

## The Spirit of Christmas, Part I The Golden Rule

As I was growing up, I was taught to love God supremely, the Lord's Prayer, the Ten Commandments, the meaning of the cross, the resurrection of Jesus, forgiveness, obedience to the unenforceable, and The Golden Rule. If I were to make a guess as to which of the teachings I heard most often, it would be the Golden Rule. The Golden Rule, as taught to most of us, is: Do unto others as you would have others do unto you." The literal wording of Jesus says, "And as ye would that men should do to you, do ye also to them likewise" (Luke 6 31). What a principle of principal importance! We are instructed by our Lord to treat others with the same treatment we in turn would appreciate receiving from them. If we would like to be given respect, kindness or love we should not wait for others to give it to us; we should take the initiative and give to them first. This is the teaching of Jesus; this is the teaching that could change our environment in a most positive way.

If I were to guess why I heard this rule most often, I might conjecture that it was because by the time I came into this world as the youngest child, the household already had siblings; I was just one more on the list. So in order to have a civil government within the confines of even a Christian home, it was imperative that this Golden Rule be THE rule. And believe me, it was taught and enforced. It was one of those teachings that, to use a parental cliché, if we didn't obey, we were going to wish we had.

I pray that we not consign this great teaching to our childhood, but that we live it today. Often at this time of the year we hear people say things like, "Come on, give me a break; after all it's Christmas." As God's children we are to live with a year round Christmas spirit. We perhaps don't realize it, but the Christmas spirit is, in reality, the living out of the Golden Rule. We give each other the courtesy we would like to receive in return, we give each other the presents we would like to receive, we feed each other the way we would like to be fed, and most people over all take the initiative to do the nice things to each other. How very appropriate that this behavior is coupled with the celebration of the birth of Jesus into this world. To say "Happy Holidays" is okay, but "Merry Christmas" says so much more, because there would not be the kindness of The Golden Rule without the life of Christ. Without that wonderful God-child on that first silent night, there would be no Golden Rule at all. What happens when we obey The Golden Rule?

### I. Vengeance is curbed.

Last Sunday morning at the out-set of teen Sunday School, a series of incidents happened, that if not stopped could have gone too far. Some of our young men decided that it would be funny to launch water balloons on their sisters who were dressed in their Sunday best. The boys got the response they so desired. Their sisters were disgusted and a little upset that their clothes were wet and above all, laughter ensued. Of course, this activated the spirit of revenge. So as the two culprits who instigated the activity were going to their seats, one of the sisters pulled the chair out from under her brother, just as he was about to take his seat. Well, as you might imagine, the boy fell right back on the floor with the full glass of chocolate spilling on himself and the other instigator of the mischief. And again we heard the laughter, this time louder and with more damage done. Chocolate milk does more to your Sunday best than water. Fortunately, it was ended and the only problem I had was getting the attention back for the lesson.

Now, all of this was in fun and there was no love lost; these kids are good Christian kids. From what I understand they got into trouble and they were probably reminded to obey The Golden Rule. There have been cases of innocent fun where vengeance has been sought out that has caused irreparable emotional or physical damage. God's Word says, "Dearly beloved, avenge not yourselves, but rather give place unto wrath: for it is written, Vengeance is mine; I will repay, saith the Lord" (Romans 12:19). Listen to some of the reasons major incidents, not accidents are caused, "Well, he cut me off." or "They didn't have a right to do this to me and so I took matters into my own hands." In large or small

things we need to always keep in mind, God is keeping the record; He can take care of our injustice far better than we can.

A few years ago, one of our nicest neighbors placed a well constructed sign in his lovely front lawn, which read "Please curb your dog." I asked him about his sign and he explained that in our neighborhood several large dogs were allowed to come, even at their owner's permission and "take care of business." My neighbor that put up the sign had a miniature collie and whenever he walked his dog, he had the shovel and scooper wherever he went. All he was asking was that people show the same respect to his manicured lawn that he was showing to theirs. It worked, the other less thoughtful neighbors got the message and their dogs were "curbed." When we live The Golden Rule, our vengeance, like a thoughtless dog, will be curbed and everybody will be happier.

## II. Kindness is made law.

There is an intriguing compliment that God gives the virtuous woman. He says, "She openeth her mouth with wisdom; and in her tongue is the law of kindness" (Proverbs 31:26). Wouldn't it be wonderful if we all would have from our lips "the law of kindness"?

Kindness reaches beyond the desire to be revenged. At times the conscientious Christian who is dedicated to maintaining the law of kindness receives wrong-doing, but must do as Jesus said, "But love ye your enemies, and do good, and lend, hoping for nothing again; and your reward shall be great, and ye shall be the children of the Highest: for he is kind unto the unthankful and to the evil" (Luke 6:35). My wife made our children memorize, quote, and practice Ephesians 4: 32, "And be ye kind one to another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, even as God for Christ's sake hath forgiven you."

When we practice The Golden Rule, we think before we act. If our actions would treat anyone with anything less than what we would want happen to us, we take the hit if necessary, but we choose the high road and forgive whether they are deserving of it or not; we are determined to leave that in God's hands. This is the way to live with a clear conscience.

## III. The atmosphere of grace is present.

Let's examine the accompanying verses in the original giving of The Golden Rule. Together, the verses read, "And as ye would that men should do to you, do ye also to them likewise. For if ye love them which love you, what thank have ye? for sinners also love those that love them. And if ye do good to them which do good to you, what thank have ye? for sinners also do even the same" (Luke 6:31-33). After Jesus gave the principle, He made this insightful comment, "And if ye do good to them which do good to you, what thank have ye?" The word "thank" is translated from the Greek word *charis*, which means: grace; that which affords joy, pleasure, delight, sweetness, charm, loveliness: grace of speech; good will, loving-kindness, favour; a gift of grace; benefit, bounty.

God is saying if we act like the people in this world who are strangers to grace, then subsequently grace will become a stranger to this world and our influence for testimonial purposes will be muted, null, and void! Not only will we have a more important impact on this world when we follow The Golden Rule, but our homes, where the Christmas spirit is best personified, becomes what God says should be the privilege of every Christian couple, "...heirs together of the grace of life..." (I Peter 3:7). So when someone says "Christmas is in the air," they are also saying grace is present in the atmosphere. And through Jesus Christ our Lord, you brought it!

Merry Christmas!

- Pastor Pope -

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