

THE GOLDEN RULE OF THE KINGDOM

Matthew 7:1-12

Key verse 12

“So in everything, do to others what you would have them do to you, for this sums up the Law and the Prophets.”

We are coming to the end of Jesus’ Sermon on the Mount. Today Jesus will give us the Golden Rule of His Kingdom: “Do to others what you would have them do to you.” Down through history this has been the mark of Jesus’ kingdom people: taking the initiative in loving others with a sincere heart and practical action. In today’s world, polarized by extremes, there is an abundance of opinion and judgment, but very little positive action taken for another’s good. Will we be different? Will the extent of our justice, mercy and faithfulness be an opinionated post to facebook, arguing our point to maximum impact? Or will there be a marked contrast in the way we live, clearly perceived by anyone as love? Lord, let us not only learn your golden rule today, but grow to be those who do it in our world, starting in our families, fellowships, communities and campuses!

First, do not judge (1-6). Verses 1-2. **“Do not judge, or you too will be judged. For in the same way you judge others, you will be judged, and with the measure you use, it will be measured to you.”** Jesus’ command here is very clear: **“Do not judge.”** Yet how do we interpret this command? One extreme is to silence the declaration of sin as sin: “Do not commit adultery!” “Hey! Don’t judge!” Another extreme explains Jesus’ command away giving it no practical application, saying, “Jesus says, do not judge, but we should be discerning.” What does it mean to judge? I think Jesus is telling us not to come to a judgment and conclusion about a person based on one small snapshot of their life, as if we were the judge of their life. The problem with this is obvious: nobody is perfect. We have been studying the Sermon on the Mount, and Jesus’ teachings and exhortations are intentionally challenging. When applied to others, we can endlessly find things wrong with each other. If we do that, then we have twisted the purpose of Jesus’ teaching around. His kingdom just becomes another part of the dog eat dog world. Jesus commands clearly: **“Do not judge.”** Like everything in Jesus’ teachings, this is to be applied to myself first, and in real situations, not just in theory or principle.

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For many of us raised and taught clear moral boundaries and expectations, this can be very challenging. Living in close community, where we are supposed to be transparent with each other, it is easy to fixate on other people's problems, and come to a conclusion about them: "You always...." or "You never..." Since we noticed this in them, we may feel a little better about ourselves, and in some superficial way, we may even be correct, but it leads to a mocker's lifestyle – deriving self-validation and self-worth through tearing others down. Especially if we begin to voice these opinions, typically behind their back, such judging destroys people and God's community.

So how can I avoid judging like this? Note that Jesus emphasized that when we judge others, we will be judged – even the measure we use will be measured to us, meaning how we treat others is how we will be treated. Does anyone here like a judgmental person? God doesn't either. But God loves a merciful person. Jesus said, "**Blessed are the merciful, for they will be shown mercy**" (5:7). To overcome the tendency to judge others, two things have been helpful to me: **1) Realize that God is the Judge, and FEAR HIM.** It is his job, and he will do it once and for all. I am not fit to judge anyone, only God is. He chooses to be kind and patient with us, rather than quick to judge. His patience leads us to repentance. **2) God sees the whole picture, I do not.** While I judge a person on some immediate event, God sees their whole life, including the motives in their heart. Be kind, you have no idea what people are going through.

Jesus helps us with two hyperbolic questions: **(1) "Why do you look at the speck of sawdust in your brother's eye and pay no attention to the plank in your own eye (3)?"** We tend to scrutinize other people's small issues, while ignoring our own very large issues. Sometimes fixating on other's problems is the very means of ignoring our own major issues, or even justifying them. **(2) "How can you say to your brother, 'Let me take the speck out of your eye,' when all the time there is a plank in your own eye (4)?"** To avoid dealing with our own baggage, sometimes we devote ourselves to wanting to help others. But due to our own log, we can't see clearly, and end up beating people over the head, swinging our log around. Note the contrast here between a speck of sawdust and a plank, or log. We all have elements of our behavior, habits, lifestyle and speech that exhibit

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sin in an extremely irritating way, like having a speck of sawdust in their eye. Through diligence and discipline, Pharisees had perfected a legalistic way of reducing or eliminating these things from their lives, but Jesus saw the logs that were still there, saying in Matthew 23:23, **“Woe to you, teachers of the law and Pharisees, you hypocrites! You give a tenth of your spices – mint, dill and cumin. But you have neglected the more important matters of the law – justice, mercy and faithfulness. You should have practiced the latter, without neglecting the former.”** We have logs in our life like injustice, legalism, pride, lust, selfishness, and so many others, which originate from within and are far more serious than the small things we fixate on in others.

Jesus’ questions should lead us to take a moment of deep introspection, examining my own life. An unexamined life is not worth living (Socrates, at his trial). In John 8, the Pharisees bring to Jesus a woman caught in the act of adultery. She is clearly guilty, and they are all ready to carry out judgment on her. Yet Jesus said: **“Let any one of you who is without sin be the first to throw a stone at her” (Jn 8:7).** Do Jesus’ questions in verses 3 and 4 expose anything in your life? Any logs needing removal?

Jesus didn’t leave the adulterous woman feeling condemned and useless, but helped her to deal with her sin – not from a position of judgment but forgiveness! So he wants to help us too. Verse 5, **“You hypocrite, first take the plank out of your own eye, then you will see clearly to remove the speck from your brother’s eye.”** The church should become a place where people grow in holiness, with fewer planks and specks all around. Jesus wants us to help our brothers and sisters with their specks. How can we? Jesus says, **“You hypocrite, first take the plank out of your own eye...”** I should take personal holiness seriously as I seek to love my brothers and sisters. Jesus said he sanctified himself, that we too may be truly sanctified (Jn 17:19). Let’s repent of our sins, and seek God’s help to pull out the planks in our own lives, to experience his deep grace of forgiveness, cleansing and healing. Then we gain perspective we didn’t have – seeing others clearly from a position of grace and humility. Instead of throwing stones at people, we will help people leave their life of sin, just like Jesus did. This changes our community inwardly: we will grow in holy strength to bear any matter, deal with it, and overcome it in the light. Outwardly: we become a place where there is real

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acceptance and forward progress toward holiness. We become true Salt and Light in the world.

Look at verse 6. **“Do not give to dogs what is sacred; do not throw your pearls to pigs. If you do, they may trample them under their feet, and turn and tear you to pieces.”** Jesus teaches discernment to protect what is sacred and valuable. Dogs are violent animals, and pigs were unclean. In the Bible they may represent the fools who say in their heart there is no God, or who despise correction. In this way Jesus tempers the instructions of the previous verses. This godly community of love, where we seek to help each other grow in holiness through compassion and grace is sacred, as the household of God! The word of God, guiding our every step and decision, is more precious than the finest pearls! But not everyone in this world thinks so. Without discernment, our efforts can be misunderstood, misapplied, or leave us vulnerable. We need a balance: The early church community made such a contrast with the godless world, clearly set apart, that people outside would never dare enter it, and yet their love and compassion for one another was clearly evident, and attracted daily new members who joined through baptism (Ac 2:42-47; 5:13). For this, we need wisdom.

Second, ask, seek, knock (7-11). Verses 7-8. **“Ask and it will be given to you; seek and you will find; knock and the door will be opened to you. For everyone who asks receives; the one who seeks finds; and to the one who knocks, the door will be opened.”** It seems best to understand these sets of promises in the context of the Sermon on the Mount, not independently. In seeking to “not judge others” but to “remove our own planks”, and also the sensitive task of delicately removing another’s speck, we need help. You won’t get without asking, and you’ll never find it without seeking, and if you don’t knock, how will anyone ever open the door for you? The form of the verbs imply persistence: “keep asking,” “keep seeking”, and “keep knocking.” Don’t give up!

Each of these verbs describe practical faith in God. Asking – for what we do not have but need, as Jesus described in the Lord’s Prayer (6:8-13). In the immediate context, we need wisdom. James tells us that if we need wisdom, we should ask God (Jas 1:5), but later says we don’t have because we don’t ask God for it (Ja 4:2b). Through Jesus’ sacrifice a way has been opened for us to approach

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God's throne of grace with confidence (Heb 4:16). Are we taking advantage of it? My sons pray nightly, mostly thanking God, but they also ask God for things, not just once, but nightly. One thing they ask God is that Cooper Diaz may be healed of his cancer. We have many people around us with many practical needs, and we have problems that seem impossible. Jesus says: **"Ask and it will be given to you."** Seeking – talks about direction, something we've lost or need to find (6:33). What does our heart long for? Jesus said blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they will be filled (5:6). He taught us to seek reconciliation with others, to settle matters quickly, or resolve our deeply rooted lust problem. Knocking – take a practical step; to press in, to seek understanding, to ask questions and converse with people, instead of simply making a judgment. One thing we see in Jesus' teachings in the Sermon on the Mount is his desire for his kingdom people to be doers of his words, not those who agree with his principles only. This requires courage and initiative on our part.

Look at verses 7-8 again. On what basis does Jesus make this promise? Look at verses 9-11. **"Which of you, if your son asks for bread, will give him a stone? Or if he asks for a fish, will give him a snake? If you, then, though you are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father in heaven give good gifts to those who ask him!"** Jesus makes this promise on the basis of our relationship with our Father in Heaven, who knows how to give good gifts. I have four sons. Verses 9-10 are clear: boys are always hungry! The first thing they want when they wake up is to eat. Amy starts work at 5AM so it is my job as the father to feed them. I had to figure out what is good for them, not a stone or a snake! Jesus says I'm an evil dad, who is sometimes burdened by this, often making mistakes. But my Father in Heaven is nothing like me! How much more will he give good gifts to those who ask him! Matthew 7:7 and 6:33 are very much related in that they are promises which are only truly understood as we practice them by faith. Only those who seek first God's kingdom and his righteousness truly understand by experience the power of Jesus' promise in Matthew 6:33. Likewise, only those who have actively engaged in asking, seeking and knocking persistently have experienced the means in which our Father in Heaven has provided good gifts to those who ask him. What are you asking, seeking, knocking about? Helping one person, dealing with my sin, living in a fallen world, bridging cultural and generational barriers to advance the kingdom: I

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have so many needs! Engaging these practically by faith in Matthew 7:7 is the road to overcoming.

Third, do to others as you would have them do to you (12). Our key verse today is 12. **“So in everything, do to others what you would have them do to you, for this sums up the Law and the Prophets.”** Most teachings have application in an area or theme. Solomon said: there is a time for everything (Ecc 3:1a), but Jesus says: **“In everything.”** We call this the Golden Rule, and Jesus wants us to practice this **“in everything.”**

Such a teaching had been around in many cultures. For example, in the 3rd to 6th century BC in Egypt there was the saying: “That which you hate to be done to you, do not do to another.” This is very similar to Jesus’ words, **“Do not judge, or you too will be judged.”** Such a view is a good way to prevent many evils in the world, but also leads to isolation. But in making this universal statement, his Golden Rule, King Jesus says, **“Do to others.”** He teaches us to take the initiative in doing good to others. This is just as our Father has done for us. He took the initiative in loving us. He didn’t wait until we finally lived up to his law and expectation. The Bible says he demonstrated his love for us in this: **“While we were still sinners, Christ died for us”** (Ro 5:8). **“Since he did not spare his own Son, but gave him up for us all – how will he not also graciously give us all things?”** (Ro 8:32) Practicing the Golden Rule is the exact way to follow Jesus. Since God in Christ Jesus has provided all we need, we are now free to do good to others.

What good should we do for others? Jesus makes an important qualifier: **“do to others what you would have them do to you.”** I don’t think Jesus wants us to use the Golden Rule as a means to manipulate people into doing things for us. “I want you to respect me, so I’m going to love you.” Instead, to know what is good for the other person will require me to trade places: “If I was that person, what would I want another person to do for me?” This gives us many more asking topics, as it requires us to seek understanding of a person and their situation. It requires humility to learn from them, to really know them, and find what to do. This is practicing Jesus’ incarnational living.

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Jesus explains that this “**sums up the Law and the Prophets.**” We do this not as an expression of our own righteousness, or maintenance thereof. On the basis of God’s grace to us in giving us a surpassing righteousness in Christ, we are to live in love. Jesus summarizes the law later in Matthew 22:37-40 – Love God, love our neighbor. These two are connected: “**This is how we know what love is: Jesus Christ laid down his life for us. And we ought to lay down our lives for our brothers and sisters**” (1Jn 3:16). In view of this, I see I have a debt of love to be expressed to others that can never be repaid. We are asked to pay it forward through loving others, obeying Jesus’ commands. In other words, practicing this kind of love fulfills what God wants and requires in the Law. This is true in two ways: **1) By practically obeying the Golden Rule of the Kingdom, we won’t break any of God’s laws. 2) More than that, as we focus our actions and endeavors on doing good to others we will fulfill what the law requires.** Paul in his letter to the Galatians encourages us this way: Walk in the way of love. Those who serve others this way will have a rich reward when Jesus comes to judge all people (25:34-36). And in the meantime, we grow in Christ’s character, mind and heart. But if we continue to live selfishly, serving only for the sake of our own agenda, we need to know God takes it very seriously. It is worse than simply violating some arbitrary moral standard; it is a violation of God’s grace and mercy to us. He will deal with such people very drastically and tragically (18:32-34; 25:41-43).

May God bless us to grow in the image of our generous, merciful and gracious heavenly Father, who chose to forgive, rather than to judge. Let’s come to him, trusting in his good character, as we ask, seek, knock. May God truly give us wisdom to understand and think of the other person as we practice the golden rule of the kingdom in our community. Our Chicago UBF key verse is John 13:34. May God help us to practically obey this prayer topic by putting this golden rule into practice.