

## THE RULE OF THE ROAD

Matthew 7:12

"Therefore all things whatsoever ye would that men should do to you, do ye even so to them: for this is the law and the prophets." Matthew 7:12.

Life is frequently likened to a road. As a kind of towering climax to the Sermon on the Mount, Christ gave the rule of the road which is recorded in our text. An observance of this rule for the road of life by every traveler would transform it from the pathway of pain and struggle to the highway of gladness and joy.

These famous words, which are usually called "The Golden Rule," shine with a special luster among all the other statements of the Master in this matchless sermon. Evidently Christ felt that what He had just said was of peculiar worth, for no sooner had the words been spoken than He drew special attention to the way in which they gathered up in one sentence everything that can be said about conduct. He summarized once and for all the whole matter in His statement, "This is the law and the prophets."

The glory of this verse shines out when it is compared with a number of similar sayings.

Thales, the earliest of the Greek philosophers (born about 640 B.C.), said, "Avoid doing what you would blame others for doing."

Plato, who lived from 427 to 347 B.C., in a kind of prayer recorded in the eleventh book of his Dialogues, said, "May I, being of sound mind, do to others as I would that they should do to me."

King Nicocles advised his subordinate officials saying, "Do not do to others the things which make you angry when you experience them at the hands of other people."

Somebody asked Aristotle, who lived from 384 to 322 B.C., "How should we conduct ourselves toward our friends?" He replied, "As you would desire them to act toward yourself."

One of the basic maxims of the Stoics was: "What you do not wish to be done to you, do not do to anyone else."

According to Tobit 4:15, the aged Tobias said, "What you hate, do not do to any one."

In Brahmanism it is stated like this: "This is the sum of duty: Do naught unto others which would cause you pain if done to you."

A wise teacher in Greece said, "If anything would make you angry if it were done to you, don't do it to anyone else."

The Jewish Rabbi Hillel (about 60 B.C. to 10 A.D.) said, "Do not to others what you would not have them do to you."

Philo (20 B.C. to 54 A.D.) wrote, "What any one dislikes to experience, he should not do."

Rabbi Eliezer came nearer to Jesus' way of putting it when he said, "Let the honor of thy friend be as dear unto thee as thine own."

Alexander Severus, who was the Roman emperor from 222 to 235 A.D., had the maxim: "What you do not wish to be done to you, do not do to anyone else," engraved upon the walls of his palace in order that he might never forget it as a rule of life.

Immanuel Kant (1724-1804 A.D.) expressed it this way: "Act so that you could wish your act to be universal." His postulate was, So act that you would be willing for everyone to do the same thing under similar circumstances.

All of these statements have a point in common with our text. All of them propose the same test for conduct, namely, put yourself in the other fellow's place. Yet there is this profound difference, all of them make of it a negative principle, or a declaration of what not to do. If something could hurt you, it would hurt another. Think of how you would feel yourself and then don't do it. In this way cruelty and injustice could be nipped in the bud.

By contrast Christ made of this principle or test a positive direction. Is there anything you desire from others? If so, then go and do those things for others yourself. His rule is positive. It does not say "don't," but it does say "do." Goodness does not lie in prohibitions but in performances. Christ repeatedly re-proved people for doing nothing. In the Parable of the Good Samaritan the priest and the Levite did not kick the wounded man or do him any harm, but they did pass by on the other side. It is not a question of doing harm. The question is, "Has he done any good?"

In this great injunction, "Therefore all things whatsoever ye would that men should do to you, do ye even so to them: for this is the law and the prophets," Christ made perfectly clear what we are to do. This rule of the road is so simple that no one can misunderstand it. What would you have others to do to you? When you have answered that question, Christ then says to you, "You do that same thing to them." We are to treat others with the same consideration that we would like for them to show us. An impressive sign hangs over the window in each of the telegraph offices in India, on which appears the words: "Please show the same courtesy here as you would like shown to you."

It is fairly easy to refrain from doing to others what we would not want them to do to us, but it is far more difficult to make it the deliberate policy of life to go out of our way to be as kind to others as we would like for them to be to us. We are to act towards others as we wish they would act towards us if they had the power to do so. Think of the pleasure that the generous impulses and gracious deeds of others would bring to you, and then set about giving that kind of pleasure to others. Your heart has been warmed by the affection of some friend; therefore, see to it that you warm the heart of somebody else.

In this rule of the road Christ is applying the idea of positive living to the area of human relationships. It works like magic in getting along with others. In fact, we determine the way others are going to treat us. Most people don't believe that. Consequently, they like to blame others for their troubles. But, in reality, people largely write their own tickets. They earn the kind of results which they get. Before one can reap the harvest which he desires, he must sow the right kind of seed to produce it.

This rule of the road is universal. No matter where one meets his fellows on the road the rule will apply. It is just as needful and as valuable in one nation as in another. It will fit the rich as well as the poor, the educated as well as the ignorant, the high as well as the low. It fits all classes of all races in all lands at all times. Whenever two meet on the road of life, no matter where they are or who they are, this rule of the road should be observed. Where this rule is applied things are smoothed out beautifully.

Since Christianity is a positive religion, it is not surprising that Christ expressed this principle in strong positive language. The predominant note of Christ's teaching is positive. In every worthwhile cause the emphasis will be upon the positive; otherwise, it could not accomplish much. Great achievements are not realized by living on the negative side of life. A negative approach to religion will never be satisfactory. The predominant emphasis of the whole ministry of Christ was upon "do" and no "don't." Never let the negative overshadow the positive.

The rule of the road is more than a beautiful motto to be displayed on billboard advertising and on plaques for the home and the office. It is a workable principle. It is sensible, practical and mutually helpful. Everywhere it has been applied it has resulted in a happier way of life. The tragedy is that so few people are willing to put it into practice. The predominant philosophy of our day is just the opposite of the Golden Rule, namely, "Do others before they do you." This is the philosophy by which most of the people of our generation live. We grow up with the suspicion that the other fellow has designs on us to "take us for a cleaning" so we reciprocate by formulating our own designs on the other fellow. It becomes a game of deceptive maneuvering to see who can get the advantage. How different the situation would be if people would only apply this rule to all of life's relationships! Resolve now to make this rule a practical principle in your daily living.

Our text teaches us plainly that the standard we set up for others must be the measure of our own conduct. The best way to get others to say kind things about you and to do nice things for you is to say kind things about others and to do nice things for others. Life moves in a circle, and what we give to others we get from them. Assuming that we are normal and average persons, what do we desire from others?

1. We want others to take a genuine interest in us.

A normal person does not want to be neglected or ignored. It always warms our hearts to know that there are some who care enough for us to grieve over our failures and to rejoice over our victories. We are happy when this interest is based on what we are in ourselves.

2. We want others to look for the best in us.

We do not like for others to find fault with us. We know that if our friends look for the worst in us that they will be sure to find it. We also know that those who look for the worst seldom see anything else. To look for the worst is to find that for which you are looking and nothing more. Aware of this, we naturally yearn for others to look for the best in us.

3. We want others to help lighten our loads.

Longing for the road of life to be made lighter, brighter and easier, we want our comrades to help lighten our loads instead of piling more burdens upon our shoulders. For that very reason, we should help bear the burdens of our brothers on the road of life.

We want those who travel with us on the road to encourage us along the way and to pray that God will protect, sustain and direct us along the road. Therefore, we should assume this same helpful attitude toward others. Since we want to hear encouraging words and to receive a helping hand from those who travel with us on the road of life, let us speak encouraging words and extend a helping hand to those who journey with us. This thought was expressed by James Whitcomb Riley in his poem:

THE FRIENDLY HAND

"When a man ain't got a cent,  
An' he's feeling kind of blue,  
And the clouds hang dark and heavy,  
An' won't let the sunshine through,  
It's a great thing, Oh, my brother,  
For a feller just to lay  
His hand upon your shoulder  
In a friendly sort of way.

It makes a man feel curious;  
It makes the tear-drops start,  
An' you sort o' feel a flutter  
In the region of your heart.  
You can't look up and meet his eye;  
You don't know what to say,  
When his hand is on your shoulder  
In a friendly sort of way.

Oh, the world's a curious compound,  
With its honey and its gall,  
With its cares and bitter crosses;  
But a good world, after all.  
An' a good God must have made it --  
Leastways, that's what I say,  
When a hand rests on my shoulder  
In a friendly sort of way."

"All things whatsoever ye would that men should do to you, do ye even so to them."  
Put yourself in the other fellow's place. Treat him as you would wish to be  
treated under similar circumstances. Deal with him as you would want others to  
deal with you. Try to bring to others the same quality of life that you want  
for yourself. Remember, all the while, that you cannot live according to the  
rule of the road without Christ. Obeying the rule of the road roots in faith  
in Christ and fruits in obedience to Him. Since He is the only Saviour, receive  
Him now as the way, the truth and the life. Believe on Him now and thou wilt  
be fully blessed.