

Wings

*"Those who wait on the Lord shall renew their strength;
they shall mount up with wings like eagles."
Isaiah 40:31*



December 18, 2016

Living the Golden Rule

No other Biblical command has been given its own name. It's effective, practical, and so simple. But humanity struggles to practice it consistently. There is a reason why.

"Therefore, whatever you want men to do to you, do also to them, for this is the Law and the Prophets" (Matt. 7:12).



We call this precept "The Golden Rule," because no other law is so valuable a guide for making moral decisions in life. If all of us treated others with the same courtesy and consideration that we expect them to show us, the world would be a much happier place.

Of course, that's not happening. Everyone admires the Golden Rule as a reliable standard of conduct, and admits that it's the answer to most of humanity's social problems. Yet most people struggle to live it consistently. Even among those who claim to follow Jesus, the compliance level is often quite low. Like so many other Biblical injunctions, profession and practice don't always match up. Why?

We can suggest a couple of reasons. First, there are some people who have been so damaged in their upbringing that they struggle to understand the concept of treating others "as you want others to do to you." They despise themselves,

and expect others to despise them too. They have no sense of self-worth by which they can appreciate the needs of others, so they are incapable of that kind of empathy. There is no personal frame of reference that would allow them to recognize the need for treating others with respect. Before these people can practice the Golden Rule effectively, they first have to do a major reconstruction of their own self-image. Only then can they appreciate the value of treating others with dignity.

For the rest of us, the Golden Rule is great in theory, but impractical in real life because of the *sacrifices* that such a way of life would entail. For example, we expect others to go out of their way to defer to our needs or wishes . . . but I don't have the time or resources to do the same to them! We expect others to swallow their pride and apologize for their offenses . . . but what I did to them was no big deal, they should just get over it! We expect others to overlook our mistakes and shortcomings (they should try to walk in my shoes for a day) . . . but their mistakes are inexcusable! We have

no problem recognizing how people ought to treat us, but extending those same favors to others is just too much to ask. We can offer all kinds of legitimate reasons for treating others *the way that benefits us*, rather than the way we would like to be treated if the roles were reversed.

The root problem here, of course, is *selfishness*. The desire for personal aggrandizement blinds us to a fair comparison of what we want and what others want. We hold one standard for others and a different standard for ourselves, and cannot see a problem in that imbalance. In order for the Golden Rule to work, we have to redirect our attention away from ourselves and toward others. We have to genuinely desire what is best for them above what we want.

That's not easy, but there are no shortcuts. We must make whatever sacrifices are necessary to make the Golden Rule central to our character—including reconstructing our self-image, if necessary. That process begins by reflecting on the work of One who loved us and sacrificed so much for us.

– David King