

# The Sermon on the Mount

## "The Golden Rule" (Matthew 7:12)

### INTRODUCTION:

- I. As we near the end of our series of studies on The Sermon on the Mount, we need to keep in mind the purpose for this teaching of Jesus some two-thousand years ago.
  - A. Some today – including some of our own brethren – contend that the teachings of Jesus in The Sermon on the Mount are simply an attempt on the part of Jesus to correct Jewish misunderstandings about the REAL meaning of the Law of Moses.
    1. They contend that the Jews in Jesus' day had been confused by the traditions and the endless rules and regulations handed down by the scribes and Pharisees.
    2. It's said that the Jews in the days of Jesus had lost sight of the real intent and meaning of the Law of Moses and its various commands.
    3. Therefore, it's argued that the extent that their devotion to God was shallow at best – done merely out of habit or ritual.

- B. While it's certainly true that the worship of many in the days of Jesus had been relegated to mindless rituals and traditions invented by men, it's not correct to simply relegate the teachings of Jesus as an attempt to correct Jewish misunderstanding about the real intent and purpose of the Law of Moses.
1. The Sermon on the Mount, as with all the teachings of Jesus, are the fundamental, foundational teachings of the spiritual kingdom Jesus came to establish.
    - a. We have emphasized over and over that: *Jesus went about all Galilee, teaching in their synagogues, preaching the gospel of the kingdom... (Matthew 4:23)*
    - b. Jesus said: **Luke 16:16** – *"The law and the prophets were until John. Since that time the kingdom of God has been preached... "*
  2. Therefore, while it's certainly true that Jesus corrected misapplications and misinterpretations many had given to the commandments of God found in the Law of Moses, it's also true that Jesus prepared His hearers for the coming kingdom by preaching these fundamental truths that are just as applicable to us today as they were to those people some two-thousand years ago.

- II. Over the past two weeks, we've focused our attention on Jesus' teaching in **Matthew chapter 7** in The Sermon on the Mount concerning our need to avoid judging one another.
  - A. First, we learned that Jesus very pointedly condemned two kinds of judgment.
    - 1. Judgment based on double-standards – one very strict, unyielding standard for you and another, more tolerant, yielding standard for me. **(Matthew 7:1-2)**
    - 2. Judgment where we are quick to see sins in the lives of others, but have become blinded to the sins in our own lives. **(Matthew 7:3-5)**
  - B. But, at the same time, Jesus went on to say there will be times when we need to exercise judgment and discernment. **(Matthew 7:6)**
    - 1. We have a responsibility to lovingly approach a brother or sister who is allowing unrepentant sin to interfere with their relationship with the Lord and which may eventually jeopardize their eternal destiny.
      - a. That requires some form of judgment.
    - 2. And we may need exercise discretion or discernment in knowing when it might be wiser to simply avoid some people

who would mock our attempts to admonish them, and would turn on us instead.

a. That also requires some form of judgment.

C. Therefore, in our lesson last week, we learned the most important way of gaining the wisdom and discernment in those situations is to ask for that wisdom through persistent prayer. **(Matthew 7:7-11)**

1. We are to ASK, SEEK and KNOCK – but to do our asking, seeking and knocking in FAITH, believing God will answer our request for wisdom and discernment.
2. And the reason we know He will answer that request is because He IS our Father in heaven and wants to provide us with ALL the spiritual blessings we need to live faithful, productive lives as Christians.

III. Now, as we come to **Matthew 7:12**, we find Jesus is STILL discussing the subject of judging one another.

A. We have come to call this verse "THE GOLDEN RULE."

1. But in essence, this timeless, eternal principle for righteous living is a brief summary of all Jesus has taught concerning our relationship to one another.

2. **Matthew 7:12** – *"Therefore, whatever you want men to do to you, do also to them, for this is the Law and the Prophets."*
  3. It's a simple, and yet DEEPLY PROFOUND summary of all the Law of Moses and the Old Testament prophets taught concerning MAN'S RELATION TO MAN.
  4. But even MORE important, this "rule" serves as a perfect summary of the kind of righteousness the Lord expects of ALL who would be citizens of the kingdom of heaven.
- B. But what does this have to do with judgment?
1. How does this divine principle of treating others the way we would want them to treat us fit into the context of judging others?
  2. The answer should be rather obvious!
    - a. If we desire compassion and understanding when others judge us for OUR faults, then we need to be compassionate and understanding when it comes to judging others for THEIR faults.
    - b. If WE expect fair and equitable treatment at the hands of others, then WE need to be fair and equitable in our treatment of THEM.

- C. Therefore, let's take a few minutes this morning to look a little more closely at this wonderful teaching of Jesus.
  - 1. Because it's in this ONE SENTENCE that we find the purest distilled teachings of Jesus relating to our relationship and treatment of others.

**BODY:**

- I. When we look at this statement of Jesus, many of us may recognize that there are many SIMILAR rules that have been advocated over the centuries.
  - A. Throughout the history of humankind, some of the world's great leaders and thinkers have come up with simple statements that express how we should treat our fellow man.
    - 1. Some contend that Jesus didn't really teach anything NEW here, but that He was merely repeating what others had taught.
    - 2. For example, look at some of the teachings of others:
      - a. The HINDU religion (ca 600 BC): *This is the sum of duty: do not to others which if done to you would cause you pain.*
      - b. The BUDDHIST religion (Buddha, 560 – 483 BC): *Hurt not others with that which pains yourself.*

- c. ISOCRATES (Isocrates 436-338 BC): *Do not do unto others what angers you if done to you by others.*
  - d. The JEWISH Talmud (500 BC): *What is hateful to you, do not to your fellow men. That is the entire Law; all the rest is commentary.*
3. These are all perfectly good philosophies dealing with the way we should REFRAIN from doing harm to others.
4. But all of these are vastly different from the teaching of Jesus.
- B. The so-called GOLDEN RULE taught by Jesus approaches our treatment of others from a POSITIVE, PRO-ACTIVE standpoint, while the others are NOT.
- 1. The teaching of Jesus REQUIRES and DEMANDS that you and I do something FAVORABLY to others, while the other teachings we've just examined only PROHIBIT us from doing something UNFAVORABLY toward others.
    - a. Jesus said: DO unto others what you want them to DO to you.
    - b. The others say: DON'T DO to others what you DON'T WANT done to you.
  - 2. With the others, all that is required is that you don't HARM other people.

3. But the teaching of Jesus requires you and I to SHOW KINDNESS toward others and DO GOOD to others.
  4. This is why the teaching of Jesus is often called THE GOLDEN RULE, while the others are often called SILVER RULES.
    - a. They are certainly of value, but not as much as the teaching of Jesus – just as silver is not as valuable as gold.
  5. The only exception is an ISLAMIC teaching: No one of you is a believer until he desires for his brother that which he desires for himself. (ca 600 AD)
    - a. The teaching of Muhammad came along some 600 years AFTER Jesus, and some of his teachings are loosely based on the Old Testament and the teachings of Jesus found in the four Gospels)
  6. So what Jesus taught was vastly different from what "uninspired" teachers had taught previously.
- II. However, what Jesus taught on this occasion is not really new – it's a simple summary of all the Old Testament Law of Moses and the Prophets taught regarding our relationship to one another.
- A. In fact, that's exactly what Jesus said.

1. **Matthew 7:12** – *Therefore, whatever you want men to do to you, do also to them, for this is the Law and the Prophets.*
  - a. This one "rule" summarizes what the Law and the Prophets were all about
2. On another occasion Jesus said essentially the same thing:
  - a. **Matthew 22:34-40** – *But when the Pharisees heard that He had silenced the Sadducees [over a question about the resurrection], they gathered together. 35 Then one of them, a lawyer, asked Him a question, testing Him, and saying, 36 "Teacher, which is the great commandment in the law?" 37 Jesus said to him, "'You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind.' 38 This is the first and great commandment. 39 And the second is like it: 'You shall love your neighbor as yourself.' 40 On these two commandments hang all the Law and the Prophets ."*
  - b. The Old Testament Law of Moses contained in the Ten Commandments dealt with two relationships – our relationship with God, and our relationship with our fellow man.

- c. The first FOUR commandments deal with our relationship with God, while the remaining SIX commandments deal with our relationship with one another.
  - d. Therefore, Jesus said LOVING GOD and LOVING OUR NEIGHBOR summarize all that is found in the Old Testament scriptures.
  - e. And that same principle holds true for you and I as Christians today – we need to LOVE GOD and LOVE OUR NEIGHBOR as ourselves – treating our neighbor the way we would want to be treated.
3. In one of the most famous of all the parables of Jesus, He taught this same principle of being PRO-ACTIVE in the way we love our neighbor.
- a. **Luke 10:25-37** – *And behold, a certain lawyer stood up and tested Him, saying, "Teacher, what shall I do to inherit eternal life?" 26 He said to him, "What is written in the law? What is your reading of it?" 27 So he answered and said, "'You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, with all your strength, and with all your mind,' and 'your neighbor as yourself.'" 28 And He said to him, "You have answered rightly; do this and you*

*will live." 29 But he, wanting to justify himself, said to Jesus, "And who is my neighbor?" 30 Then Jesus answered and said: "A certain man went down from Jerusalem to Jericho, and fell among thieves, who stripped him of his clothing, wounded him, and departed, leaving him half dead. 31 Now by chance a certain priest came down that road. And when he saw him, he passed by on the other side. 32 Likewise a Levite, when he arrived at the place, came and looked, and passed by on the other side. 33 But a certain Samaritan, as he journeyed, came where he was. And when he saw him, he had compassion. 34 So he went to him and bandaged his wounds, pouring on oil and wine; and he set him on his own animal, brought him to an inn, and took care of him. 35 On the next day, when he departed, he took out two denarii, gave them to the innkeeper, and said to him, 'Take care of him; and whatever more you spend, when I come again, I will repay you.'*

- b. The priest and the Levite in this story COULD have argued that they KEPT the Talmudic interpretation of what it means to do GOOD by arguing they did NO HARM to the injured man.
  - c. But Jesus showed that loving our neighbor is MUCH more than never doing anything to HARM him, it's DOING things to DO HIM GOOD!
  - d. We demonstrate our love of SELF by doing GOOD THINGS for ourselves – rewarding ourselves, doing things we enjoy.
4. This concept of loving our neighbor as ourselves – a PRO-ACTIVE kind of love that seeks to DO GOOD to our neighbor – is also expressed in Paul's letter to the church at Rome.
- a. **Romans 13:8-10** – *Owe no one anything except to love one another, for he who loves another has fulfilled the law. 9 For 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." 10 Love does no harm to a neighbor; therefore love is the fulfillment of the law.*

III. Now, let's put this teaching of Jesus back into the context of judging or of being judgmental.

A. What is it that Jesus was actually saying here?

1. As we've already mentioned, Jesus condemned two kinds of judging. **(Matthew 7:1-5)**
  - a. Judgment based on double-standards.
  - b. Judgment that is blind to our own sins.
2. But He also pointed out that there are times when we must exercise DISCRETIONARY JUDGMENT, or DISCERNMENT. **(Matthew 7:6)**
3. And to know how to judge PROPERLY in those instances we need to pray for wisdom – we need to ASK, SEEK and KNOCK. **(Matthew 7:7-11)**
4. However, if you want to sum up the teachings of Jesus on judging then follow the so-called GOLDEN RULE: **Matthew 7:12** – *Therefore, whatever you want men to do to you, do also to them, for this is the Law and the Prophets.*

5. In other words, if YOU treat OTHERS the way YOU want to be treated then it's unlikely that you will ever do the wrong thing.

## CONCLUSION

- I. Obviously, some of the teachings of Jesus are very deep and complex, but for the most part, everything we find in The Sermon on the Mount is simple and to the point.
  - A. Do you remember when Jesus said He had NOT come to "destroy" the Law, but to fulfill it in every way? (**Matthew 5:17**)
    1. This is just another example of how Jesus expects for you and me to live RIGHTEOUS, GODLY lives as His disciples.
    2. This is the only way we will be able to lead others to a saving knowledge of Jesus Christ.
    3. That's why Jesus said, **Matthew 5:20** – *For I say to you, that unless your righteousness exceeds the righteousness of the scribes and Pharisees, you will by no means enter the kingdom of heaven.*
    4. Being a DISCIPLE of Jesus Christ – a Christian – is FAR MORE than simply REFRAINING from doing BAD things. It's about DOING the RIGHT things.
  - B. Are you DOING the right things?

1. The respected Presbyterian theologian Adam Clarke in his commentary put it this way: "Guided by justice and mercy, do unto all men as you would have them to do to you..."
2. Our lives as Christians are lives that need to be spent DOING the right things – acting out of justice and mercy in our everyday dealings with others.
3. But part of DOING the right thing also involves BEING a true disciple (follower) of Jesus Christ.
  - a. If you've never surrendered your life to Jesus Christ as your Lord and Savior, then...
  - b. If you have given your heart and soul to Jesus Christ in the past through your obedience to the gospel, but...