

Golden Rulers

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[0 : 00] Spirit of the living God, we believe that you worked with Matthew, the tax collector, to remember the words that he heard on that mountain that day, and then to write them down accurately for us.

And I pray in your mercy and grace that you would now cause these words to jump off the page and grab hold of us as never before. Lord, we pray this in Jesus' name. Amen.

Amen. Four years ago, on the 40th anniversary of the assassination of Martin Luther King Jr., the Vancouver Sun had on this front page the question, what does it mean to be civil? Ten rules.

It also had in the corner, it's all over for the Canucks, but that was four years ago. What does it mean to be civil? Ten rules. And then they had the picture of ten different people who gave their answer to the question, what does it mean to be civil?

Stephen Jobs, pay attention to what is going on. Dalai Lama, practice compassion. Anjali Jolie, act.

[1 : 16] Beverly McLaughlin, hold individuals accountable for what they do. She's the Chief Justice of Tenet. Martin Luther King, be clear in stating your case.

Oprah Winfrey, listen. Barack Obama, be prepared to change. Mahatma Gandhi, avoid violence, physical and emotional.

Keith Richards, founder of the Rolling Stones, remain genuine. And then, last but not least, Jesus. Treat others with the respect with which you would like to be treated.

It's close to what Jesus said. Close enough. As we continue following Jesus into his Sermon on the Mount, we come to a section where it all comes together.

In Matthew 7, 1-12, the whole sermon, the whole of the Sermon on the Mount, comes together.

Throughout his Sermon, Jesus has been describing the new kind of humanity brought into being by him and by his Gospel.

[2 : 31] He has described some of the character traits. Blessed are, blessed are, blessed are. He has described some of the behavior traits. You have heard it was said, but I say unto you.

He has described some of the movements of the heart. Beware of practicing your righteousness before others to receive their applaud. Treasure treasures for yourself in heaven.

Seek first the kingdom of God. He has been describing the character traits, the behavior patterns, and the movements of the heart that come into being in ordinary broken human beings upon whom the kingdom of heaven is dawning.

Then in this text, in Matthew 7, 1-12, Jesus pulls it all together. He pulls the whole sermon together in one sentence.

So, in everything, do to others what you want them to do to you. This sums up the law and the promise.

[3 : 35] Many scholars refer to that one line as the Mount Everest of the Sermon on the Mount. And I agree. Here we are at the highest point.

The one sentence has come to be known as the golden rule. Therefore, in everything, do to others what you want them to do to you.

For this sums up the law and the prophets. Earlier in his sermon, Jesus said, You are never to think that I came to abolish the law and the prophets.

I came to fulfill the law and the prophets. And now here, towards the conclusion of his sermon, he brings the fulfillment, the golden rule. However you want people to treat you, so treat them.

And it is brilliant. It all comes down to one simple sentence. No one has ever summed it up as clearly, succinctly, and brilliantly as Jesus.

[4 : 48] No one. What about all the other great teachers in history? What about Socrates and Buddha and Moses and Hillel?

Is Jesus not simply saying what others have said? No, he's not. He is saying what no one before him and no one after him has said.

Many other great teachers have said things that sound like what he said. So, for example, Confucius. Confucius was asked, is there one word which may serve as a rule of practice for all one's life?

And Confucius responded, 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 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.

[5 : 57] 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.

What stirs your anger when done to you by others that do not do to others. There's the philosopher Epictetus who condemn the institution of slavery on the principle what you avoid suffering yourself seek not to inflict upon others.

And then there are the two great Jewish philosophers, Jewish ethicists, the Rabbi Shammai and the Rabbi Hillel. As the story goes, a Gentile comes to the Rabbi Shammai and asks, I'm prepared to be received as a proselyte on the condition that you teach me the whole law while I'm standing on one foot.

Shammai sends him away. The Gentile goes to Hillel and Hillel answers, what is hateful to yourself do to no other.

That's the whole law. The rest is commentary. Go and learn. And then there's this intertestamental book, Tobit. And there the aged Tobias gives his counsel to his son.

[7 : 15] He says, this is all you need to live. What you yourself hate to no one do. So it appears that in the golden rule, Jesus is simply saying what all these other teachers say.

But is that the case? Go back and listen more carefully. 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. Are those 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. Are those the same? Hillel and Tobias, what you yourself hate to no one do.

Jesus, do to others what you want them to do. Are those the same? Not at all. All the other ethical exhortations are negative and passive.

[8 : 23] That is, simply refrain from doing to others what you would not want them to do to you. Jesus' exhortations are 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.

Most of us could stand tall before such an ethical exhortation. But do to you what I want others to do for me? That's an altogether different standard.

And it is very liberating. Jesus' saying turns everything around from the negative to the positive and from the passive to the active.

And it's brilliant. Simply brilliant. It delivers us from so much ethical agonizing. This sums up says Jesus.

[9 : 26] This sums up the law and the prophets. Jesus is the law giver. He's the one about whom the prophets spoke. and he says this sums it all up.

This one simple sentence sums up all of God's revelation of what it means to live in this world. It sums up all of the righteousness of the kingdom of heaven.

It all comes down to this. However you want people to treat you, so treat them. Jesus saying frees us from endless experts who come and develop endless laws for every conceivable situation we face.

Martin Luther puts it this way. Martin Luther had this propensity to put things in very dramatic ways. Listen to this. It was certainly clever of Jesus to state it this way.

The only example he sets up is ourselves. The book is laid into our own bosoms and it is so clear that you do not need glasses to understand Moses and the law.

[10 : 34] Thus you are your own Bible, your own teacher, your own theologian, your own preacher. And you can forgive Luther for some poetic license there, exaggeration, but he is on to something.

Do to others what you want them to do to you. how should I treat my grown children? Well, how would I want to be treated if I were David Christine Marissa?
How should I treat my spouse? Well, how would I want to be treated if I were Sharon? How should I treat my aging mother?
Well, how do I want to be treated when I am aging? How am I supposed to treat her? Especially when she is losing her memory. How should I treat the waiter at the restaurant today?
Well, how would I want to be treated if I were the waiter? How should I treat immigrants to our great country? Well, how would I want to be treated if I were an immigrant?
[11 : 50] How should I treat someone with HIV AIDS? Well, how would I want to be treated if I had AIDS? There's an old Native American saying, do not judge anyone until you have walked one mile in his moccasins.

That's a very good rule of ethics. But Jesus goes further than that. Jesus frees us from that. Jesus even frees us from going one mile in another person's shoes.
He makes it simpler. Jesus says, consult your own best interests and then relate to other people out of your own best interest.

And herein lies the brilliance, Jesus' brilliance, and why this is rightly called the golden rule. When I consult my own best interest, and then act toward others, out of my own best interest, I find myself outside of myself.

It's brilliant. Look in, discern how I want to be treated, and then look out toward others, and we find ourselves outside ourselves, freed from having to have it our own way, acting in servant love.

[13 : 17] It's brilliant. Now, I've been focusing on only one sentence of the text that Phil read. The text has twelve sentences.

Why have I been only focusing on the twelfth sentence? Why? Because it is the pivotal sentence of the whole text. And why is it pivotal?

Because of the therefore in the golden rule. Therefore, the text you have in front of you says so, but it is literally therefore, however you want people to treat you, so treat them.

The golden rule begins with a therefore. And you know the question I'm going to ask you at this point, don't you? What is the therefore? Very good.

What is the therefore therefore? The therefore in the golden rule is therefore to point us back to the words Jesus says before the golden rule. And I submit to you that in the eleven verses before the golden rule Jesus is speaking of ways all of us wish to be treated.

[14 : 31] However you want others to treat you, so treat them. In Matthew 7, 1-11, Jesus is identifying three ways every one of us wants to be treated.

The first way we want to be treated is in verses 1-4. The second way we want to be treated is in verses 5-6. And the third way we want to be treated is in verses 7-11.

So now let me show you what I mean. First way, Jesus says, do not judge. This is one of the most frequently quoted sayings of Jesus and it is one of the least understood.

The Greek verb that Jesus uses, like the English word we use, has a wide range of meanings. This word can mean decree, esteem, go to court, sentence, think, conclude, determine.

I agree with those who say that when Jesus says do not judge, he does not mean turn a blind eye to your neighbor's faults.

[15 : 42] He does not mean refuse to discern. He does not mean suspend your critical faculty. We can't function in the world. We can't function in a broken world unless we make judgments.

Right? Paris must make judgments all the time in order to raise their children in a godly way.

Business leaders and politicians have to make good judgments or our society collapses.

And how can we as citizens even vote unless we make a good judgment between the candidates and their positions? So when Jesus says do not judge he does not mean do not make value judgments I mean if not the whole sermon on the mount one sustained call to discern and to choose wisely?

Matthew 5 20 unless your righteousness surpasses that of the scribes and Pharisees you won't even enter the kingdom of heaven six times you have heard it was said but I say to you three times do not act like the religious hypocrites Matthew 6 8 do not be like them Matthew 6 24 no one can serve two masters and on and on it goes and then there is this hard to else that means it is clearly a call to engage our highest critical faculties it is a call to be as critically discerning as possible so I agree with those who argue that when Jesus says do not judge he means do not condemn when

Jesus says do not judge he means do not pass sentence on he means do not render the final verdict he means do not close the book on another person's character or life he means do not dare to write the final sentence of the final chapter of another human being's life and then he gives us a whole bunch of reasons why we should not condemn for one thing he says we do not know all the facts we neither know all the circumstances nor do we know all that is going on inside another person and because we do not know all the facts and we do not know what is going on we cannot possibly make an accurate final verdict from 1976 to 1986

I served as the pastor of St. John's Presbyterian Church in West Los Angeles at the time West Los Angeles was about 50% Jewish it's probably higher than that now and it would seem it would seem from outward appearances that most of that Jewish population had written off Jesus as Savior and Lord but was that really so it became clear to me that the majority of people had not even had the opportunity to write Jesus off oh most of them had heard the word Jesus Christ but I soon discovered that in reacting to Jesus Christ they were not reacting to a person to the word Jesus Christ they weren't reacting to a person but to a whole host of other things whenever I would say Jesus Christ you could feel this intense negative reaction why because they were rejecting [19:24] Jesus no not at all the word Jesus Christ triggered thoughts in those Jewish people about Christian antisemitism the word Jesus Christ triggered thoughts about the church's silence during the Nazi Holocaust they were reacting to the pain and the anger triggered by the word they were not necessarily reacting to the person behind the word and for some reason the Lord helped me refer to him as Jesus of Nazareth not Jesus Christ and when I called him Jesus of Nazareth I didn't get intense reaction quite the contrary I had opportunities to share with people there was a professor of history at UCLA and he would ask me to come and give a lecture one time at each term in his class and I was to give a one hour lecture on the history of Christianity and

I was very careful to always refer to him as Jesus of Nazareth and I didn't feel any intensity in the room afterwards three Jewish girls one day asked if we could and one of the girls said to me so is this Jesus of Nazareth you speak about Jesus Christ I said yes wow I could love Jesus of Nazareth I wonder about that in our country in Canada people who write off Christianity my sense is the majority have never been exposed to Christianity never had a chance to write off the real thing they're reacting to something else so we can never close the book on another human being because we do not know all the facts and we cannot do so for another reason to judge in the sense of passing sentence is

God's prerogative and God's alone to close the book on another person oh she's hopeless or he's a loser is to us place that God alone has and it's to become guilty of the great sin of hubris of plain God only God can write the final verse of a person's life and thanks be to God in Jesus Christ that final verse is full of mercy and grace the final verse on your story is welcome home beloved we cannot close the book for still another reason Jesus warns us I don't like this section I don't like this section Jesus warns us that the ruler that the tape measure we use is the ruler and the tape measure that's going to be used on us verse one in the same way you judge others says Jesus you will be judged and with the measuring rod you use it will be measured to you that's why I'm getting rid of all my rumors except the ones shaped by mercy and grace someone has suggested that this saying of Jesus should frighten all of us out of the condemning business and then there is yet one more reason we cannot close the book on another person more often than not more often than we care to admit our judgment of another is but the reflection of our own sin I think that's what Jesus is getting at when he talks about specks of dust and lobs in the eye it's very possible that the speck of dust I see in your eye is simply the reflection of the log in my own eye it's very possible that the disgust

I have about my own sin but will not face is simply projected onto you now nowhere is this principle more involved than when it comes to the sin of pride and here our friend C.S.

[23:54] Lewis helps us there's no fault which makes a person more unpopular no fault of which we are more unconscious of in ourselves and the more we have it ourselves the more we dislike it in others Lewis 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 me or show off 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 fact that I'm so conscious of in your own eye just might be a reflection of my own judgment do not judge do not condemn do not write the verdict on another human being because none of us knows

all the facts to do so is to us serve the place of

God the ruler we use is going to be used on and we might just be revealing our own sin all of this makes me agree with what E.

Stanley Jones says about this text this attitude of censoriousness is always the sign of a declining spiritual life when religious people begin back sliding they begin back biting first specific of the golden rule do not close the book the second is an inseparable on the other hand the other side of the coin the second specific help people stay on track I call your attention to an overlooked clause in this text take the speck out of your neighbor's eye verse five take the speck out of your neighbor's eye Jesus realizes that actually there might be something in the neighbor's eye that there really might be something that's detrimental to the spiritual life take it out says the preacher on the mount in another place in Matthew 18 he says if your brother or sister sins go and show them their fault just do it one on one we owe it to one another as fellow citizens of the kingdom of

God as fellow members of the body of Christ to let one another know when we've got off the rail it's just that we're supposed to do this with first checking out what's going on in our lives we ask ourselves what does this mean about me what does this thing that bothers me about you now I think this is why Jesus brings in the sayings about dogs and swine don't put sacred things before dogs don't cast your pearls before swine I think he's reminding us that it is so easy to become so familiar with sacred reality that we lose the spirit of reverence Peter who heard Jesus preach these words I think takes this tack in his letter we call 2nd Peter in that letter Peter says that it's possible to commit apostasy he's argued that it's better not to have known the way of righteousness than to have known it and not walk in then he writes in 2 Peter 2 22 of them the proverbs are true a dog returns to its vomit and a pig that has washed those back to its wallowing in the mud he's saying it's so easy to happen we need to help each other come back to this place of reverence which brings us then to the third example of the golden rule ask seek not says

Jesus many commentators are puzzled that this teaching on prayer should come at this point in the sermon on the mount why here in Matthew 7 wouldn't it be better to have it back in Matthew 6 Jesus teaches us the Lord's prayer our father who art in heaven your name be hallowed on earth as it is in heaven bring your kingdom on earth as it is in heaven cause your will to be done on earth as it is in heaven give us to stay our daily bread and on it goes and then right there ask seek and knock I mean wouldn't that have been the better place to put it there in Matthew 7 why here in Matthew 7 I think that Jesus puts it here to make a point he puts it here to tell us that the way the most redemptive way to avoid a critical and judgmental spirit is to pray the most redemptive way that we can graciously and unoffensively help our sisters and brothers grow is to pray yes what [29 : 13] Jesus says about prayer in Matthew 7 has larger application it does encourage us to ask seek and knock for our own needs but I think Jesus teaches on prayer at this point in the sermon to encourage us in intercession to ask and seek and knock on behalf of other people and in particular to ask and seek and knock on behalf of the people that we want to judge and what an encouragement it is that he gives us ask seek knock no qualifiers just ask seek knock that simple yes remember the character of the one to whom you're praying says Jesus the father the heavenly father the good father your father the one who knows how to give good gifts and then to strengthen our understanding of this and this encouragement he brings in we earthly parents earthly parents he says know how to give good gifts and we are not good in fact

Jesus says we're evil did you catch that when people read the text it isn't going to win friends and influence evil not the most flattering part of the sermon on the mountain but it's realistic because none of us parents are free from sin and evil and yet we know how to give good gifts to our children who ask and seek and not we do not give them stones when they ask for bread we don't give them a snake when they ask for fish how much more says Jesus that's the key how much more will the one who is good who is not evil who is not sinful give good gifts to those who ask seek and not just ask seek and not simple as that yes because Jesus gives us even more encouragement and it's in verse eight let me render it literally verse eight listen for everyone who is asking is receiving and whoever is seeking is finding and to the one who is waste your breath praying you never waste your time praying in the asking something is happening in the seeking something is happening in the knocking something is happening what

Is this something? We're meeting the Father. We're encountering the Father. And in that, the Father is opening his heart to us and giving himself to us.

And we are discovering that the Father is gooder than we thought or imagined. And this Father who is good knows how to give good gifts to his adopted children. So, instead of closing the book on another person, pray for them.

Instead of writing them off, bring them to the throne of grace. If I could write a new bylaw for our Constitution, it would be.

[32 : 39] No one has a right to speak a critical word of anyone if they have not prayed for 48 hours. Some of you have been reading Dietrich Bonhoeffer's book, Life Together.

And in Life Together, Bonhoeffer calls us to this most significant act we can ever perform for another human being. Listen. A Christian fellowship lives and exists by the intercession of its members for one another or it collapses.

He goes on.

How does this take place?

Bonhoeffer continues. And then, intercession means no more than to bring the other into the presence of God. To see them under the cross of Jesus as a human being and as a sinner in need of grace.

[33 : 56] Then everything in them that repels me falls away. And I see in them their destitution and need. I take all of their need and their sin upon myself.

It becomes so heavy and oppressive that I feel it is my own and that I can do nothing else but say, Lord, you alone, deal with them according to your severity and your goodness.

And then this line. To make intercession means to grant our brothers and sisters the same right we have received, namely, to stand in the presence of Christ and receive mercy.

Therefore, ask, seek, none, especially on behalf of the person you want to judge.

How do you want to be treated by other people? I know how I want to be treated. I do not want anyone to close the book on me.

[35 : 04] I want to be given room to grow and change. I want to be shown when I'm off the rails and be brought back in to the kingdom way.

And I want to be carried to the foot of the cross. I want someone to lift me up and take me into the presence of Jesus Christ, Jesus of Nazareth.

Where we find mercy and life. Then, says Jesus, do so for others.

However you want people to treat you, so treat them. This sums it all up. It's brilliant. Simply brilliant. In relating to another human being, I am to consult my own best interest.

And then act toward that other human being out of my own best interest. And when I do, a miracle takes place. I discover that I'm outside myself.

[36 : 18] I discover that my issue no longer matters. And I discover that I have died. From my own self-interest. And a free. For the love. It's brilliant. Some argue that in order for us to live this way, we have to become new people.

And I agree. We have to receive the king and his kingdom. We do need to be born again from above. But today, I'd like to emphasize the opposite. Do this.

One little line. And we become new people.