

7th Sunday after Epiphany
February 23, 2025
Lincoln Heights Lutheran Church
The Golden Rule

Luke 6:27-38 (EHV)

“But I say to you who are listening: Love your enemies. Do good to those who hate you. ²⁸Bless those who curse you. Pray for those who mistreat you. ²⁹If someone strikes you on one cheek, offer the other too. If someone takes away your coat, do not withhold your shirt. ³⁰Give to everyone who asks you, and if anyone takes away your things, do not demand them back.

³¹“Treat others just as you would want them to treat you. ³²If you love those who love you, what credit is that to you? To be sure, even the sinners love those who love them. ³³And if you do good to those who do good to you, what credit is that to you? Even the sinners do the same thing. ³⁴If you lend to those from whom you expect to be repaid, what credit is that to you? Even the sinners lend to sinners in order to be paid back in full. ³⁵Instead, love your enemies, do good and lend, expecting nothing in return. Your reward will be great, and you will be sons of the Most High, because he is kind to the unthankful and the evil. ³⁶Be merciful, just as your Father is merciful.

³⁷“Do not judge, and you will not be judged. Do not condemn, and you will not be condemned. Forgive, and you will be forgiven. ³⁸Give, and it will be given to you. A good measure pressed down, shaken together, and running over will be poured into your lap. In fact, the measure with which you measure will be measured back to you.”

Dear Friends in Christ,

There are truths of God that can only be found in the Bible. You will not find these teachings in other religious and secular philosophies. The Triune God is only found in the Bible. The creation of the universe in six days and the redemption of sinners through the sacrifice of God’s Son are not found in other religions of the world. The virgin birth, perfect life, innocent death and bodily resurrection of Jesus Christ is revealed in the Bible. Justification by grace alone through faith alone in Christ alone is found nowhere else except the Holy Scriptures.

In the section of Luke’s Gospel before us today, we find a truth that can be found in many other secular and religious philosophies. The Golden Rule, as it is widely known, is popular with Christians and with many who are not Christians. The Golden Rule is known by many who don’t know much else from the Bible at all and may not even know that Jesus gave us the command to *“treat others just as you would want them to treat you.”* It is not only human intelligence that likes the Golden Rule, but even Google AI let me know that:

“Practicing the Golden Rule can:

- Reduce stress and boost your mood
- Enhance your emotional well-being
- Create a ripple effect of kindness in communities
- Lead to a more harmonious and supportive community”

“Treat others just as you would want them to treat you,” is something almost everyone agrees is good to do for your own good and the good of those around you. If everyone followed this command from Jesus, the world would be a better place to live. But you know that not everyone follows Christ’s golden rule. In fact, no one except Christ, follows his golden rule.

The first thing we who have a sinful nature do with the golden rule is to adjust it in our own minds. Instead of *““treat others just as you would want them to treat you,”* we hear it as *“treat others the way they treat you.”* If someone is kind and generous to us, we should be kind and generous to them. We may think that if we do something loving and merciful for someone that

they then owe us the same in return. Or we fall into the thinking that if someone is cruel and mean and unloving towards us, we can be the same towards them. This is a complete twisting of Christ's command to "*treat others just as you would want them to treat you.*" Jesus makes it clear that treating others like they treat us is easy for sinners to do.

³²If you love those who love you, what credit is that to you? To be sure, even the sinners love those who love them. ³³And if you do good to those who do good to you, what credit is that to you? Even the sinners do the same thing. ³⁴If you lend to those from whom you expect to be repaid, what credit is that to you? Even the sinners lend to sinners in order to be paid back in full.

Twisting Scripture to make it seem like we are obeying Christ does not mean we are. But our sinful nature has more tricks to make us think we are keeping the golden rule when we are not. The next trick is to limit the scope of Christ's command. We may tell ourselves that we love our family unconditionally. We are generous with our close friends. We show great mercy to our long-time associates at work. But Jesus doesn't include family and friends in his commands before us today. He says:

Love your enemies. Do good to those who hate you. ²⁸Bless those who curse you. Pray for those who mistreat you. ²⁹If someone strikes you on one cheek, offer the other too. If someone takes away your coat, do not withhold your shirt.

If we are honest with ourselves, we don't always do these things for our close family and friends. In fact, we can sometimes take those closest to us for granted and treat them horribly. How then can we possibly hope to love our enemies and do good for those who hate us? We can't even love the people we say we love in the way Jesus commands.

Our sinful nature continues to plea our case for being pretty good. At least I don't actively hate anyone. I'm not racist or antisemitic or advocating for genocide or anything like that. Our sinful nature sets the bar of being a good person pretty low. Jesus sets the bar at the top and we don't get there. Because it is really difficult to do good to the coworker who gets away with everything while you do all the work. It is really difficult to pray for the friend who hurt you. Jesus commands us to be actively loving, not just refraining from active hate.

Still, our sinful nature objects by saying that we have been good at certain times. We showed love and mercy that one time to someone who didn't deserve it. We prayed a couple times for those who mistreated us. And again, Jesus sets the bar so high that we cannot reach it. He uses about 16 commands (imperatives) in the verses before us today. All are present tense, meaning that we are to keep on doing these things. One time is not enough. All the time is the command. Keep on loving your enemies, all the time. Keep on doing good to those who hate you, every time.

The world may love the golden rule but has a distorted view of what Jesus is commanding. When we see how Jesus explains the golden rule, we have to admit that we have not and are nowhere close to keeping this command. Jesus' own words make it clear that keeping the golden rule perfectly at all times to all people is impossible for everyone descended from Adam.

Except one. Jesus kept the golden rule in every way and at all times. The perfect Son of God is "*is kind to the unthankful and the evil.*" One time, Jesus healed ten men of leprosy. Only one was thankful but Jesus did not give the others their leprosy back. Jesus was literally struck in the face by his enemies, and he did not retaliate. He was insulted and he did not answer. He loved his enemies to the end so that he allowed them to nail him to a cross and lift him up to be mocked by many and left to die. His love and mercy were not limited to his friends. It was not limited to only certain times. His unconditional love for all showed as he died for the sins of all upon the cross. He even prayed to his Father in heaven to forgive those who put him on the cross.

Jesus did not give us the golden rule and all the commands surrounding it as rules for us and not

for him. As true man, born of the virgin Mary, he came to fulfill the law by obeying it completely. He came to keep the law that we could not, and thanks be to God that Jesus kept the golden rule in our place. This is what we call his active obedience. He kept the law actively in our place and through faith in Christ, what he has done counts on our record before God. Thanks be to God for Christ's obedience and for his love that led him to the cross to pay for our sins against the golden rule and all other commands of God. Jesus truly is kind to the unthankful and evil.

His kindness that saves us also changes us from unthankful to thankful. All who have faith in Christ have been changed from being God's enemies to being Christ's friends and God's family. The unbelieving world sees the golden rule as a way to make the world a better place, a way to reduce stress and make communities become more harmonious. This can be a wonderful side effect of keeping the golden rule. But that is not why we who have been credited with Christ's perfect obedience and forgiven by Christ's precious blood seek to keep the golden rule. Jesus gives us the reason:

³⁵Instead, love your enemies, do good and lend, expecting nothing in return. Your reward will be great, and you will be sons of the Most High, because he is kind to the unthankful and the evil. ³⁶Be merciful, just as your Father is merciful.

We love and do good and give generously because our God is kind to the unthankful and the evil and has made us his children. We show mercy out of thanks that we have a Father in heaven who shows us mercy. Because our God continues to pour out his grace and forgiveness upon us through Word and Sacrament, we are continually empowered with the godly desire to thank our Savior. One way to do this is to *"treat others just as you would want them to treat you."*

Amen.