

THE GOLDEN RULE

How does that go again, "do unto others before they do unto you"? Not quite. Maybe it's this one: "he who has the gold makes the rules." Then there's the two golden rules of marriage: 1, the wife is always right; and 2, refer to rule #1.

Jesus didn't call it "the golden rule" but it's an apt description, as we learn from Luke 6:30-34, part of His teaching on the beatitudes. The blessing of God is experienced by followers of Jesus Christ as they learn to become like Him, in their attitudes and actions toward others.

ALWAYS BE READY TO GIVE - "*Give to everyone who begs from you, and from one who takes away your goods do not demand them back,*" Jesus says in verse 30. It's an echo of Psalm 32:21 and Proverbs 21:26. The righteous give passive resistance, but they are not to be victims of every passing thief or anyone who wishes to take advantage of them. "We read this in light of the whole of Jesus' teaching" notes theologian RC Sproul, "as it is qualified elsewhere in Scripture."

"The spirit that is to characterize the Christian in the kingdom of God is a willingness to give," notes Sproul. The believer recognizes all he has and is comes from God and is for God's purposes. His followers will emulate His generous gracious heart. Christ models this in Philippians 2: "*look not only to your own interests, but also to the interests of others.*"

CAN YOU DO THE GOLDEN RULE - "*As you wish that others would do to you, do so to them,*" declares Jesus in verse 31. It echoes in Matthew 7:12 and Leviticus 19:18 as "*love your neighbor as yourself.*" In Deuteronomy 6:5 and Mark 12:29-31, it's "*love God with all your being and your neighbor as yourself*" as the "great commandment" summing up all of God's law.

But the world says, "don't get mad, get even." When my sons were little, one of them would punch the other's arm, only to have him beat on his head. We had to explain Exodus 21:23-25, which presents the '*lex talionis*' law that limits retaliation to equal penalty: an eye for an eye, wound for wound. If only our justice system would be as circumspect as this!

DON'T DO WHAT YOU DON'T WANT - the golden rule had been stated negatively by rabbi Hillel as "what is hateful to you, do not do to your neighbor. This is the whole Torah, the rest is commentary thereof." Jesus goes further, making this proactive, to take the initiative to "*do to others what you would want done to you.*" This is love, doing what is best for the other.

Verse 31 helps us understand verse 30, because it shows it's "attitude" that is important, the heart and motive behind words and deeds. Otherwise, as Leon Morris observes, "if Christians took this absolutely literally, there would soon be a class of saintly paupers owning nothing, and a class of prosperous idlers and thieves. It is not this that Jesus seeks, but readiness among His followers to give and give and give."

EXPECT NOTHING IN RETURN - What keeps most people from giving away what they have? Love for their possessions. "This should never keep a Christian from giving," notes theologian RK Hughes. "Love must be ready to give everything, or have it taken away. Love decides when to give and when to withhold our possessions."

Verse 32-34 Jesus said, "*if you love those who love you, what benefit is that to you? For even sinners love those who love them. And if you do good to those who do good to you, what benefit is that to you? For even sinners do the same. And if you lend to those from whom you expect to receive, what credit is that to you? Even sinners lend to sinners, to get back the same amount.*" (See also Matthew 5:42,46, and Luke 14:12-14).

WALK BY THE LAW OF LOVE - Love is ready to give. Love gives. Love doesn't expect anything back. "Anyone can show charity who hopes to gain something by it," notes JC Ryle, "but this doesn't rise an inch above the level of an old Roman or Greek idolater. Rather, the Christian loves others from higher principles than do the ungodly."

Jesus' disciples are not to be like the world, not of His day nor of our day. Rather, we are to be like Jesus. The world says look out for your own self-interest. The way of Jesus says, "*Look not only to your own interests, but also to the interests of others*" - all by His power within! □