

DO AS YOU WOULD BE DONE BY

"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.

With Christ's commandment, "Therefore all things whatsoever ye would that men should do to you, do ye even so to them," the Sermon on the Mount reached its climax. This commandment has been called "the capstone of the whole discourse." Perhaps this verse constitutes the most famous statement that Christ ever made. It was something which had never been said before. It expressed a new view of life and of its obligations. It was Christ's standard for daily living, the code for human conduct under all circumstances. No sooner had He uttered these words than Christ drew attention to the way in which they gathered up in one sentence everything that can be said about ethical conduct. Once and for all He summarized 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. There are many parallels to this saying, in a negative form, which were in use for centuries before the Christian era.

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

Confucius, the famous Chinese sage (born about 550 B.C.), said, "What you do not want done to yourself, do not do to others."

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." The rabbi was simply expressing the policy of abstention. He was simply urging this: "Do not be the means of causing your neighbor to suffer what you would not inflict upon yourself."

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. However, it needs to be understood that to heed these maxims would only shut up a person in his own affairs, absorbed in the idea of doing no harm, without making any attempt to become an agent of that which is good. These maxims fall far short of compliance with the command of Christ.

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 reproved 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 rule Christ is applying the idea of positive living to the area of human relationships. He expressed this important principle in positive and strong language. The predominant note of Christ's teachings was positive. Unless the emphasis is placed upon the positive the accomplishments of any person will be very meager. Great achievements are not realized by living on the negative side of life. Christianity is not negative, even though some of its would-be interpreters emphasize the negative almost to the exclusion of the positive. Christ did give some "don'ts," but the predominant emphasis of His entire ministry was upon the "do's." Therefore, we must never allow the negative to overshadow the positive.

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.

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.

This rule which Christ enunciated is more than a beautiful motto to be displayed on billboard advertising or on plaques for the home and the office. It is a workable principle. It is sensible, practical, and mutually helpful. Everywhere it has been tried it has resulted in happier living. The tragedy is that so few people are willing to put it into practice. Unfortunately, the predominant philosophy of our day is just the opposite of the Golden Rule, namely, "Do others before they do you," or "Do unto the other fellow what he would like to do unto you, and do it first." 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 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! Why not resolve now to make this rule a practical principle in your daily living?

Every follower of Christ is commanded and expected to take the initiative in doing as he would desire to be done by. In talking with Dr. Dale of Birmingham, England, a lady said, "I have been attending your church for three years and nobody has ever spoken to me." Well, of course, that meant that she was as guilty as the others. She had never spoken to anybody herself. Christ teaches us that we are to begin by doing our part. We are required to do to our fellow men what we wish they would do to us.

If you want others to look for the best in you, then look for the best in others, for you will always find that for which you are looking. If you would like for others to help lighten your load, instead of piling more burdens on your shoulders, then be sure that you help to make the road of life brighter, lighter, and easier for others. If you would like to hear encouraging words, and to receive a helping hand from somebody, then be sure that you speak encouraging words and extend a helping hand to those who journey down the road of life. If you want somebody else to have what is yours, whether it be your material possessions or your position, then and only then would it be permissible for you to try to get the possessions or position away from somebody else. Christ said, "All things whatsoever ye would that men should do to you, do ye even so to them." Be sure that you do as you would be done by. Treat others like you want to be treated. Deal with others in the same manner that you want others to deal with you. This principle applies to all circumstances. This rule never fails when it is applied in the home, the church, the school, the community, the state, the nation, or the world.

This attitude of helpfulness toward others was expressed in the following words of James Whitcomb Riley in his poem entitled:

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."

Try to bring to others the same quality of life that you want for yourself. Christ's command to you is: "All things whatsoever ye would that men should do to you, do ye even so to them." But, you need to know and remember that you cannot obey this command unless you are a Christian. Obeying this commandment 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 as your personal Saviour, and you will be fully and wonderfully blessed.