

"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. See Luke 6:31 also.

Our Lord is here speaking to His disciples. He is stating a principle to men who are really bent upon the culture of excellence — men who want to be godly and good, men who are under the influence, therefore, of an enlightened and powerful understanding. He is speaking to them individually, with regards to their personal obligations and of what they ought to be in relation to one another.

This text is regarded by many as one of the most important and practical sayings that ever fell from the lips of Christ, and therefore one most applicable to human conduct and the general relationships of men to one another. These words were by no means altogether new when our Lord spoke them. Parallels to them can be found in the writings of heathen philosophers, and in the sacred books of other religions. Our Lord is to us the most original of teachers. One of the first impressions His teaching made upon those who heard it fresh from His lips was that He "taught with authority and not as the scribes," not like men who retailed a traditional morality; but as one whose lessons came direct from the fountain of truth and order.

I want you to observe that this is not a negative exhortation, but it is a positive one. It does not read as some persons interpret it — "Refrain from doing to others what you would not desire them to do to you." That is very admirable as far as it goes, but if Christ had said that only, no originality could be granted for the maxim. In that form it had existed hundreds of years before He came, and it was, therefore, familiar to the people.

Similar sayings have been uttered from time to time by the heathen philosophers and moralists or by outstanding Jews. They are to be found in more than one ancient classical writer, and they were taught by the Jewish Rabbis.

Confucius had said, "One must not do to others what you would not they should do to you." In Tobit 4:15, which is one of the Apocryphal books, we read, "Do that to no man which thou hatest." The Stoics had a saying, "What thou dost not wish done to thee, do not to another." But these, it must be noted, are only refrains or negatives. They were rules telling us what to avoid doing; what not to do.

Plato went farther, and 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."

On being asked, "How we should conduct ourselves toward our friends?" Aristotle replied, "As you would desire them to act toward yourself."

It is said that a Gentile inquirer, who wanted to embrace the Jewish religion, went to the great Shammai and said, "Teach me the law while I stand on one foot." That is, he wanted the law condensed to a sentence, so that he might have it in the fewest words and the briefest space of time. In anger the Rabbi smote him with his staff and turned away. Then the questioner went to Hillel, the Jew, with the same request, whereupon Hillel replied, "What thou hatest thyself, that do not thou to another; that is the whole of the law, all the rest is only a comment on it." In other words, whatever you would that men should not do to you, you must not do to them. That merely expresses the policy of abstention. It does not urge more than this — "Do not be the means of causing your neighbor to suffer what you would not inflict upon yourself."

Another great ethical teacher, Immanuel Kant, expressed it in this way, "Act so that you could wish your act to be universal." Kant's great postulate was, So act that you would be willing for everyone to do the same thing under similar circumstances.

Such a maxim would never bring us into kindly, helpful association with our neighbors. We would only be shut up in our own concerns, absorbed in the idea of doing no harm, without any attempt being made to become agents of that which is good.

But all of these maxims fall far short of the extent and grace of the saying of the Master. They forbid the doing of evil. Jesus taught the doing of good as well. He tells us what to do. While Aristotle considered this rule as one for friends, Jesus extended it to both foes and friends. Our Lord did not come into this world simply to sanction its principles of action and to accommodate His laws to human weakness and sin. He was intolerant of the cruel selfishness which abounds. He struck at the root of those practices which separate man from man and class from class. His standard imposes upon us not only the duty of doing justice to our neighbors, but also to exercise mercy and forbearance. He raised a high standard for human attainment — "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."

Here then is the originality of Christ. He turned the negative into the positive. He translated others' negatives into God's positive. The rule as He expounded it is "All things whatsoever ye would that men should do to you, do ye even so to them." This is an altogether different thing. It teaches us to take the initiative; to begin to do for others what we conceive they ought to do for us. This needs to be emphasized. It immediately suggests active love, a direct benefit which those around us are to receive. We are prone to contemplate what we consider the most pleasant and desirable things, cataloguing our ambitions, our wishes, and our hopes, and thus discovering what "we would that men should do to us," to go forth into the world and, as far as lies in our power, enrich the lives of others with those very things that are so dear in our estimation.

We are to act towards others as we wish they would act towards us if they had the power. This rule or principle, however, does not cover all conduct. It has nothing to say of a man's private attitude toward and relation to God. It isn't given to regulate the inner, secret life of a man's thoughts and feelings. It applies to a man's dealings with his fellows. It clearly contemplates that the life of the Christian will be a life necessarily rich in social duties and responsibilities and opportunities. It makes the great principle of life one of service to others. It pictures all men as anxious to impart good to their fellows to the utmost of their capacity.

Christ sets this principle before us as of primary importance. It is the first rule of Christian conduct. It is the law of our Lord's own life, and He alone shows us how it can be carried out in practice and so makes it real and living. It is the old principle of the law that we are to love our neighbors as ourselves. It sets before us an excellent test by which we may see whether we are doing so.

Think, says Jesus, of what you would like to happen to you. Think of the kindly action, the generous impulse, the gracious deed, and of what pleasure these will always bring to you. And when you have thought of that, 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 somebody's heart. If you want others to be merciful to you, remember that you will never attain that end if you are unmerciful. If you want others to be charitable in their estimate of your conduct, remember that you will never gain your object by complaints, or by dealing out uncharitableness yourself. Before you can reap the fruits of charity, you must sow the seed.

Christ plainly teaches us 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 do

kind things for you is to do those things for others.

A life moves in a circle. What we receive we give. What we give we get. Life's scales are always balanced by one attitude or another. Let me repeat it, what we give to others we get from them. For the most part, we can get from others the response we desire. Assuming that we are normal persons, what do we desire from others?

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

We do not like to be neglected or passed by. It always warms our hearts to know that there are some who care enough for us to rejoice in our victories and to grieve over our defeats and failures. We are eager for this interest to be based on what we are in ourselves.

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

We do not want our friends to be faultfinders. We are conscious that if they seek for the worst in us, they will be sure to find it. Not only do those who look for the worst in us find it, but they generally miss all that is good. The faultfinder so fixes his attention on the fault that he usually fails to see anything else. That is true in the reading of a book, the eating of a dinner, or the hearing of a sermon. One man berated his pastor for preaching a certain sermon. While he agreed with ninety-nine per cent of what his pastor said, there was one per cent to which he objected. Therefore, he threw away the ninety-nine per cent with which he agreed and carried away the one per cent that he disliked. How silly! To look for the worst is to find the worst and nothing more. Naturally, therefore, we yearn for others to judge us kindly and to look for the best in us.

3. We want the appreciation of others.

We are eager that they appreciate us for what we are and for what we do. Not only so, but we are glad for them to express their appreciation. Of course, there are times when we must carry on even though nobody applauds and nobody approves. But while we must do this, there is no denying the fact that our work would be easier and our hearts would be lighter if others would tell us of their appreciation.

How, then, are we to win from others the responses and reactions that we so deeply desire?

(1) If we want the interest of others in us, we must be interested in them.

If we long for them to like us, the first big step is to like them. This will win when everything else fails. When Will Rogers met his tragic death a few years ago, he was lamented by millions around the world. Why was this the case? It was not true merely because he made the world laugh. That was a help. He laughed at and with all the prominent men of his day. But his laughter was never jarring. It was always gentle and kindly. Why, then, did millions feel that they had lost a friend? His own words answer that question. He said, "I never saw a man that I did not like." The surest way to have a friend is to be one.

(2) If we are eager for others to judge us kindly, we should judge them kindly.

Jesus said, "With what judgment ye judge, ye shall be judged: and with what measure ye mete, it shall be measured to you again."