

The Golden Rule in Practice

Happy Sabbath to all.

This week, and with the New Moon following the Sabbath, I would like to talk about one of the most basic, and central, principles of our faith, which is called the “Golden Rule.” While this may seem like a simple idea, like all foundational concepts it is both deep and wide, and its proper, sanctified, application to real life truly does require spiritual discernment.

One of the things that has been in my mind this week is a verse that Sis. Jody mentioned during the discussion section at the end of last week’s meeting.

In talking about faith that cannot be transferred from one person to another, of “oil” that cannot be given by the wise virgins to the foolish ones, she shared this:

“‘Though these three men, Noah, Daniel, and Job, were in [the land under judgment], they should deliver but their own souls by their righteousness,’ saith the Lord Yahweh.” (Ezek. 14:14)

There are many examples of righteousness in the Old Testament, so why did Yah specify these three individuals?

Noah was a patriarch who lived before and through the global flood. Job lived some time after that, but before the establishment of Israel as a nation. Daniel lived at a much more recent time, when Israel existed, but had been taken captive by rebellion and then (physically) by the Babylonians.

These were three very different periods of time, in which the worshippers of Yahweh would have three distinct pictures of “practical righteousness,” and yet they are all equally praised by the Creator.

Each of the three lived under a different covenant, and yet they all shared in the Holy Spirit, and they all approached unto the same perfection of character that would be later revealed in its fullness by the Savior while He was on earth.

Even though the natures of their covenants differed, even though there may have been different standards of practices and behavior, the principles of their faith were identical, and in fact are identical with our own in this generation. Despite the fact that our outward activities associated with the worship of Yah are very different than theirs (the communion vs. the sacrificing of animals, for example) the righteousness of the Almighty can be recognized despite historical and cultural variations.

I am bringing this up, because our topic for this week, the Golden Rule, is one of those principles that is easily understood on some level by most human beings, despite differences of language, nationality, and even beliefs. It spans many religions, being adopted into even those that are very different from Biblical Christianity.

And yet, because it is so widely accepted, and so widely spread, the errors to which its misapplication can lead (and there ARE errors that may arise) are very difficult to identify and correct.

For Yahshua's Church, for those seeking the perfection of character leading to righteousness that even our Holy Father may praise, it is not enough to merely accept the right principles. We must have the proper application of principles so that our own souls may be refined for Heavenly service, while at the same time we are setting a pure and attractive example for those who observe our words and our conduct. This is where doctrines come in.

We have looked at a number of definitions for that term, "doctrine," over the years, but for the purposes of this study, we may define it simply as "the application of principle." We may have a principle that we show agape-love and respect for our brethren, even if we believe they are taken in a fault – that is the principle. The application of that principle, which manifests itself in a doctrine, is what we call "Gospel Order."

We have a principle that we hold agape-love (this is a common feature of all Yah's principles) toward our fellow men, even though most do not know the truth about the Great Controversy. The application of that principle, again a doctrine, is summed up in the Great Commission, to go out and teach the Word, saving souls from destruction, and lives from even earthly forms of misery.

But the Golden Rule is called "golden," because just about any principle that one might consider really goes back to this one. It is ultimately THE central idea of the Biblical religion.

We have agape toward others, because our Father shared it with us. Because we delight in this gift, and in our knowledge of this gift, we know that others would (if they knew it) also rejoice. As a result, we act toward them in ways that best express this principle.

We read, "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." (Mat 7:12)

This verse, for all its simplicity, is remarkably full of wisdom. While many forms of religion (even some forms of Paganism) have adopted some of its wording, they can never know the fullness of all that it means, because of the way it ends – "for this is the Law and the prophets."

Why should we treat others as we would like to be treated? It is because it fulfills the Law of Yah and the teachings of His servants.

Now, some might say, "But that is a legalistic reason for being kind to others." It would be, IF the proper understanding of the Law was that it led to righteousness.

This is something I believe we can all benefit from taking some time to consider. Without going too deeply into the theology of it, and the apostles expected us to understand this much, we as born-again Christians know that obedience to the Law results from agreement with, and delight in, what the Law says. It is not to earn salvation, or to please our Father only for Him to reward

us, but it is because we understand that what the Law says is really best, and therefore we follow its particulars.

That understanding is critical.

Perhaps a good angle from which to approach it is in this way: A legalist “obeys” the Law. A Christian “fulfills” the Law.

As with our Savior Himself, our harmony with the Law is a result of our desire to bring it into an honorable light, to share it with others, and have them benefit from its blessings even as we benefit from its blessings.

Here again, even in our testimony, we are treating others as we would like to be treated – because we are setting for them an example from which we ourselves, at some point in the past, have benefitted.

If it is true, as Yahshua said, that treating others as we would like to be treated is the “Law and the prophets,” then every divine commandment, and every inspired doctrine, must therefore be an extension and an interpretation of this principle.

It might be a worthwhile activity to take some time and consider all our doctrines, one-by-one, and see how they reveal the Golden Rule.

In fact, I will go so far as to say this: If we cannot connect a belief or practice back to the Golden Rule, it means that we do not truly understand that teaching as our Father would have us understand it, and we would do well to pray about it, or ask about it, until we are satisfied that we see the truth of it. This will make a worthwhile discussion among our members and friends if this activity is taken up as it might be, and I pray that it will indeed be something that we are inspired to pursue.

Since the Victory doctrine is one we consider our central theme in many ways, we ought easily to make the connection between overcoming all sin and the Golden Rule.

As long as sin exists in our lives, we are cut off from our Father’s presence. We can do no everlasting good to those whom we encounter. We ourselves are destroyed, and will never experience what it means to completely receive the love of our Father, which we can then share with others.

But when we accept this gift of our Father, being born again into His service, we can do all things through Christ to heal the sick (both spiritually and physically), to restore the life-and-health-giving worship of Yah to the world, to speak the truth in love and set an example for others that will urge them ever Heaven-ward. Being a recipient of these gifts is something that anyone who loves life, and desires it more abundantly, would want to have. Therefore by equipping ourselves to best share it with others we are treating them as we would desire to be treated.

That is one way to connect the two; there are other ways of looking at it as well.

Even in the absence of our fellow humans, our Father has paid an infinite price to redeem us from death. He has given His all for our sakes, enduring the weight of sin for thousands of years so that we may exist, and then be won back to our originally-intended inheritance. It is this knowledge that wins willing hearts, because as they embrace the Golden Rule, they come to understand the love of our Heavenly Father toward us, and we could never react to this unspeakable gift with rejection or indifference. We accept Him, because He first accepted us, even in our sinfulness, because we know that this is what we would desire if we had given as He has given. In the accepting of the Father and Son, we shed that which was dark and earthly about our lives, and become His victorious children.

We may test our heart-level understanding of all doctrines, as I have said, by looking at them in this manner. If any believe they lack understanding of any doctrine, of any principle, let them take this knowledge from tonight's study, and so let them grow.

But now, having examined that this principle lies at the heart of our relationship with our Creator, and with our fellow men, how shall we then conduct ourselves?

The "perfect" application of the Golden Rule, the application that the 144,000 make if it, requires discernment, as I mentioned. One of the main reasons for this is because there are some limitations which primarily involve our degree of knowledge. Let me explain that a little further.

The Golden Rule is usually interpreted as, "Do unto others as you would have them do unto you with your current level of understanding," or even more simply, "Do to others what would feel good for you to receive now." This reasoning, from a limited human perspective, leads to both spiritual and moral errors.

Consider, for example, a parent that spoils a child. That parent might reason that the child should be treated as "well" as possible, but as most of us will easily recognize, spoiling children by providing for every desire is setting them up for real problems later in life. Now, if the parents truly knew the damage that was being done in the long term, they (if they have any wisdom) would not want to have been treated that way themselves.

It is, perhaps, a fine balance to strike between restrictions and freedoms, and this is why it takes discernment to interpret this principle into a practical doctrine according to Yah's will. Parenting is a ready example, but the idea here is applicable to all different kinds of relationships. If we treat everyone the way we would want to be treated, according to the world's interpretation/doctrine, then we could never violate preferences for convictions. We would not be able to testify against sin, or attempt to correct error, because it is "not nice."

Of course, nominal Christianity takes the world's perspective and runs with it, because this is the root of the idea that we cannot "judge" anyone, even if we are merely repeating the Father's righteous judgment.

Remember, this principle is at the center of all truly inspired doctrine; therefore, if the doctrines are false, it is because the understanding of the Rule is skewed somehow.

According to the worldly and nominal reading of the Golden Rule, we cannot say, “Cease to sin,” or “Stop that bad habit,” because we are being judgmental, and making others feel bad.

However, just like the parents in the example above, if they knew the long-term disasters that result from leaving sin un-cleansed— up to and ultimately the second death – what would they themselves leave undone and unsaid?

The world and nominal Christianity need to be taught the true definition of “Love.” Only then can they interpret the Golden Rule in its perfection. It is a decision; it is a commitment, to do what is best for another person even if “no chastening for the present seemeth to be joyous, but grievous.” As the rest of that verse reads, “nevertheless afterward it yieldeth the peaceable fruit of righteousness unto them which are exercised thereby.” (Heb 12:11)

For the Saints, we know that we would never knowingly do anything deliberately to cause another harm either in the short term or the long if it can be avoided. With this understood, our work is to find the “little things,” our work is to find the small blemishes to cleanse away, so that we are not merely doing good for others, but the best.

It is the little things in life that show character the most, as Yahshua taught when discussing matters such as the widow who donated her last two coins, or those who pray in secret for the good of those whom they know. Our faith with regard to this matter is best revealed in having courtesy for others, having consideration for them in all that we do, even in the tiniest of matters. As we think of others before ourselves we may begin to find areas that are worthy of refinement, and this is appropriate with the New Moon just before us.

I have spoken in the past, for example, about punctuality in attending these studies, as this is a courtesy that both refines us and sets a standard for others to follow. Thanks to Yah, I have seen some improvement in this; but of course, I did not share that with the Church merely to have it applied to Friday nights. I would hope that those who have seen the error and improved have done so in all their dealings with others, whether it be at work, or with friends and family.

As we approach the perfection of Yahshua’s character, those things that might once have been considered beneath our notice may be identified as real barriers to spiritual growth. Let us, therefore, be diligent in these small matters of treating others as we would like to be treated, and as would be best for us in all ways. Let us deal with others with all courtesy and consideration, the better to “follow peace with all men.” (Heb 12:14)

As a doctrine of our faith, as an interpretation of our principles, let us follow the Golden Rule in even the smallest matters, showing that religion can be a smile and a kind word, an apology if our actions inconvenience others, and so on.

These may be things that the world will consider to be too insignificant for a Church to teach, too simple for a Bible study, and yet for the 144,000, who walk as Yahshua walked, the very sanctification of our faith consists of these things, for which our Father will one day turn to the universe and say of us, as He will of Noah, Daniel and Job, “These are my faithful servants, in whom I am well pleased.”

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