The Constitution of the Kingdom

A 33-Session Journey through the Sermon on the Mount & the Sermon on the Plain

SESSION TWENTY-SEVEN — The Golden Rule

Part Six: The Two Ways · Texts: Matthew 7:12; Luke 6:31

The Texts

> **Matthew 7:12** *In everything do to others as you would have them do to you; for this is the law and the prophets.*
>
> **Luke 6:31** *Do to others as you would have them do to you.*

The Sermon in One Sentence

For twenty-six sessions we have climbed this Sermon — the blessings, the salt and the light, the six great contrasts, the practices, the treasure, the worry, the log and the speck. It is a mountain of teaching. And now, near the top of the final chapter, Jesus does something breathtaking: he takes the whole towering thing and hands it to us in a single, portable sentence — one line you could write on the back of your hand and carry for the rest of your life.

"In everything do to others as you would have them do to you."

We call it the Golden Rule, and it is so familiar we have half stopped hearing it. But do not miss what Jesus says right after it: "for this is the law and the prophets." That is not a small claim. It means: everything — all the Law, all the Prophets, the whole vast library of Scripture — comes down, in the end, to this. If you did only this, and did it truly, you would have kept it all. The Sermon, and indeed the Bible, in one sentence you can hold in your hand.[1]

Let's search the Scriptures together.

An Old Rule, Newly Aimed

Now, versions of this rule are ancient and worldwide. The great Rabbi Hillel, a generation before Jesus, was asked to sum up the whole Torah while standing on one foot, and he answered: "What is hateful to you, do not do to your neighbor — that is the whole Torah; the rest is commentary." Confucius said something similar centuries earlier, and so have wise voices in nearly every culture on earth. This is one of those rare truths the human conscience seems to recognize almost everywhere. Jesus is not inventing it out of nothing; he is standing in that long, deep stream and — as he does with everything — driving it to its fullest reach.[2]

[1]Unless noted, Scripture is quoted from the New Revised Standard Version, Updated Edition (NRSVue), the base translation for this course. Matthew 7:12, with a parallel at Luke 6:31 (Sermon on the Plain, set within the love-your-enemies teaching). "This is the law and the prophets" frames the whole Sermon: the same phrase appeared at 5:17, so the Golden Rule and the fulfillment of the Law bracket the Sermon's central teaching.

[2]Versions of the rule existed before Jesus and around the world, most often in the negative form—Rabbi Hillel: "What is hateful to you, do not do to your neighbor; that is the whole Torah" (b. Shabbat 31a); and similarly in Confucius and elsewhere. Jesus renders it positively ("do to others"), which is more demanding: the negative form asks restraint; the

And here is the difference that changes everything. Almost every earlier version is negative: do not do to others what you would hate. Jesus turns it positive: do to others what you would want. It sounds like a small shift; it is an enormous one. The negative form only asks restraint — don't harm, don't cheat, don't wound; leave people alone and you have kept it. You could obey "don't hurt anyone" in your sleep, doing nothing at all. But the positive form will not let you sit still. "Do to others" demands that you get up and act — that you go looking for the good you would want, and do it. It is not enough to refrain from harming your neighbor; you must actively love them. Jesus takes the fence around bad behavior and turns it into a road toward the good.

The Engine Is Your Imagination

Look closely at how the rule actually works, because it is ingenious. "As you would have them do to you." The engine that drives this love is your own imagination. Jesus hands you the simplest, most portable moral compass ever devised: in any situation, with any person, stop and picture yourself in their place. What would you want, if you were the one hungry, the one grieving, the one new and afraid and alone in the room, the one being talked about, the one who made the mistake? Whatever you would long for, were you standing where they stand — go and do that.[3]

This is love made practical enough for a child and searching enough for a saint. It requires no theological degree, no long deliberation — just the daily willingness to trade places in your imagination and let your own deepest wants become your map for loving your neighbor. You already know how you would want to be treated; you have known it your whole life. Jesus simply says: now extend that knowledge to everyone. It is, in fact, the working form of the old command we keep returning to — "love your neighbor as yourself." The Golden Rule is what that love looks like when it rolls up its sleeves: love your neighbor as yourself means treat your neighbor as you would want to be treated.

"This Is the Law and the Prophets"

And now hear that closing phrase again, and feel its weight: "for this is the law and the prophets." Something quietly extraordinary is happening in the shape of the whole Sermon here. Way back in the fifth chapter, when Jesus opened his teaching, he said, "do not think I have come to abolish the law or the prophets" — the same phrase. And here, at the close, he says the whole law and prophets come down to this rule. He has bracketed the entire central teaching of the Sermon between those two lines. What holds the whole thing together, from one end to the other, is love.[4]

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positive demands active, initiating love. Both stand in one stream; Jesus' form is its fullest reach.

[3] "In everything" makes the rule comprehensive, and "as you would have them do to you" makes the imagination the engine of love: we are to picture ourselves in the other's place and act accordingly. Compare "love your neighbor as yourself" (Leviticus 19:18; Matthew 22:39), of which this is the working form.

[4] That the Golden Rule sums up "the law and the prophets" does not reduce Scripture to sentiment; it names love of neighbor as the thread on which the whole hangs (Matthew 22:40; Romans 13:8–10; Galatians 5:14). It is demanding, not vague—love that seeks the actual good of the other, and, joined to "love your enemies," reaches even those who cannot or will not reciprocate.

Do not mistake that for something soft or vague, though. Jesus is not reducing the Bible to a warm feeling or a bumper sticker. To say love of neighbor sums up the Law and the Prophets is to say it is the thread on which every other command hangs — Paul would put it exactly so: "the one who loves another has fulfilled the law." This is demanding love, active love, the love that seeks the neighbor's actual good and not just my comfortable feeling about them. And remember where we have already been: joined to "love your enemies," this rule reaches even the people who will never do a single thing for me in return. I am to treat even them as I would want to be treated. The Golden Rule is not the ethics of a fair trade; it is the ethics of the Kingdom, which loves first and loves regardless.

Why It Flows from the Father

And notice where Jesus places this rule — right after last session's picture of the good Father who gives good gifts to his children. That is not an accident; it is the whole logic of the Kingdom. Because a person who has learned, at last, that they are held by a generous Father — who has stopped clutching and grasping and defending, and started receiving freely — becomes, naturally, a person who can give freely. You cannot squeeze the Golden Rule out of a fearful, self-protecting heart; it will always find a reason to make an exception. It flows, instead, out of a heart set free by the Father's goodness. First you are loved; then you can love. First you learn to ask and receive from an open-handed God; then you become open-handed toward everyone else. The Golden Rule is what the good Father's children look like when they have grown up into his likeness.

Freedom for Others

Put it to our thread — and this time the thread and the text are one and the same thing, for the Golden Rule simply is freedom-for-others, distilled to its purest drop. Every session we have asked where a teaching increases someone else's dignity and flourishing, and what it costs us; and here that question becomes the whole ethic: do to others the good you would want done to you. It costs us our convenient exceptions — the people we would rather not imagine ourselves into, the ones it is easier to keep at arm's length. So ask with me, and answer honestly: who is the one person, or the one kind of person, I have quietly exempted from this rule — whom I do not treat as I would want to be treated? And what would change, this week, if I actually pictured myself in their place? *Freedom for others may cost us our exceptions — what can we lay down?*

Around the Table — For Discussion

- Jesus says the whole law and prophets come down to the Golden Rule. Does that make Scripture feel simpler, harder, or both — and why?
- The old rule was negative ("don't do what you'd hate"); Jesus made it positive ("do what you'd want"). Where do you tend to settle for merely not harming, when love asks you to act?
- The engine is imagination — picturing yourself in the other's place. Whose place is hardest for you to imagine yourself into?

- This rule flows from being loved by a generous Father. How does knowing you're held change your capacity to give freely?
- Freedom for others may cost us our exceptions. Who is the one person you've quietly exempted from the Golden Rule?

This Week — A Practice

Two movements. First, run the rule once a day. Each day this week, choose one ordinary encounter — a coworker, a stranger, a family member, the person who tries your patience — and before you act, pause and picture yourself in their place: what would I want here? Then do that, actively, not just "don't be unkind" but "do the good I would want." Second, find your exception. Name the one person or kind of person you have been leaving out of this rule — and this week, deliberately extend it to them: one concrete act of the good you would want if you were standing where they stand. Then bring back what you found. This Kingdom, like all the rest, is learned in the doing.

Looking Ahead

Next session, having handed us the summit of the ethic, Jesus turns to the summit of the decision. The Sermon is nearly over, and he begins to ask us, plainly, to choose. "Enter through the narrow gate… for the road is easy that leads to destruction, and those who take it are many. For the gate is narrow and the road is hard that leads to life, and there are few who find it." The two ways — and the choice that only we can make.

Benediction

So go this week and carry the whole Sermon in your pocket, written in a single line: do to others as you would have them do to you. Do not settle for merely not harming anyone; get up and do the good you would long for if you stood in their shoes. Picture yourself into the life of the one in front of you — the hungry, the grieving, the difficult, the stranger, the enemy — and treat them as you would ache to be treated. And when it costs you an exception you were fond of keeping, remember whose child you are: freely you have received from a good Father; freely, now, you can give. Blessed are those who do unto others, for in that one small, daily act they keep the whole of the law and the prophets — and look, unmistakably, like their Father in heaven.

Love, practiced — not just professed — reveals the Kingdom among us.

Blessings,
Pastor Mick Finch

SESSION TWENTY-SEVEN

Introduction Video Script

Single presenter, to camera · target 5–6 minutes · warm, steady, unhurried

[Begin still.]

Welcome back to the table. For twenty-six sessions we've climbed this Sermon — the blessings, salt and light, the six great contrasts, the practices, the treasure, the worry, the log and the speck. It's a mountain of teaching. And now, near the top of the final chapter, Jesus does something breathtaking: he takes the whole towering thing and hands it to us in a single, portable sentence — one line you could write on the back of your hand and carry for the rest of your life.

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[Old rule, newly aimed.]

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And here's the difference that changes everything. Almost every earlier version is negative: don't do to others what you'd hate. Jesus turns it positive: do to others what you'd want. Sounds small; it's enormous. The negative form only asks restraint — don't harm, don't cheat, leave people alone and you've kept it. You could obey "don't hurt anyone" in your sleep, doing nothing. But the positive form won't let you sit still. "Do to others" demands you get up and act — go looking for the good you'd want, and do it. It's not enough to refrain from harming your neighbor; you must actively love them. Jesus takes the fence around bad behavior and turns it into a road toward the good.

[The imagination engine.]

And look how the rule actually works — it's ingenious. "As you would have them do to you." The engine that drives this love is your own imagination. In any situation, with any person, stop and picture yourself in their place. What would you want, if you were the one hungry, the one grieving, the one new and afraid and alone in the room, the one being talked about, the one who made the mistake? Whatever you'd long for, standing where they stand — go and do that. It's love made practical enough for a child and searching enough for a saint. You already know how you'd want to be treated — you've known it your whole life. Jesus just says: now extend that to everyone. It's the working form of "love your neighbor as yourself" — that love, with its sleeves rolled up.

[The law and the prophets.]

And hear that closing phrase again — "for this is the law and the prophets." Something quietly extraordinary is happening in the shape of the whole Sermon. Back in chapter five, Jesus opened by saying, "don't think I've come to abolish the law or the prophets" — the same phrase. And here, at the close, the whole law and prophets come down to this rule. He's bracketed the entire central teaching between those two lines. What holds the whole thing together, end to end, is love. But don't mistake that for soft or vague — he's not reducing the Bible to a bumper sticker. To say love of neighbor sums up the Law and the Prophets is to say it's the thread every other command hangs on. It's demanding love, active love, love that seeks the neighbor's actual good. And joined to "love your enemies," it reaches even the people who'll never do a thing for me in return. This isn't the ethics of a fair trade — it's the ethics of the Kingdom, which loves first and loves regardless.

[Why it flows from the Father.]

And notice where Jesus puts this rule — right after last session's picture of the good Father who gives good gifts. That's no accident; it's the whole logic of the Kingdom. A person who's finally learned they're held by a generous Father — who's stopped clutching and grasping and started receiving freely — becomes, naturally, a person who can give freely. You can't squeeze the Golden Rule out of a fearful, self-protecting heart; it'll always find a reason to make an exception. It flows instead out of a heart set free by the Father's goodness. First you're loved; then you can love.

[The thread and practice.]

So here's our question this week — and this time the thread and the text are the same thing, because the Golden Rule just is freedom-for-others, distilled to its purest drop. It costs us our convenient exceptions — the people we'd rather not imagine ourselves into. So ask honestly: who's the one person, or kind of person, I've quietly exempted from this rule — whom I don't treat as I'd want to be treated? And what would change this week if I actually pictured myself in their place?

Two things to practice. First, run the rule once a day — pick one ordinary encounter, and before you act, picture yourself in their place: what would I want here? Then do that, actively. Second, find your exception — name the person you've been leaving out, and deliberately extend the rule to them this week, one concrete act of the good you'd want if you stood where they stand.

Next time — having handed us the summit of the ethic, Jesus turns to the summit of the decision. The Sermon's nearly over, and he starts asking us plainly to choose. "Enter through the narrow gate." The two ways — and the choice only we can make.

[Slow. Land it.]

For now, go and carry the whole Sermon in your pocket, in a single line: do to others as you would have them do to you. Don't settle for merely not harming anyone — get up and do the good you'd long for if you stood in their shoes. Picture yourself into the life of the one in front of you — the hungry, the grieving, the difficult, the stranger, the enemy — and treat them as you'd ache to be treated. And when it costs you an exception you were fond of keeping,

remember whose child you are: freely you've received from a good Father; freely, now, you can give.

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