabbi Hillel, who answered, what is hateful to yourself due to no other? This is the whole law, and the rest is commentary.

Go and learn. And then there's the book of Tobit, where the aged Tobias tells his son that all you need for life is what you yourself hate to no one do.

So it would appear that Jesus' golden rule is saying the same thing others have said. But is that the case? Listen again. Confucius.

What you do not want done to yourself, do not do to others. Jesus, do to others what you want them to do to you. Is that the same? Socrates.

What stirs your anger when done to you, that do not do to others. Jesus, do to others what you want them to do to you. Is that the same? Hili and Tobias.

[ 8 : 31 ] What you yourself hate to no one do. Jesus, do to others what you want them to do to you. The same? Not at all.

All the other ethical exhortations are negative and passive. They're negative and passive. That is, refrain from doing to others what you would not want them to do to you.

Jesus' exhortation is positive and active. Do to others what you want them to do to you. Not doing to you what I do not want you to do to me is not that difficult.

All of us could stand tall before such an ethical standard. but do to you what I would have you do to me. That's an altogether different matter.

Jesus' saying turns everything around from negative to positive, from passive to active. It's brilliant. It's simply brilliant. And very liberating.

[ 9 : 36 ] It delivers us from so much of our ethical agonizing. Agonizing. This sums it up, says Jesus. This sums up the law and the prophets. Jesus is the law giver.

Jesus is the one to whom the prophets, about the one about whom the prophets spoke. And Jesus says this sums it all up. This sums up the law and the prophets. This one deceptively sentence sums up the whole of God's revelation of how we are to treat people.

It all comes down to this. Do to others what you want them to do to you. Jesus' saying frees us then from the need for all of these experts to develop endless rules for us on how to react to different things that we face in life.

Martin Luther puts it like this. It was certainly clever of Christ to state it this way. The only example he sets up is ourselves. The book is laid into our own bosom.

Do to others what you want them to do to you. How should I treat my children? Well how would I want to be treated if I were a child? How should I treat my aging parents?

[ 10 : 48 ] Well how would I want to be treated if I were elderly? How should I treat the immigrants in Glendale? Well how would I want to be treated if I were an immigrant? How should I treat those who have AIDS?

Well, how would I want to be treated if I had AIDS? Dale Bruner writes, Disciples can know the will of God for their relationships most of the time by consulting their own self-interest.

There's an old American Indian saying, Do not judge a man until you have walked a mile in his moccasins. Jesus is liberating us even from the need of walking in another person's moccasins.

Yes, that's helpful to do. It's helpful to put ourselves in another person's shoes. But Jesus simplifies things more. He says to us, Consult your own self-interest and then act toward the other along those lines.

Now, herein lies the brilliance of Jesus saying and why it is rightly called the golden rule. When you do consult your own interest and then when you turn to the other out of your own self-interest, you are freed from your own self-interest.

[ 12 : 02 ] It's brilliant. Look inward and then act toward the other from that inward look and you find yourself outside yourself in servant love.

It's brilliant. Now, we've been focusing on only one sentence in the text we read. That's appropriate because verse 12 is the central verse of the whole text.

But we read 11 other verses. Why? Because of the therefore in the golden rule. The golden rule begins with the word therefore.

Now, you've probably heard the saying that whenever you come across a therefore in the Bible, you have to ask, what is the therefore therefore? Therefore? The therefore is in the golden rule, therefore to point us back to the words of Jesus which precede the golden rule.

Words which Jesus apparently felt were needed to be heard before he could give us the golden rule. And I submit to you that in the 11 verses which come before the golden rule, Jesus is addressing three ways we wish other people would treat us.

[ 13 : 19 ] The first way is in verses 1 through 4. The second way is in verses 5 through 6. And the third way is in verses 7 through 11. Three ways we wish other people would treat us.

Are you with me? Let me take each of those separately then. First, Jesus says, Do not judge. This is one of the most often quoted but least understood sayings of Jesus.

I agree with those who argue that when Jesus says, Judge not, He does not mean turn a blind eye to others' faults. He doesn't mean that.

He does not mean refuse to discern. He does not mean suspend your critical faculties. We cannot function in life unless we make judgments. Parents must constantly make judgments as we raise our children.

Political and business leaders constantly make judgments. Otherwise, society is going to collapse. How are we going to vote unless we judge between different candidates and different platforms?

Jesus does not mean by judge not, do not make value judgments.

[ 14 : 30 ] The fact is, the whole Sermon on the Mount is one sustained call to discern and choose. Unless your righteousness exceeds that of the scribes and Pharisees, you will not enter the kingdom of heaven, he says.

You have heard it was said, but I say unto you. You have heard it was said, but I say unto you. Six times. Do not be like the hypocrites. Do not be like them. No one can serve two masters. Constant call to judge.

And then there is this hard to pin down saying in the text we read in verse 6. Do not give dogs what is holy. Do not cast your pearls before swine. Whatever else that means, it is clearly a call to engage in critical thinking.

It's a call to be as critically discerning as possible. I therefore agree with those who say then that when Jesus says, judge not, he means condemn not.

He means, do not pass the sentence. He means, do not render the final verdict. He means, do not close the book on another person and another person's character.

[15:38] Jesus then gives us a number of good reasons for this exhortation. For one thing, none of us knows all the facts. We neither know all the circumstances nor all that is going on inside of another person.

And because we do not know all the facts, we cannot possibly render an accurate final verdict. From 1976 to 1985, I served as the pastor of St. John's Presbyterian Church in West Los Angeles. At that time, West Los Angeles was 50% Jewish. I don't know if it's higher now or not. It would seem from outward appearances that most of the Jewish population of West Los Angeles has written off Jesus Christ as Savior and Lord.

But was that really the case? It became clear to me that most had not even had a chance to write him off. Oh, most had heard about Jesus Christ.

But I soon discovered that in rejecting Jesus Christ, they were not rejecting a person, but a whole host of other things. When I would say the word Jesus Christ, there was an immediate, intense, angry reaction.

[16:52] Why? Because they were rejecting a person? Not at all. Because the words Jesus Christ triggered thoughts of Christian anti-Semitism, and for many in West Los Angeles, the word Jesus Christ triggered a remembrance of the church's silence during the Nazi Holocaust.

They were reacting to the pain and the anger resurrected by the words. They were not necessarily rejecting the person behind the words. For some reason, while I was in West Los Angeles, I learned to speak of our Lord as Jesus of Nazareth.

I quit saying Jesus Christ and said Jesus of Nazareth. And when I did, there was not this intense reaction, and I had many, many fruitful dialogues with Jewish people about Jesus of Nazareth. None of us can close the book on another human being because none of us knows all the facts, you see. We cannot do so for another reason, to judge in the sense of passing sentence on another person is God's prerogative and only God's.

To close the book on another person, ah, he's a loser or she's helpless, is to usurp the place of God and therefore to be guilty of the greatest of all sins, the sin of hubris, the sin of playing God.

[18:15] Only God, only God can write the final sentence on a person's life. And thanks be to God that for those in Jesus Christ, that final sentence is full of mercy and grace.

We cannot close the book on another person for still another reason. Jesus says that the ruler we use will be used on us. Yikes.

In the same way you judge others, he says, you will be judged. With the measure you use, it will be measured to you.

Someone has rightly said that ought to frighten us all into being merciful and gracious. Thanks be to God that he does not use the ruler on us that we use on others.

And thanks be to God that God does not use the ruler on me that I use on me. There's another reason we cannot close the book on another person.

[19:23] More often than we care to admit, our judgment of another person is but a revelation of our own sin. That's what Tim and Greg were trying to bring out in the children's challenge.

That's what Jesus, I think, is referring to when he talks about these specks of sawdust and the logs in our eyes. It's very possible that the speck of dust we see in the other person's eye is but a reflection of the log in our own eye.

Listen to our criticisms of other people. They may just be our own disgust over our own sin which we do not want to face now being projected onto other people.

Nowhere is this principle more involved than when we judge other people for being proud. C.S. Lewis says of pride, there is no fault which makes a person unpopular and no fault which we are more unconscious of in ourselves.

The more we have pride in ourselves, the more we dislike it in others. Lewis goes on to say, if you want to find out how proud you are, the easiest way is to ask yourself, how much do I dislike it when

other people snub me or refuse to take any notice of me or shove their oar in or patronize or show off?

[ 20 : 47 ] On that last point, Lewis observes, it is because I wanted to be the big noise at the party that I'm so annoyed at someone else being the big noise. The speck I'm so concerned about in your eye just may be a reflection of the log in mine.

Do not judge. Do not condemn. Do not close the book on someone, says Jesus, because none of us knows all the facts. To do so is to usurp the role of God.

The ruler we use on others is going to be used on us, and we may be revealing our own sin. All of this makes me agree with E. Stanley Jones when he said, the attitude of censoriousness is always a sign of a declining spiritual life.

I'll read that again. The attitude of censoriousness is always a sign of a declining spiritual life. And then he says this, when religious people begin backsliding, they begin backbiting.

I better move on. First specific of the golden rule, do not close the book. The second is inseparable other side of the coin.

[ 22 : 12 ] The second is, help the other person stay on track. I want to point out a neglected line in the text. It's in verse 6. Take the speck out of your neighbor's eye.

Notice that? He does say we're going to do it. Jesus acknowledges that as a matter of fact, there is a real foreign object in the other person's eye. There actually is a real detriment to the spiritual life in the sister or brother.

Take the speck out, says the preacher on the mount. In another place, in Matthew 18, Jesus says, if your brother sins, go and show him his fault.

Just do it between the two of you. We owe it to one another, as fellow travelers, as members of the body of Christ, to let one another know when we are off the rails of the kingdom of God.

It's just that we are to deal with our own off-trackness first. We need to ask, what does my concern about this person say about me? And then having dealt with that before the divine judge, we are able then to, in a spirit of mercy and grace, take the speck out of the neighbor's eye.

[ 23 : 19 ] Is this why Jesus refers to giving sacred things to dogs and putting pearls before swine? I think so. I think he's saying to us that it's so easy to become so familiar with sacred things that we lose the spirit of reverence.

Peter, who heard Jesus preach the Sermon on the Mount, seems to apply Jesus' words in this way. In 2 Peter, he warns of the real possibility of apostasy. He argues that it is better not to have known the way of righteousness than to know it and not walk in it.

He writes, of them the proverb is true, a dog returns to its vomit, a pig that is washed goes back to wallowing in the mud. He's saying that it's so easy to become so dull and insensitive to the things of God.

And when we spot this happening in the brother and the sister, we owe it to them to help them get back on track. Right? Which brings us to the third specific of the golden rule.

Ask, seek, knock, says Jesus. Many commentators are puzzled that this teaching on prayer should come at this place in the sermon. Why here?

[ 24 : 26 ] Why not have this teaching on prayer in Matthew chapter 6 right after he gave us the Lord's prayer? Well, I've wrestled with this for a number of years and I think that I finally see and it's profound.

It's this. Jesus is saying that the only way to avoid a judgmental, censorious attitude toward others, the only way that we can graciously and unoffensively help the brother or sister who is going astray is if we pray for them.

In fact, I was thinking during this week about making a rule in the life of GPC. How about try this rule on? No one can complain about anybody else in the life of the church unless they have prayed 30 days first.

In fact, I'm making that a rule in my office. I will not hear a complaint about another member of the body of Christ unless you can demonstrate to me you've prayed 30 days first.

Ask, seek, knock. It's the only antidote to judgment. I like how Dietrich Bonhoeffer, maybe that was too heavy a rule. Fifteen days?

[ 25 : 42 ] You get the point though, right? And that's the point of this text. Dietrich Bonhoeffer in his book Life Together calls me to this in a profound way.

Let me read what he had to say. A Christian fellowship lives and exists by the intercession of its members for one another or it collapses. Read that again.

A Christian fellowship lives and exists by the intercession of its members for one another or it collapses. He goes on. I can no longer condemn or hate a person for whom I pray no matter how much trouble he or she causes me.

The person's face that heretofore may have been strange and intolerable to me is transformed through intercession into the countenance of a brother or sister for whom Christ died the face of a forgiven sinner.

How does that take place? Bonhoeffer goes on. Intercession means no more than bringing the other into the presence of God. And to see the other under the cross of Jesus as a poor human being and sinner in need of grace.

[ 26 : 50 ] Then everything that repels me in that person falls away and I see in them destitution and need. Their need and their sin become so heavy and oppressive that we feel them as our own and we can do nothing else but pray Lord do thou thou alone deal with them according to thy severity and thy goodness.

To make intercession means to grant our brothers and sisters the same right that we have received namely to stand before Christ and share in his mercy. Isn't that powerful?

A Christian fellowship lives and exists by the intercession of its members for one another or it collapses. Therefore, ask, seek, knock.

especially on behalf of those you want to judge. How do you want people to treat you? I know how I want people to treat me.

I do not want anyone to close the book on me yet. I want to be given the chance to change and to grow and to mature. And I want to be shown when I'm off the track and I want to be held back on the track.

[ 28 : 05 ] And I want to be carried to the foot of the cross to the throne of grace where I can be given mercy and life. Then, says Jesus, do the same for others.

However you want people to treat you, treat them for this sums it all up. It's brilliant. Simply brilliant. In relating to any other human being, I am to consult my own interest as if I were the other. And then I am to act toward the other out of my self-interest.

And when I do, a miracle takes place. I die to my self-centeredness and I discover that I am free to love. It's brilliant. Some emphasize that in order for us to follow this rule we're going to have to become new people.

And I agree. But I would like to emphasize the flip side today. Follow this rule and we become new people. Follow Jesus into the golden rule and the center of our lives shifts.

[ 29 : 16 ] William Barclay is certainly right. If the world was composed of people who sought to obey this rule it would be a new world.