

September 15, 2002 by Steve Brandon



The Teaching of Jesus Christ - The Golden Rule

Matthew 7:12 (Ephesians 5:22-33; James 2:1-9; Romans 13:8-10)

We should apply the Golden Rule in our homes (Ephesians 5:25-33).

We should apply the Golden Rule in the church (James 2:1-9).

We should apply the Golden Rule in the world (Romans 13:8-10).

How can we apply the Golden Rule?

One of my majors in college was Physics. One of the things that I really loved about Physics is that its goal was to understand how the complex world around us works. Though the world is quite complex, there are some very simple rules, which you can use to understand why things happen as they do.

For instance, when studying the motion of objects, we learned the basic rules of Newtonian mechanics, which would allow us to predict such things as ...

- how long it will take for a tennis ball to hit the ground when dropped from six feet from the ground.
- how far a tennis ball will travel when thrown at any given angle and initial velocity of thirty miles an hour.
- the path that that the tennis ball will travel

We learned that we could predict these things by simply applying a few simple mathematical formulas to the data we received. In each of these cases, we simply needed to know two basic concepts: (1) When in flight, objects travel at a constant horizontal speed; (2) When in flight, objects accelerate toward the earth at 32 feet per second per second. That is all you need to know to begin solving these sorts of problems. You can take the world of objects in flight and reduce it down to two, simple equations.

Sounds simple, right? So, if I shoot a cannonball at 32 degrees above the horizon at an initial velocity of 145 miles per hour, will I clear the castle wall that is 300 yards away and 100 feet high? Will it? I did a little physics this week and found out that I am a whole lot more rusty at solving physics problems than I thought I was. But, finally, after applying the simple formulas, I figured that it would, indeed clear the castle wall.

The verse we will examine this morning, in some ways, is exactly the same as these sorts of physics problems. It is one simple rule that you can apply in a myriad of circumstances to arrive at the correct answer of what you should do in any given circumstance. As, such, it is a rule of life. Indeed, some have called this command, "the Golden Rule." This rule is found in Matthew 7:12. Jesus said, "Therefore, however you want people to treat you, so treat them, for this is the Law and the Prophets."

So, you are faced with a dilemma in life of what you should do? Simply ask yourself, "How would I want others to treat me?" You ought to treat them in the same way. This is a general rule of living: "Do to others as you would have them do to you." This is why I love this verse of Scripture. Because, it is like Physics. You can take this rule, given by our Lord, and can apply it most any circumstance in which you live.

You have probably seen people, who wear bracelets with WWJD on them. They are meant to be there as a reminder of a question we ought to ask ourselves, "What Would Jesus Do?" This is a good question to ask ourselves when we encounter situations in life. However, there are several difficulties with this question. (1) We don't know exactly what Jesus would do in any given circumstance. Many of the answers to this question rely upon mere speculation. (2) Sometimes we can't do what Jesus would have done, like giving a blind person sight (Matthew 20:29-34).

Matthew 7:12 gives us another idea for a bracelet. We could have a bracelet that says, WWYLDY, "What Would You Like Done To You?" The benefits of this question is that we know the answer to this one. There is no room for speculation in this question. We can simply ask ourselves, "What Would You Like Done To You?" Whatever our answer to the question, we can boldly act upon it, as a proper action. This is what Jesus says, "However you want people to treat you, so treat them, for this is the Law and the Prophets."

It has often been pointed out that many other religious have a similar ethic. Indeed it is so.

The Rabbi Hillel had said, "What is hateful to you, do not do to your neighbor; that is the entire Torah; the rest is commentary (Babylonian Talmud, Shabbat 31a).

Hinduism teaches that, ..."This is the sum of duty: do not do to others what would cause pain if done to you" (Mahabharata 5:1517).

Buddhism says, "Treat not others in ways that you yourself would find hurtful" (Udana-Varga 5.18).

Confucianism - "One word which sums up the basis of all good conduct ... loving kindness. Do not do to others what you do not want done to yourself" (Confucius, Analects 15.23).

These other religions sound just like Jesus, "However you want people to treat you, so treat them, for this is the Law and the Prophets." However, there is one huge difference. Did you recognize the difference? If not, read them again and see if you can see how the ethic of these people is different than the ethic of Jesus?

Here is the difference. Before Jesus came upon the scene, the Golden Rule in all other religions was a **negative** rule. They were negative in the sense that the rules of other religions focussed upon what you shouldn't do to others. Rather than **not doing** to others what you would **dislike** done to you, Jesus instructs us **to do** to others what you would **like** done to you. There is a huge difference between these two commandments. (Let me note that since the time of Jesus, there have been others to express this in a positive form like He did, but, as best we can tell, Jesus was the first to express this in a positive form).

The difference between Jesus and these other religions points out what the essence of Godly living really is. Sometimes we can fall into the thinking that our Christian lives ought to be about not doing this or not doing that. As long as we don't swear, we are OK. As long as we don't murder, we are OK. As long as we don't steal, we are OK. As long as we don't covet, we are OK. We can often think that our Christianity is bound up in the commands in Scripture to "do not," and we often miss the "do's" to which we are called.

We listen to James 1:27 and hear, "This is pure and undefiled religion in the sight of our God and Father ... to keep oneself unstained by the world." We "do not" do the things above and think that we are keeping "pure and undefiled religion" because we are keeping ourselves from the sins of this world. There is great truth to this. However, we often miss the phrase that I skipped in this verse. Let me quote James 1:27 in its entirety, "This is pure and undefiled religion in the sight of our God and Father **to visit orphans and widows in their distress** and to keep oneself unstained by the world." How easy is it to pull ourselves from the world and the television and the radio and the internet, and think that the sum of our Christian duty is keep ourselves pure by not touching these things. May I especially warn you who home school your children (as I do) that this warning must come to us. We can easily have the thought that our godliness is wrapped up in our purity from the world. Yet, James tells us that there is more to "pure and undefiled" religion than keeping ourselves from the world. It includes actively helping those in the world.

Think about this. (Steve Belonger pointed this out to us several years ago, but it bears repeating). When Jesus describes the final judgment, He describes two sorts of people in this world: the sheep and the goats. And **to the sheep**, Jesus says, "Come, you who are blessed of My Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world. For I was hungry, and you gave Me something to eat; I was thirsty, and you gave Me drink; I was a stranger, and you invited Me in; naked, and you clothed Me; I was sick, and you visited Me; I was in prison, and you came to Me" (Matt. 25:34-36). And **to the goats**, Jesus says, "Depart from Me, accursed ones, into the eternal fire which has been prepared for the devil and his angels; for I was hungry, and you gave Me nothing to eat; I was thirsty, and you gave Me nothing to drink; I was a stranger, and you did not invite Me in; naked, and you did not clothe Me; sick, and in prison, and you did not visit Me" (Matt. 25:41-43). **Both of these groups** of people respond with confusion. They wonder how it is that they did or didn't help Jesus. He said to both of them, "to the extent that you did (or did not do) it to one of the least of these, you did (or did not do) it to Me" (Matt. 25:40, 45).

I want you to notice how active this is. Jesus rewards those who took action, by actively treating others as they would have wanted to be treated. Jesus condemns others, for their inaction. Oh, perhaps, they may have argued, that they went to church every Sunday and delighted in the worship of God, had their quiet times every day, read through the Bible every year for 25 years, didn't even own a television, and only listened to Christian radio. In the final day, it isn't because they didn't harm anybody, or treat anybody like they themselves would not want to be treated. Rather, it is because they treated others as they would have wanted to be treated. It is decidedly a judgement based upon the positive actions of others. And **the Golden Rule which Jesus puts forth is likewise, a decidedly positive statement.**

You could be a monk, and keep yourself completely apart from other people, and never do any harmful thing to anybody, but you still wouldn't be obeying the Golden Rule. You could live in the country near the cornfields, out with your farm animals, and never offend any of your neighbors, by your actions, but you still wouldn't be obeying the Golden Rule. You could be completely passive in your relationships with others and never offend them in anyway, whatsoever, but you still wouldn't be obeying the Golden Rule. See, Jesus instructs us to be active in our behavior toward other people. We are to **help** them in every way, rather than simply not hurting them.

Come January, when the cold winds blow and Rockford is dumped with twelve inches of snow, and we pull out our snow blower to shovel our drive, the Golden Rule teaches us to help our neighbor, who is trying to dig his way out. When you see others struggling financially, the Golden Rule instructs us to help them, rather than simply not harming them. When you see strangers, the Golden Rule would have us to befriend them, rather than simply smiling at them, but keeping your arm's distance.

It is really easy to be off by ourselves, enjoying communion with God (in our devotional times or in our prayers or in our Bible reading), thinking that we are being godly. However, Jesus calls us to action, "However you want people to treat you, so treat them, for this is the Law and the Prophets." Please don't misunderstand my emphasis here to think that your fulfillment of the Golden Rule alone is the only thing that you need to apply in the Christian life, because it isn't. My emphasis this morning has been the emphasis of Jesus, who said, "However you want people to treat you, so treat them, for this is the Law and the Prophets."

This is an astonishing summation and what makes it so astonishing is the little word, "is." The "Law and the Prophets" is a pretty big scope of material. The "Law" refers to the first five books of the Bible (Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, Deuteronomy), commonly called, the Pentateuch. The "Prophets" refers to those books of the Bible, written by Prophets (Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, ...). By conservative estimates, this is about 1/3 of your Bible, or 1/2 of the Old Testament, which were the Scriptures of Jesus' day. Jesus says that the "Law and the Prophets" can be reduced to one, simple statement: "However you want people to treat you, so treat them." That statement is equivalent to the "Law and the Prophets."

In what sense is this true? When you think about the Law, what do you think about? I think about sacrifices, dietary laws, laws for detecting leprosy, regulations for the tabernacle, regulations for the priests, yearly feasts, and rules for Israel to follow in their conduct. When you think about the Prophets, what do you think about? I think about God's rule, the rebellion of the people, God's condemnation upon those who rebelled, the predicting of the future and the call to repentance. However, not many of these things I just mentioned are easily associated with

"However you want people to treat you, so treat them." How is it that sacrificing two turtledoves upon the altar is an expression of treating others as I would have them to treat me? How are the dietary laws an expression of this? Personally, I don't think that they are. So, in what sense is this statement equivalent to "the Law and the Prophets"

We must remember, that in this whole sermon, Jesus has been dealing in the ethical realm of things. Jesus has been instructing us on how to live. He has been instructing us on our attitudes toward each other, our sexual purity, our words, and our treatment of others. So, reaching the conclusion of it all, He says, "However you want people to treat you, so treat them." This is how the Law and the Prophets instruct us to live. You can take every instruction as it relates to our behavior toward one another and boil it down to this one guideline. When Jesus is here speaking about the "Law and the Prophets," I don't think that He is referring to the sacrificial system or dietary laws. I believe that He is referring to the ethical demands of how we ought to live. Just as Paul wrote, "the whole Law is fulfilled in one word, in the statement, 'You shall love your neighbor as yourself'" (Gal. 5:14). You look at the context of Galatians 5, and you will discover that Paul was addressing the issue of relationships with each other.

Later in His ministry, Jesus will demonstrate that this command is only half of the Law and the Prophets (i.e. the ethical half -- how we relate to each other). Matthew records for us (in Matthew 22) some of the final encounters Jesus had with the religious establishment of the day. After these encounters, nobody dared, "from that day on to ask Him another question" (verse 46), because of how well Jesus answered some of these questions. The question was put to Jesus in verse 36, "Teacher, which is the great commandment in the Law?" In verses 37-40, Jesus responded by saying, "'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 foremost commandment. The second is like it, 'YOU SHALL LOVE YOUR NEIGHBOR AS YOURSELF.' On these two commandments depend the whole Law and the Prophets." Literally, the whole Law and the Prophets "hang" or "suspend" from one of these two commandments. In other words, everything in the Law and the Prophets is some sort of an expression of one's love for God or one's love for others.

At this point Jesus put forth two commandments, not just one, as a summary of the Law. The first is love toward God. The second is love toward others. This is where I believe that some of the sorts of things in the Law, like sacrifices and dietary laws and regulations for the yearly feasts come in. For Israel, many of these things were expressions of one's love to God. Your love for God needs to be total and all-consuming. When you love Him, you will realize that you need a righteousness that is not your own. You will come to love the Redeemer, who was sent to die for our sins. You will come to embrace, by faith, all that God says in His Holy Word. You will love to express your worship and praise to God. You will love to obey His commands. You won't find them to be a great burden! A great verse to memorize is 1 John 5:3, "For this is the love of God, that we keep His commandments; and His commandments are not burdensome!" God had instructed Israel to perform these things and out of love and obedience to God, Israel was to perform them. Love for God is the first, and all-consuming, commandment.

The second commandment is like the first (verse 39). It has to deal with our relationships with one another. Our relationships are to be characterized by love for one another. "You shall love your neighbor as yourself." This is practically equivalent to how Jesus put it in the Sermon on the Mount, "However you want people to treat you, so treat them, for this is the Law and the Prophets." When Jesus called this quote from Leviticus 19, the second greatest commandment, He is obviously focussing our attention upon our relationships with each other, rather than upon our relationship with God. In the Sermon on the Mount, I believe that Jesus' primary focus has been upon our love toward one another, and how we act toward one another.

Jesus here is summarizing perfect righteousness. What is perfect righteousness, but to do the Law and the Prophets, which Jesus said that He would fulfill. Jesus said in Matthew 5:17, that Jesus, Himself, would "fulfil the Law and the Prophets", but never mentions the "Law and the Prophets" again until 7:12. I believe that Jesus has been spending most of His time in this sermon describing what it means to have a righteousness that fulfills the Law and the Prophets. By the time you get to 7:12, in effect, Jesus is summarizing all that went before by saying, "however you want people to treat you, so treat them, for this is the Law and the Prophets." This is how I think that the "Therefore" of 7:12 fits in. I believe that Jesus is here summing up everything that He has just said about how we ought to live. He has found the summary with these words, "However you want people to treat you, so treat them, for this is the Law and the Prophets."

As great as this summary is, we would expect that it would be repeated in several other locations in the Scripture. Indeed it is. There are ten other verses in the New Testament that include some form of the Golden Rule (Matt. 19:19; 22:39; Mark 12:31, 33; Luke 10:27; Rom. 13:9; Gal. 5:14; Eph. 5:28, 33; James 2:8). This morning, I want to quickly survey three of these passages to understand the scope of its application to our lives.

We should apply the Golden Rule in our homes (Ephesians 5:25-33).

In Ephesians 5, we find Paul's admonitions to husbands. Within this admonition we find two statements that look curiously close to what Jesus said in the Sermon on the Mount. Men, particularly those who are married, please listen carefully.

Ephesians 5:25-33

"Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ also loved the church and gave Himself up for her; that He might sanctify her, having cleansed her by the washing of water with the word, that He might present to Himself the church in all her glory, having no spot or wrinkle or any such thing; but that she should be holy and blameless. So husbands ought also to love their own wives as their own bodies. He who loves his own wife loves himself; for no one ever hated his own flesh, but nourishes and cherishes it, just as Christ also [does] the church, because we are members of His body. FOR THIS CAUSE A MAN SHALL LEAVE HIS FATHER AND MOTHER, AND SHALL CLEAVE TO HIS WIFE; AND THE TWO SHALL BECOME ONE FLESH. This mystery is great; but I am speaking with reference to Christ and the church. Nevertheless let each individual among you also love his own wife even as himself; and let the wife see to it that she respect her husband."

We don't find the exact phraseology in this passage, yet we do find the exact concept in this passage. Notice verse 28, "So husbands ought

to love their own wives **as their own bodies**." Notice verse 33, "let each individual among you also love his own wife **even as himself**." You might call this, "The Golden Rule applied to marriage." My purpose is to press the Golden Rule into our homes!

Husbands, you love yourself! I know that by Biblical revelation, careful observation, and personal experience. The Bible tells us that "no one ever hated his own flesh, but nourishes and cherishes it" (Eph. 5:29). I have observed how you men nourish and cherish your flesh. You are nicely clothed this morning. Your hair is nicely combed. I have noticed how you love to eat the snacks after service. In the winter time, I have observed how you like to protect yourself from the cold by wearing a coat. I love myself. When I am cold, I run to get my sweatshirt. When I am thirsty, I drink water. When I am hungry, I go to great lengths to find the food to satisfy me. When my back itches, I scratch it. When my eye itches, I rub it.

The simple exhortation of the Scripture is for me to nourish and cherish my wife in exactly the same way as I nourish and cherish my own body. My care for my wife is a demonstration of my love, "husbands ought also to love their own wives as their own bodies." Husbands, your love for your wife isn't a sentimental feeling, rather it is a servant-like caring. You want to apply the Golden Rule in your marriage? Then, serve your wife with the same diligence with which you serve yourself.

Paul's words in this passage are controversial in our world today, especially verses 22-24, "Wives, [be subject] to your own husbands, as to the Lord. For the husband is the head of the wife, as Christ also is the head of the church, He Himself [being] the Savior of the body. But as the church is subject to Christ, so also the wives [ought to be] to their husbands in everything." They are controversial because of our egalitarianism today, where everybody in our society must be treated equally. Think about how far we have come with this. With the terrorist attacks on our country, the government has begun to crack down on airline security. They have increased the scrutiny of their security checks, which extends to randomly going through one's luggage. Since we consider everybody equal in our country, we are as likely to search the luggage of an 80 year old woman, who walks with a cane as we are a family man travelling with his wife and three children as we are a nervous Arab man with a turban. When people are signaled out for special scrutiny, a law suit might quickly follow. In some ways, this is a good thing. It is an expression of our liberty. In some ways, this is a bad thing. We spend so much of our time and effort seeking to treat everybody equal, that we waste much time and cannot quite focus on the issues at hand very well. All that to say that we live in a society, where everybody must be treated equally. So, when it comes to a wife submitting to her husband, many women across this land, even those in the church, hate this scripture and refuse to submit to their husbands. That's why it is controversial.

May I put forth, however, that in 95% of the cases in which a woman is refusing to submit to her husband is because her husband isn't even coming close to approximating the Golden Rule in their marriage. It ought not to be that way! Men, I exhort you to practice the Golden Rule in your marriage, and watch as see if your wife doesn't delight to submit to your leadership. It is precisely because of Christ's self-denial and sacrificial love for the church that we all willingly forsake other things on Sunday mornings to gather to worship Him as a body. His sacrificial love for us makes Him altogether lovely and worthy of our love and adoration and as Christians, we willingly submit our lives at His feet. So ought marriages to be. I pray for the marriages at Rock Valley Bible Church to be like this, where men are sacrificially loving and serving their wives, in accordance with the Golden Rule.

We should apply the Golden Rule in the church (James 2:1-9).

James 2:1-9

My brethren, do not hold your faith in our glorious Lord Jesus Christ with an attitude of personal favoritism. For if a man comes into your assembly with a gold ring and dressed in fine clothes, and there also comes in a poor man in dirty clothes, and you pay special attention to the one who is wearing the fine clothes, and say, "You sit here in a good place," and you say to the poor man, "You stand over there, or sit down by my footstool," have you not made distinctions among yourselves, and become judges with evil motives? Listen, my beloved brethren: did not God choose the poor of this world to be rich in faith and heirs of the kingdom which He promised to those who love Him? But you have dishonored the poor man. Is it not the rich who oppress you and personally drag you into court? Do they not blaspheme the fair name by which you have been called? If, however, you are fulfilling the royal law, according to the Scripture, "YOU SHALL LOVE YOUR NEIGHBOR AS YOURSELF," you are doing well. But if you show partiality, you are committing sin [and] are convicted by the law as transgressors.

Imagine with me the situation. It's ten minutes to ten o'clock. You are all here, because none of you are ever late for worship of the Almighty God! We all are looking outside and see a man walking across the field out there. He looks like he just got off work from Lube-pros up the street. His blue shirt is very dirty, and looks like it is covered with oil. His shoes are also pretty dirty. He has an old, tattered book in his hand. While this man is coming closer to the school, we see a limousine driving down the road outside and stopping near the door. When the limousine stops, the driver, wearing a tuxedo, opens the door. Out steps a man, with his wife, and four lovely children. He is dressed in fine, fancy suit. Under his arms is a MacArthur Study Bible!

The timing is such that both of these people are arriving at the door at the same time. What are you going to do? Where will the man dressed in the oil-stained clothes sit? Where will the rich man sit? Who will you invite to sit next to your family as the church service begins? Will you hold your faith in the Lord Jesus Christ with an attitude of personal favoritism? Will you judge a man, based upon how he looks? James said, "if you show partiality, you are committing sin and are convicted by the law as transgressors" (verse 9). But following the royal law (given in verse 8), "You shall love your neighbor as yourself" will show no personal favoritism.

It might just be that the rich man is coming to church in order to form an impression upon us. After speaking with him, we find out that he is new to the area. He is the new president of the bank, and wants to find a church with a good reputation in the community, where he can do his community service. "After all, any bank president needs to have reputation for being a fine, upstanding citizen, right?" His Bible was a gift to him from one of his old friends back home and has never been opened. Most of its pages are still stuck together. He has no interest in the gospel, but wants to attend church someplace.

It might just be that the poor man who came to find a group of genuine believers. He looks like he just got off work at Lube-pros up the street, because he did get off work at Lube-pros up the street. He just moved to the area, and the only job he was able to get was changing oil at the Lube-pros. He has to work each Sunday and finally persuaded his boss to let him take three hours off of work to go to church. Since he doesn't have a car, he had to walk over here. That old, tattered book in his hand is a Bible, that he faithfully reads every day. When you speak to him, you find out that He loves the Lord Jesus and holds firmly to the doctrines of grace and is a five-point Calvinist!

At Rock Valley Bible Church, we need to love one another. My previous example was absurd. I doubt whether or not that sort of thing will happen here, but there are other things that just might happen here. Let me get a little more realistic....

When a visitor walks into the church, how do you respond? Do you stay, talking with your old friend, who you like to talk to each Sunday and ignore the new person? Or, do you watch them intently, while happily standing in your comfort zone, with your old friend? Or, do you make an effort to meet such an individual, and welcome them to Rock Valley Bible Church?

Do you ask yourself, "Now, if I was a visitor to church, how would I want others to treat me?" Do you look down at your new WWYLDTY bracelet and ask, "What Would You Like Done To You?" Will you follow your conscience? Perhaps it might be good for some of you to visit a church some Sunday morning. Your experiences will easily answer your question you should be constantly asking yourself.

Or, how about this? You have seen those folks sitting over there. In fact, that family always sits over there. You always sit in the same place as well. But you haven't yet really met them. Well, at least, you don't know their name. How do you treat them? Do you show favoritism? Do you think to yourself, "They have five children, and we don't have any. We certainly don't have much in common with them. Why bother meeting them?" Perhaps you think, "They are so much older than we are. Why bother meeting them?" This is personal favoritism.

I'm astonished at how often it happens in our church, as small as it is, that I am talking to someone about another family in the church, whom they have seen, but never quite met or talked to. With a church as small as we are, you ought to know everybody. If you have attended this church for some time, but haven't met all of the people who are attending, you might just be guilty of personal favoritism, hanging out with those who are like you. So, if there is somebody, who you don't know, please be bold and take the step of introducing yourself (and your family) to them. There may well be a day, when it is no longer possible to do this, but today, we can. With a little work, you can know everybody in the church.

Or, how about this? There is somebody in the church, who does something that you really don't like. Perhaps they always talk about football, but you believe that football is bad, because it is always played on Sundays. Perhaps they aren't dressed right. They haven't yet dressed up to your standard of dress! Perhaps they can't carry on a good conversation. Perhaps there is some other reason why you have a particularly difficult time loving them within the church. Will you practice the Golden Rule with them? Or, will you show partiality? I would contend that these are precisely the people that really test you. It is easy to love others who are like us? Jesus said, "If you do good to those who do good to you, what credit 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, in order to receive back the same amount" (Luke 6:33-34). But, your true commitment to the Golden Rule occurs in the situation, when people go over the line and offend you for some reason (which they may not even know about).

At Rock Valley Bible Church, we need to love one another. ... and you do. I love what the Lord is doing in our congregation, because I see the genuine fruit of our salvation in your love for one another.

We should apply the Golden Rule in the world (Romans 13:8-10).

Romans 13:8-10

"Owe nothing to anyone except to love one another; for he who loves his neighbor has fulfilled the law. For this, "YOU SHALL NOT COMMIT ADULTERY, YOU SHALL NOT MURDER, YOU SHALL NOT STEAL, YOU SHALL NOT COVET," and if there is any other commandment, it is summed up in this saying, "YOU SHALL LOVE YOUR NEIGHBOR AS YOURSELF." Love does no wrong to a neighbor; love therefore is the fulfillment of the law.

Here again is the Golden Rule. We see what a great summary this commandment is. Love for you neighbor is what sums up the commandments. Again, like Jesus, Paul is speaking primarily about the ethical realm -- how we deal with other people, not with God.

In this context, the Golden Rule is applied to our relationships with those outside the church. This chapter begins by addressing how we need to submit to our government and live in our society as an responsible citizen, who pays their taxes (verses 6-7), which is how we need to act in the world. Also, when Paul quotes the 6th, 7th, 8th, and 10th commandment, he isn't only applying them to the church (like it is OK to murder somebody outside of the church, but not within the church). So also, when he quotes the Golden Rule, it ought to be applied to those outside the church -- to non-Christians.

We ought to love those at our places of work. We ought to love those who work at the supermarket. We ought to love those who stand in the express lane with too many items.

So, let's get practical. Think about where you live, whether that is a house, an apartment, or a trailer. Write down the names of your neighbors to the left and to the right of you. Write down the names of your neighbors directly across from you and behind you. These are the people that you are called to love. These people are your primary mission field. You need to show your love to these people. Perhaps, for some of you, you cannot write down their names, because you have never met them. How are you to love a person, whom you have never met? How are you to serve a person, whom you have never met. It's a challenge.

I realize how difficult it can be. Just yesterday, Yvonne and I were in the driveway and noticed a few doors down a family with two children about Hanna's age, who were playing in the driveway. It was a particularly busy day for us. We thought about going over to meet them, but

found excuses not to do so. We need to make an effort to meet them and reach out to them and "love them as we would love ourselves" (Rom. 13:9). Perhaps you need to do the same with your neighbors. I know that this is particularly difficult with some neighbors. We have some other neighbors, with whom we have sought to reach out to, but apparently seem to have no interest in developing a genuine relationship with us. Yet, it is love for them that ought to compel me to continue to reach out to them and serve them and love them.

Remember, the Golden Rule isn't a passive thing. It is an active command. It compels us to help others.

How can we apply the Golden Rule?

Perhaps you are saying now, "Steve, how in the world can I do this? It seems all too difficult for me! I can't do it." I would say, "You are exactly right! You cannot do it."

Let me show you what I mean from Galatians 5. The people of Galatia were legalists, who sought to subject those who became Christians to rigors of the Jewish legal regulations according to the Law. But Paul said, on the contrary. You are saved by faith to freedom from these rules and regulations.

In verse 13, Paul writes, "For you were called to freedom, brethren; only do not turn your freedom into an opportunity for the flesh, but through love serve one another." Then, here comes the Golden Rule again in verse 14, "For the whole Law is fulfilled in one word, in the statement, 'You shall love your neighbor as yourself.'" But notice their difficulty within the difficult relationships of those in the church, "But if you bite and devour one another, take care lest you be consumed by one another" (verse 15). Then, Paul gives the solution to fulfilling the Golden Rule, "But I say, walk by the Spirit, and you will not carry out the desire of the flesh" (verse 16).

Let me give you the key to loving your neighbor as yourself in a few simple words as we look to close our time this morning. The key to loving your neighbor as yourself is to die to yourself (and your own effort), and to rely fully upon the Spirit to enable you to love in a way that is super-human. This is what Paul meant when he said, "Walk by the Spirit." He instructs us to fully rely upon the Spirit in our daily living.

You aren't going to be muster up enough spiritual strength within you to be able to do this on your own. You need to rely upon the Spirit of God to energize you to treat others as you would have others treat you (Matt. 7:12). May we be such lovers at Rock Valley Bible Church.

This sermon was delivered to Rock Valley Bible Church on September 15, 2002 by Steve Brandon.
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