

Grace to Live – The Golden Rule

Matthew 7:12 | Sunday, November 25, 2018 | By Brian Brookins

GRACE TO LIVE

THE GOLDEN RULE

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“So whatever you wish that others would do to you, do also to them, for this is the Law and the Prophets.”

We have been studying the Sermon on the Mount, the most famous, greatest sermon ever preached, preached by Jesus, recorded in Matthew, chapters 5, 6, and 7. We have almost completed our journey. I have a confession to make to you. I was tempted to finish all of this in one sermon. Because we have verse 12, then the very next verse, verse 13 begins the conclusion. It goes through verse 27, so about 14 or 15 verses. As Jesus concludes the sermon he goes through a series of “twos.” Two gates, two roads, two ways, two houses. He is clearly giving an invitation for the hearer to make a choice about which path they are on. I thought I’d preach that with verse 12, the Golden Rule. Then I realized, no, this is too important. This single verse carries such an important theme for us with such an emphasis by Jesus that it really deserves attention all by itself.

I could spend the rest of today’s message and go to verse after verse after verse, talking about the importance of love. I could actually do that for many, many sermons – just reading and making brief comments, because it is a theme over and over and over again in scripture: **We as Christians are to love other people.** In fact, this verse is one of those summary verses. It summarizes the Christian life for you. Maybe we would want to narrow that a little bit to say it summarizes how to treat other people. **It summarizes how to relate to other people.**

It is certainly a summary of the body of the Sermon on the Mount. Here is a really simple explanation, or outline. You’ve got the first 16 or so verses of the sermon – that’s the introduction, very important. Then you’ve got these last 15 or 16 verses, the conclusion. And in between, in the body of the sermon – this verse neatly, concisely summarizes it all for you. As I’ve said, this is a theme that occurs and reoccurs over and over.

You may have been to a Christian wedding and heard 1 Corinthians 13. The Apostle Paul in this great hymn says, “Though I speak with the tongues of men and of angels, but have not love, I am a gonging brass or a clanging symbol. If I have

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prophetic powers, if I have faith to move mountains, if I give my body to be burned, if I sell all that I have to give to the poor -- if I do this but have not love, I am nothing.”

It’s interesting that Paul in that hymn is borrowing little tidbits from things that Jesus said, like faith to move mountains. He is addressing these great spiritual gifts and abilities that we would put a premium on. He is saying, “All of this is nothing apart from love.”

Many people who don’t have any experience with Jesus Christ, who wouldn’t call themselves Christians, are familiar with the Golden Rule. Jesus is famous for this teaching. He took some understanding of love – there are certain ways that this Golden Rule has been expressed, but he activated it. He put it in the most aggressive, positive form that no one else had ever done, and he expounded on this in many, many ways.

Here’s what’s interesting. If you are a Christian, think about this. People who don’t personally know Jesus Christ – this is what they think of when they think of the teaching of Jesus. Many times people will say, “You know, the Christians that I know don’t live out this message that Jesus taught.”

Sometimes we do. Sometimes we do well. There are moments, maybe more than moments – I don’t mean this as a wholesale indictment, but I want to say as a pastor and as a Christian, there is truth in that concern. Significantly, we’ve just missed this massive message, that this is who we are in Jesus. This is how God is related to us and how he calls us to relate to other people. Right? We could be here all day long. That’s the truth, right? So, let’s learn what it has to say to us.

Let me give you a little understanding of how it is that Jesus can make this massive claim. Here’s what he said. I’ve said to you he’s summarizing the whole body of the Sermon on the Mount. But he says more than that, doesn’t he? He says, “This is the Law and the Prophets.” He is saying to you: “In one statement I’ve summarized the entire Old Testament.” How can he make that claim? I’m glad you’ve asked.

This is Jesus speaking in Matthew, chapter 22. He is having a conversation with a biblical scholar. He is being tested a little bit, so he summarizes the Old Testament in terms of two commandments. Matthew 22:37-40. The first commandment is given in verses 37 and 38. “And he said to him, “You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind. This is the great and first commandment.” Jesus said that if we’re going to summarize God’s law, this would be the first and greatest commandment.

What Jesus is doing here is summarizing the first four commandments. We call this the first table of the law, the first tablet of the law. These four:

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- 1) You shall have no other gods before me, literally no other gods before my face – the idea there is you cannot come before God worshipping something more than you worship God.
- 2) You shall make no idols. Idolatry, worshipping something created, is at the heart of all of our offense against God.
- 3) You shall not take the name of the Lord your God in vain. And,
- 4) Keep the Sabbath day holy.

Jesus, in the great commandment, verses 37 and 38, “You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, soul and mind” is summarizing these four commandments, the first table.

Then he goes on to give us the second command. “And a second is like it: You shall love your neighbor as yourself. On these two commandments depend all the Law and the Prophets.” He is summarizing here the second table, the second tablet of the Ten Commandments:

- 5) Honor your father and your mother.
- 6) You shall not murder.
- 7) You shall not commit adultery.
- 8) You shall not steal.
- 9) You shall not bear false witness against your neighbor. And,
- 10) You shall not covet.

Jesus takes these two commands – in the first he is quoting Deuteronomy 6:5 and in the second he is quoting Leviticus 19:18. **He pulls them together and is giving us handles to reduce down what God requires of us. It is to love God with all that we are and to love others with the same commitment with which we love ourselves.**

Now, sometimes in scripture, there is the use of just this second command -- loving your neighbor as yourself -- as shorthand for everything. The assumption under that is that you can only love others in the way that you should if you love God ultimately. Jesus, here in our Sermon on the Mount, Matthew 7:12, is activating that truth into an aggressive principle by which you live your whole life. Are you ready to break it down? Three things:

- I. **Wisdom.**

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II. Purpose.

III. Life.

There is amazing wisdom in this Golden Rule. This Golden Rule will lead you to your ultimate life purpose. And #3 – it will lead you to life, to new life. So let's start.

I. Wisdom.

If you've been listening to Jesus and taking him seriously in the Sermon on the Mount, what Jesus requires of us is troubling. He tells us to love our enemies. He tells us if someone slaps us on the cheek to turn the other cheek. He tells us if we're required to go a mile, go a second mile. If you are like most people, you are thinking, "Jesus, I know some people that if they require me to go a mile and I go the second mile, they'll take the third mile and the fourth mile and the fifth mile." Right?

If you're thinking right now, "Oh, you've met my spouse," don't even go there, alright? That's not what this sermon is about. But we have an immediate concern about being massively taken advantage of. I mean, how do you live this way, Jesus? How do you even drive on South Florida streets?

Interestingly enough, the big fear that comes up in our hearts is: "I won't have enough. If I live that kind of generous life that seems to be free of self-preservation, I will exhaust all of my resources." So in the body of the Sermon on the Mount, what does Jesus do? Do you remember what he does? He launches into this whole explanation about how you don't need to be anxious. "Just trust your heavenly Father. Seek him. Seek his kingdom first and he'll take care of you."

He deals with that anxiety, but now this principle, this Golden Rule comes in to sum up all of that. It's so helpful, because he is saying to you, "Do the loving thing. It's not just about abdicating your own personal rights." No, that is a call to follow Jesus – to come and deny self and take up your cross daily to follow him. But you want to do what is loving. So after having set aside the priority of getting more and self-preservation and pleasure and comfort, after removing that, now he give you this wisdom principle.

You say, "I have this person in my life. They have an addiction. If I give to them, they'll use this to feed that addiction. If they take from me and I give them more, they'll be feeding that addiction to their own destruction." What would you want, were you in their position? You would not want someone to feed that destructive, destroying addiction, right?

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In the same way, you would want more than that. You would want someone who would take the risk of loving you and being involved in your life. But what we want to do is say, “It’s too dangerous to associate with you. I’m checking out.” Jesus is saying, “No, that’s not what you would want. You wouldn’t want someone to be feeding your addiction, but neither would you want someone to just abandon you completely.” Listen, if you are dealing with this issue in your own life or with someone you love, I am not giving you a whole prescription for how to deal with addiction in three minutes. We understand these can be very complicated, nuanced dilemmas, but this principle is wonderfully helpful.

In Luke’s gospel this is presented to us in a way where it all comes together in back-to-back verses. Some of the same material we find in the Sermon on the Mount, Luke 6:30-31: “Give to everyone who begs from you, and from one who takes away your goods do not demand them back. As you wish that others would do to you, do so to them.” When you see them lined up like that, it’s oh so helpful.

You and I (it’s certainly true for me) -- there’s something that rises up in me when I feel like someone is trying to take advantage of me. I don’t like it. My emotions will kick in. Jesus is disarming us of that, but at the same time he is arming us with a wisdom principle to help us and to guide us.

Let’s continue. Let’s go to #2 and see about Purpose. Wisdom, Purpose.

II. Purpose.

What we discover here is the second great benefit and blessing of this Golden Rule. It crystalizes life purpose for us. This summarizes how to treat other people, how to relate to other people. When you give yourself to this, it has a clarifying effect so that you don’t get off track. If I could just be candid with you and talk about how in ministry and in church life it’s easy for us to get off track. **It’s easy for us to have other goals that are not really the main thing, when Jesus has made it so clear: “I am calling you to love other people.”**

So many of the complicated issues that we face will take a different shape. We may arrive in the same position in terms of our actual stance, but the way we go about it will look so different when we understand **the main purpose for which God has called us into this world is to show his love to a hurting world.** It’s not safe, but something awakens in us when we say, “This is not an appendage to my life. Living generously. Living for others, seeking the happiness of others in God is not an add-on. It is the calling of God and the purpose for which I’m here, no matter what it is vocationally I do.”

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Okay, listen, I know. You are saying, “Man, it’s Thanksgiving. Last week we were talking about gravy. It was lighter. This is heavy!” I understand that, but we are going to get hope before this message is over. I will not leave you here. Well, I’ll try not to leave you here.

There are many places I could go in scripture to illustrate this, but think about this one. I love this verse: Galatians 5:6. The Galatian church is dealing with pressure to circumcise all the believers that are not circumcised. It’s more than becoming ethnically Jewish. It’s about rituals and worship and tradition – just a lot packed in here. And Paul makes this statement: “For in Christ Jesus neither circumcision nor uncircumcision counts for anything, but only faith working through love.” This is one of those great summary verses.

This Sunday and last Sunday we’ve had a little scaled back worship. It was great, wasn’t it? Frequently we have drums and electric guitar. Now, you are really good as a church. I don’t get people coming to me and saying, “I don’t like it when we don’t have the drums.” Or, “I really like it when we don’t have the drums.” You do really well at not getting drawn into that kind of stuff. I’d like to think it’s because you’ve been pastored so well. But I know that can’t be it. I would like to think that there is a residing maturity in many of you who say, “No, no, no. That’s not the bottom line. We are not here to be entertained. We are here to worship the Lord. What matters is not whether I’m Baptist or I’m Methodist. No, I follow Jesus and faith in Christ is working its way out of my life. It’s only faith in Jesus. I receive his transforming love. Then it takes faith for me to say it’s not about me getting what I want all the time.”

I mean, good grief. I go to church websites sometimes: “We’ve got a contemporary service, we’ve got a traditional service, we’ve got a blended service, we’ve got a short service, we’ve got a long service, we’ve got a service for young people, we’ve got a service for women, we’ve got a service for men, we’ve got a service for whatever you want. We will meet your consumer...” Sorry. I’m just going off here. None of that’s bad in and of itself. We want to reach people. When it’s motivated out of love it’s great, but all of us want to hear this guiding correction. Don’t get hung up in all that. Yeah, we have to work through it. It’s not that it doesn’t matter at all, but it’s not the main thing. **The main thing is faith working through love.**

Alright, now we come to #3. We come to Life.

III. Life.

How does the Golden Rule bring life? You see, it’s wonderful to think, “Okay, this guiding rule provides wisdom on how to live. It reveals purpose. But there’s just one problem. There is just one incredibly large, overwhelming problem. Do you know what it is? I can’t do it. I mean, I really cannot do it. On my best days I cannot do it.”

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I was thinking about this, and I was thinking, “Lord, I can be so selfish, it’s just so deeply embedded in my heart.” And I really thought this: “How do my wife and kids get the grace to hear me preach?” I think sometimes they must sit there and say, “Yeah, right.” Maybe you want to come up here and say that’s not true right now.

When you wipe away all of our justifications, the way we give ourselves a pass and then judge other people -- when you wipe all that way, Jesus is saying to you, “I want you to love other people with the same level of commitment with which you love yourself.” If you grasp that, you’re like, “No, mm-mm. No. I’d like a new commandment. I want to trade my commandment. Give me 10, give me 12, but don’t give me this one.”

Interestingly enough, Jesus uses this formula over and over in the gospels. A scribe comes to him and says, “Hey, how do I get eternal life?” (The scribe is a biblical scholar.) “How do I get eternal life?” Jesus says, “Well, what about the commandments?” He gives him the second table. He gives him this Golden Rule in the Ten Commandments -- committing adultery, stealing, right? And the guy makes this incredible claim: “Done. Have kept those since my youth. No problem.”

If you’re Jesus in that moment, what do you do? Do you call him a liar? “You’re such a phony. In fact, I know, because I’m Jesus and I know everything.” Right? No. You know what he does? He immediately reveals the true love of this extremely wealthy man’s heart. He says, “Listen, you just lack one thing. It’s real simple. Just go do this. Go sell everything you have, give it to the poor, and follow me. And you’re in.”

The guy is despondent, because the veil has been lifted on the true god of his life. It’s interesting. Look at what Jesus says. The man leaves and Jesus, seeing that he had become sad said, “How difficult it is for those to have wealth to enter the kingdom of God. For it is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich person to enter the kingdom of God.”

If this sounds harsh to you, Jesus is loving you. He is telling you: Do not put your hope in wealth. Don’t. It will deceive you. It will leave you empty. Those who heard it said: “Who can be saved? Then who in the world can be saved (just to add some emphasis)? “But he said, what is impossible with man is possible with God.”

Let that stick there for a minute. Jesus, navigating his way through these areas, using this Golden Rule -- what is he doing? He is exposing: “You need a new heart. You need a new life. I’m offering you regeneration, a brand new life. I will set you free from the things that enslave you.” This is really good news, right?

Jesus perfectly lived the Golden Rule in your life. Jesus gave his life. He bled and died for his enemies. And he did it to set them free from everything that kept them from him. In this moment he is inviting you to come and be transformed and be renewed. When you take God’s requirement seriously and say, “Okay, I’m going to stop playing games. God really

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wants me to love people,” you immediately see the poverty of your own heart and spirit. And where did the Sermon on the Mount begin? **“Blessed are the poor in spirit for theirs is the kingdom of God.” In that moment you are invited into Jesus. It’s not a moment of despair. The despair is brief.**

“Listen, it scares me. If I’m following you and you become the Lord of my life, Lord that scares me.” **But the moment you step through that threshold, immediately you experience life and peace and joy.**

I was okay until he started talking about money. He’s a pastor. I knew he would talk about money. That’s all they care about. That’s not all that wrong. Right? It’s not all that wrong. But the truth is still the truth. Okay? Pastors have not always modeled freedom from the love of money very well. And for that I ask you to forgive me and to forgive us.

Let me move on. Let’s talk about something other than money, because that’s a tough one. Let’s go back to what we skipped for a moment.

Do you remember this verse? “For in Christ Jesus neither circumcision nor uncircumcision counts for anything. It’s not about your religious traditions. It’s not about any of that. **What matters is faith working through love.**” Before he finishes Galatians, look at how he brings up a parallel. I love this. This is amazing. In the next chapter he does this. “For neither circumcision counts for anything nor uncircumcision.” Sound familiar? But what? “But a new creation.”

Here’s what matters. I want to reduce it for you: Faith expressing itself in the Golden Rule in your life. You trusting in Jesus, living for other people is synonymous. It is the same as you trusting in Jesus and him making you a new creation, because you can’t do this without this. Only when Jesus comes in and makes you new can you even begin to want to do it. You will want to cling to unforgiveness and bitterness and resentment and love of created things and all those other pursuits. They hold our hearts in a way that we cannot let go until we turn with a new heart given to us by God to say, “No, no, no. You know what? That’s a trade down. There is greater joy and greater peace that I find when I trust in Jesus.”

Okay, I want to end with this: Luke 19. You remember this man comes to Jesus in Luke 18. He is claiming to have kept the commands and Jesus tells him to go sell everything. The followers of Jesus are wondering, “How can anyone follow you? This is just impossible.” Jesus makes this statement: “What’s impossible with men, (yeah, it is impossible) is possible with God.”

In the very next chapter, almost the very next episode is one of my favorite stories in the whole Bible. Jesus comes to a town and there is a man there who is short. He is extremely short. . Some people believe he is so short that he would have been ridiculed, not just as a short person, but would have had a deficiency of some form that would have put him in a special class of need. And he is a tax collector. His name is Zacchaeus, and he is extremely wealthy. But he cannot see

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Jesus because of his height, so he climbs up in a tree so that he can see Jesus. Jesus sees him, encounters this man, welcomes him into the kingdom, and do you remember what happens? The religious people of the day -- those who care about circumcision and uncircumcision -- they are angry at Jesus because he is spending time with these sinners. And Zacchaeus is transformed. He is renewed.

The reason I tell you about his height is because if you know anything about human nature, you know how his power and his position and his money compensated for what society put on him or what he put on himself because of that challenge. We are so impacted by little passing comments that people make to us about the color of our hair, our height, our weight, our ethnicity, and on and on and on.

We are hard on ourselves about where we think we don't measure up, but here was something that made this man something, someone to be reckoned with. This brought him credibility. And in a moment he left it. He ran from it, to run to Jesus. It's awesome.

Do you know what he said? Anyone I've defrauded, I'm giving four times back to that person. I'm giving half to the poor. Immediate transformation takes place in this man's heart. And look at what Jesus said to him: "Today salvation has come to this house, since he also is a son of Abraham." Look at this. I love this: "For the son of Man came to seek and to save the lost."

Do you remember the toxic toads from a couple of weeks ago? My dogs want these poisonous toads. Sometimes the things we want most are the things that are killing us. **Jesus loves you so much that he died to set you free from the things that you want more than him. That is good news.** Let's pray.