

DO UNTO OTHERS

Matthew 7:12

"In everything do to others as you would have them do to you; for this is the Law and the Prophets!"

Love your neighbor as yourself! (Deuteronomy 19:18)

The reason these two ideas are connected is that what we should all want to have others do to us is to love us. So...loving your neighbor as yourself is, in many respects, packaged in the Golden Rule: *Do to others as you would have them do to you.* The context for this passage in the Gospel of Luke is in the setting of Jesus' Sermon on the Plain, which parallels, in many ways, Jesus' Sermon on the Mount in Matthew. An entire ethic can be developed from this simple command: *Do to others as you would have them do to you!* An ethic is a system of values, and in Luke's setting, the Golden Rule is set among a whole series of what you might call Golden Rules, and begins with Christ telling His listeners, *"I say to you that listen, Love your enemies, do good to those who hate you, bless those who curse you, pray for those who abuse you..."* (Luke 6:27-28)

Consider the values by which you try to live. Is unconditional love at the core of those values? Or is self-love your primary concern?

Of course the love that is spoken of in the New Testament is a pure love, not a love that is mixed with passion (the Greek *eros*) or based on friendship (the Greek *phileo*), but love that is rooted in the divine (the Greek *agape*). It is a love that is offered to others not because of who they are, but because of who God is, and, who we are... who we are to be... by faith. The love Jesus speaks of is not inspired by emotions or by a sense of duty, but only by God, God's grace at work within us. It is natural to love when something somehow tugs at your heart. But it is supernatural to love in spite of negative feelings! This love is not just an equal response, something reciprocal – as in: you treat me this way, so I will treat you this way too. It is not a response to anything another has done. It is, however, a choice. You have to choose to love an enemy. You have to choose to love the extra mile and... expect nothing in return! The story of The Giving Tree by Shel Silverstein is an example of this sort of love.

Love – Enemies!?! We are supposed to love even our enemies! We can only do it because of who we are! For Christians, it should not matter who the recipient of our love might be. We love because Christ makes us loving. And we show our love by being patient and kind, by rising above envy and boastfulness and arrogance and rudeness. We show our love by not insisting on our own way, by not being irritable or resentful; but by rejoicing in what is true. Divine love enables us to bear all things, believe/trust all things, hope all things, and endure all things! (1 Corinthians 13:4-7) Jesus teaches that putting conditions on our loving behavior makes us no better than your average sinner. If you love only those who love you... If you do good only to those who are good to you... If you lend only to those who will pay you back.... Even sinners do that! *But love your enemies, do good, and lend.... Expecting nothing in return! Your reward will be great, and you will be called...* (Suckers!!! No!). *You will be called children*

of the Most High: for He is kind to the ungrateful and the wicked! Be merciful, just as your Father is merciful!" (Luke 6:32-36)

Godly kindness, faithful graciousness, generous mercy will be rewarded! Golden Rules!

Back up to *The Golden Rule: Do to others as you would have them do to you...* Implied in this rule is the idea that we should not do to others what we would not want others to do to us. The ways we treat others, even though we are doing nothing particularly bad, even in the setting of the Church, sometimes becomes a downright sin. Not only do we know we are to love our enemies; not only are we to show love to strangers, not only are we to love our friends, our brothers and sisters our mothers and fathers, but it should be obvious that we should love our brothers and sisters in Christ. We should love the old and the young, the rich and the poor, the good, the bad, and the ugly! In fact, when it comes to our relationships, as Christians, there should be nothing *but* love!

Does that mean that we will never make each other angry? Of course not. Does that mean we will never do anything that might hurt another's feelings? Of course not. As long as we are not yet perfect, we will do imperfect things. But...what should we do when those things happen? Jesus tells us what not to do: *"Judge not, and you will not be judged; do not condemn, and you will not be condemned."* And Jesus tells us what to do: *"Forgive, and you will be forgiven; give, and it will be given to you!"* (Luke 6:37-38)

There will be payback in eternity: *"A good measure, pressed down, shaken together, running over, will be poured into your lap; for the measure you give will be the measure you get back!"* (v.38) I call it Kingdom Reciprocity! It happens only in God's Kingdom, it is not earthly!

Listen to what Paul said in Romans 12:20-21 – *"If your enemies are hungry, feed them; if they are thirsty, give them something to drink; for by doing this you will heap burning coals on their heads."* The Proverb then adds, *"and the Lord will reward you."* Paul concludes by saying, *"Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good!"* There's some good advice!

It would be nice if every kindness melted every heart. That is the idea of Paul. It may not work right away. But it works like a hammer blow.... Blow after blow, the stone is eventually cracked. Grace changes people. Radical grace changes radical behavior! Some of that other heavenly bad advice is *"If anyone takes away your coat, do not withhold your shirt! Give to everyone who begs from you; and if anyone takes away your goods, do not ask for them back!"* Out-grace them... *"Be merciful, just as your Father is merciful."* *"Do not be overcome by evil... Overcome evil with good!"*

And even then... *"Expect nothing in return"* ...in this world. But in the world to come... *the measure you give will be the measure you get back.* It happens, not because of who anyone else is or what anyone else does. It happens because of who we are! And we are disciples of Jesus Christ, the Son of God; the Lord, the Savior, the Way, the Truth, and the Life! Love! *This is the Law and the Prophets!* This is what fulfills God's purpose for us! LOVE!!!