

The Golden Rule

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Bible verses: Luke 6:27-36, NKJV

27 But I say to you who hear: Love your enemies, do good to those who hate you, 28 bless those who curse you, and pray for those who spitefully use you. 29 To him who strikes you on the one cheek, offer the other also. And from him who takes away your cloak, do not withhold your tunic either. 30 Give to everyone who asks of you. And from him who takes away your goods do not ask them back. 31 And just as you want men to do to you, you also do to them likewise.

32 But if you love those who love you, what credit is that to you? For even sinners love those who love them. 33 And if you do good to those who do good to you, what credit is that to you? For even sinners do the same. 34 And if you lend to those from whom you hope to receive back, what credit is that to you? For even sinners lend to sinners to receive as much back. 35 But love your enemies, do good, and lend, [h]hoping for nothing in return; and your reward will be great, and you will be sons of the Most High. For He is kind to the unthankful and evil. 36 Therefore be merciful, just as your Father also is merciful.

1. How does God categorize people?

This teaching of Lord Jesus in Luke 6, which can also be found in Matt 5:43-48, is often referred to as 'the Golden Rule.' He taught His disciples to love even their enemies and do to others how they would have them to do to them. This was a very revolutionary teaching, which is a unique teaching of Christianity of forgiveness, kindness and mercy. In spite of this teaching, however, western Christian nations have killed and hurt millions of peoples of other nations including fellow Christian nations during the past 20 centuries. The American history includes the sad and tragic acts of near genocide against the American indigenous people and the slavery of the African black people in the South, which triggered the Civil War. Here, let us study what the Scripture says about who our enemies are and how we should interpret the Golden Rule taught by Lord Jesus.

In this sermon Jesus referred to His followers and contrasted them against the 'sinners.' We often erroneously believe that all teachings of the Bible apply to ALL people. This teaching in Luke 6 was given to the Jewish followers of Jesus. Does it apply to us Christians of the 21st century? Most of us believe it does. To have a good understanding about its applicability we first need to know how God views these two groups of people.

The first group is God's people, who are today the followers of Jesus Christ. In the OT era this term, 'God's people,' referred to the people of Israel, who were descendants of Abraham. However, in later years most of them forsook their belief in God and this spiritual betrayal by the Israelites caused God to forsake them as His own people. Only a few remnants kept the true faith. During Jesus' days here on the earth only a small band of people followed Him and the balance of the Israelites was a group of sinners, just like the gentiles. When the gospel spread to the rest of the Roman Empire territories later, tens of thousands came into the promised salvation of God through Jesus Christ and they became a part of God's kingdom. Most of the teachings of Lord Jesus thus became pertinent to the NT era Christians. However, there were some teachings that were only relevant to the Jewish believers who were living in the OT era, prior to the dawn of the NT era. And we need to distinguish the applicability of these teachings properly.

The second group is called 'sinners.' The original meaning of 'sin' is an arrow that misses the mark. Hence, it refers to the people who are outside of God's will. Jesus declared that the purpose of Him coming to this world was to "call the sinners to repentance [Luke 5:32]." This group called 'sinners' refers to both the Jews and the non-Jews who have not repented before God. The purpose of the gospel of Christ is to bring the unrepented sinners into the grace of God, which is extended to the entire human race. The Jewish people mistakenly believed that they were in God's grace and blessing because they were the descendants of Abraham by blood line. However, all who have not been brought into God's grace upon repentance through the gospel of Jesus Christ, whether Jews or non-Jews, fall in this category of sinners. The power of God is available to the people of God to live as His people and to show the love and grace of God to others, even the golden rule of Jesus Christ. However, that is not the case of sinners.

2. Who are the enemies of Christians?

When we read the Bible, we often confuse the definition of 'enemy.' Who are our enemies? Are 'our enemies' the same as 'God's enemies'? Do you think that God will consider our enemies as His enemies and will try to vanquish them? Does Jesus' teaching to love our enemies mean that we must love God's enemies?

Jesus described who the enemies [ekstros: v. 27, 35] of the disciples were. They include 'those who hate you [v. 27],' 'those who curse you and spitefully use you [v. 28],' 'those who hurt you and take away your clothing [v. 29],' and 'those who rob of your possessions [v. 30].' These are people who are full of ill will toward Christians, who lack love and compassion toward others, who hate others and those who use or rob others for their self-interests. They were both Jews, Herod's subordinates and the Roman soldiers in the first century. They are all sinners before God and appear as enemies to us Christians.

However, they are still within the reach of God's mercy. Therefore, Lord Jesus teaches us to love them and to pray for them although they come to us as enemies, and to lay a coal fire upon their heads by showing God's love in return for their spiteful persecutions and hatred toward Christians. He even teaches us to let them have our material possessions, which they forcibly take from us, so that love of God in us is manifest. God is good and we ought to show forth His goodness even to our enemies because they are still within God's mercy.

3. God's enemies

God's enemies are not necessarily our enemies and our enemies are not necessarily God's enemies as we have just seen. The people of Israel were under the colonial oppressive rule of the Roman Empire in the first few centuries including the time Jesus was on the earth. Nowhere in the Bible we find the Roman Empire and its military referred as God's enemies. They were not enemies to God because He was using them to achieve the grand plan of human salvation. Jesus did not come to save the people of Israel from the colonial rule of the Roman Empire. Rather, He came to deliver the entire humanity from Satan and his hosts and bring them into the blessed kingdom of God. The Roman Empire was not adverse to this plan, although the Roman rulers were often very harsh to the people of Israel and Pilate succumbed to the pressure of the Jewish religious leaders to have Jesus Christ crucified.

God's enemies are categorized in the following three ways in the Bible:

The first group of enemies of God is Satan and his host. Satan has made himself an enemy to God by opposing God's authority and seeking to take the rightful place of honor and dominion of this world that belong to God. Those spiritual entities and human beings who follow Satan and seek to fulfill his evil plans also belong in this category of God's enemies [Matt 13:25, 28; Matt 22:44; Luke 1:68-71]. These are the evil forces in this world that deceive the peoples to doubt and disbelieve God's goodness, that seek to destroy the social and moral fabric of the society, and thus seek to drive people away from the true light of God toward the darkness that Satan brings. In the last days they will be severely conquered by Lord Jesus and the heavenly host that He will command and they will all be thrown into the eternal fire of the lake of fire, where they will consciously suffer unending pain and remorse for eternity.

What should be the attitude of Christians toward this Satanic group of God's enemies? Should we apply the Golden Rule to these evil entities and people? No, it is not what the Bible teaches. Apostle James teaches us to resist the devil [James 4:7]. Apostle Paul teaches that our warfare is "*against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this age, against spiritual hosts of wickedness in the heavenly places* [Ephesians 6:12]." We are not to show love and mercy to them but to fight against such forces of evil so as to expose their evil intents and plans, to block and foil their devices, and to restore the damages that they have wrought in homes, communities and in our nation. In this regard the choice that America faces in 2020 Election is a serious one. We must choose the candidates on God's side, who profess to uphold the values and principles of God in our societies and the nation. By doing so we will be crushing the intents of those of the dark side to bring about the descent of our society economically, morally and spiritually into the abyss where the dark forces are destined to slide into. Never before in the American history has a presidential election had such a serious implication on the future of our nation and of the free world as the current one we face.

The second group of God's enemies consists of hypocritical religious leaders. John the Baptist and Lord Jesus both criticized the Pharisees and the Scribes severely by calling them 'sons of vipers.' They knew the truth of God and yet led the people of Israel to the place of darkness and damnation rather than leading them to the light of God's truth. Therefore, they became enemies of God who could not avoid His curse and damnation [Matt 3:7, 12:34, 23:33]. There are such religious leaders today who enjoy the honor and adoration of the believers and yet they are knowingly leading the flock to false ways that bring no hope of true salvation but disappointments and depravity. Unless they repent and change their ways fundamentally God's wrath will bring about utter destruction to their religious structure and headquarters and the false leaders will face the same damnation as Satan and his host [Revelation 18].

How should Christians treat these hypocritical leaders of the church? Recently Pope Francis announced the Catholic Church's position of approving the same-sex marriages. This caused many true believers in the church voice their criticism of the pope and became agonized. Their criticism of the pope's wrong position is only right because it is the duty of the believers to be critical of the wrongs of their church leaders. The apostles of Jesus Christ were never tolerant on corruption and depravity in the churches of the first century. Lord Jesus accurately pointed out and criticized the wrongs of the seven churches as apostle John wrote in Revelation 1-3. When church leaders become wrong, it is the duty and responsibility of the believers to clearly expose them and demand the leaders to repent and to make fundamental changes to make things right and true before God. And if such acts of reform are not made, the congregation should consider the fallen leaders as having gone over into Satan's camp and remove them from their positions of leadership and responsibility.

The third group of God's enemies are those who deny God and live in sins. Apostle Paul called them 'enemies of God' [Romans 5:10]. We read and hear of many who used to live as enemies of God, then are brought into the true hope of life and salvation of Jesus Christ through the gospel. Therefore, Christians must show love, compassion, and patience toward these people so that they might see God's goodness in us and are brought into His grace as a result. That would be a valid reason for practicing the Golden Rule toward such people.

4. Golden Rule and the contemporary Christians

So, how should the contemporary Christians apply the Golden Rule to their lives? Should we consider the enemies of our nation as our personal enemies? In other words, should the Golden Rule be applied to all enemies of God, even the hosts of Satan, and the leaders of extremist rogue nations like China, Iran and North Korea? Let us see what the Bible says about these questions.

In the Old Testament 'enemies' are mostly defined to be the peoples in and about the Promised Land who would be hindrances to God's plan of establishing a kingdom of His people in the land that God had promised to Abraham [Exodus 23:22, Lev. 26:7-8]. The people of Israel were to conquer this land and to thrive in it while faithfully serving God. The tribes who were living in the land of Canaan were the enemies to Israel, which had to be conquered and driven out so that God's plan could be achieved.

This definition of enemies applies equally in the NT era. Those peoples who stand against God's plan of establishing and thriving the Kingdom of God on the earth are defined as 'enemies of God.' The foremost prayer item for all Christians is furtherance and thriving of the Kingdom of God as Lord Jesus taught [Matt. 6:33]. In God's eyes those peoples who stand against His kingdom are His enemies and should be enemies to the Christian people. Therefore, when young men and women of a Christian nation join their military and fight against the military of an evil nation, there should not be any resistance or hesitance in their attitudes.

Another type of enemies in the Old Testament was personal enemies, as king David sang in Psalms more than 80 times about his enemies. King Saul, who was David's father-in-law and his guards became David's enemies for a number of years because they sought his life. Later on, his own son Absalom rebelled against him and became his enemy. But David had learned the Golden Rule and practiced this principle so that he did not wish to kill either Saul

or Absalom and entrusted their fates in God's hand. For today's Christians we should love our personal enemies just as David did and pray for their forgiveness to God just as Jesus did on the cross.

In practicing the Golden Rule, three principles must be kept:

1. The standard of good behavior must first be applied to myself.
2. I must avoid duplicity at all costs.
3. I must show compassion and mercy to all people regardless of their attitude toward me.

This standard is required because Christians are God's ambassadors. Just as a nation's ambassador is charged to represent the policies and values of his/her own government, Christians are likewise called upon to represent the policies and values of the Kingdom of God through their words and actions [v. 36].

35 But love your enemies, do good, and lend, [h]oping for nothing in return; and your reward will be great, and you will be sons of the Most High. For He is kind to the unthankful and evil. 36 Therefore be merciful, just as your Father also is merciful.

The root cause of the hatred shown toward the Jewish people over the centuries and the Jewish Holocaust by Nazi Hitler regime during World War II was the terrible misunderstanding held by the Christians of past centuries and Martin Luther, very unfortunately, that the Jews were the enemies of the Christian world. The Jewish leaders of the first century were responsible for the crucifixion of Jesus on the cross. However, Jesus taught His disciples to forgive them and to apply the Golden Rule toward them. During the first three centuries the Christians never harbored hatred and enmity toward the Jewish people although many Jews were responsible for turning the Roman persecution on the Christians. Today, despite their unwillingness to recognize Jesus as their messiah because of their spiritual blindness, the Jewish people are still the 'original olive tree,' the root of the Judeo-Christian belief system, as taught by apostle Paul. And they must not be thought as the enemies to the Christian world.

[Romans 11: 23-25] And they also, if they do not continue in unbelief, will be grafted in, for God is able to graft them in again. For if you were cut out of the olive tree which is wild by nature, and were grafted contrary to nature into a cultivated olive tree, how much more will these, who are natural branches, be grafted into their own olive tree? For I do not desire, brethren, that you should be ignorant of this mystery, lest you should be wise in your own opinion, that blindness in part has happened to Israel until the fullness of the Gentiles has come in.

When is the time limit of practicing the Golden Rule? The answer is until God's mercy toward His enemies terminates. In the last days God's mercy and patience will no longer be available to Satan and his followers as well as to the fallen world and His terrible wrath will unfurl in unimaginable disasters of revenge on all His enemies, all three groups as defined above. When a nation declares war on another nation, its ambassador is called back home so that he/she will not experience the fury of the home nation's acts of war. Likewise, God will call back His chosen people through a remarkable rapture event prior to the commencement of His apocalyptic acts of revenge and wrath. This rapture event is a day of hope for all Christians, both living and dead, of being united with Lord Jesus, their eternal bridegroom, Savior and King, who will reward them for their faithfulness and perseverance in the face of all kinds of evil through their lives.

[1 Thessalonians 1:10] And to wait for His Son from heaven, whom He raised from the dead, even Jesus who delivers us from the wrath to come.

