

A bible study on the Golden Ethical rule given by Jesus in Matthew 7:12:

*Do for others what you would like them to do for you. This is a summary of all that is taught in the law and the prophets. (The New Living Translation)*

*Here is a simple, rule-of-thumb guide for behaviour: Ask yourself what you want people to do for you, then grab the initiative and do it for them. Add up God's Law and Prophets and this is what you get. (The Message)*

The NIV says: “Do to others what you would have them do to you”. Confucius, who lived 500 B.C., said “Don't do to others, what you don't want them to do to you”. Confucius was a Chinese philosopher whose thinking penetrated much of the Far East until present day. Jesus said “Do to other...”, Confucius said “Don't do to others...” The difference captures something of the paradigm shift that Jesus introduced to a late Judaism fallen under legalism. The difference is between two concepts of sin: in Jesus' paradigm sin is the sin of omission, while in Confucius' paradigm it is the sin of commission. In Jesus' paradigm the right thing to do is activity, while in Confucius' paradigm the right thing to do is passivity.

Activity and passivity captures the wrong turn late Judaism took, in the Babylonian exile, when e.g. a school like the Pharisees, with their more than 500 laws, preached a passivity of “Not doing this, not doing that! Don't touch this, Don't touch that etc.” In short, this ethic quickly turns into legalism, surrendering to criticism and judgementalism. Jesus turned this around. Jesus said: “Do to others as you want them to do to you”. Does that sound like criticism or judging others? No, the measuring stick is not even the others, but the self. If I would like someone to give me food when I'm hungry, then I should give food to a hungry person without judging if he or she deserves it not.

The long and short is that we have to project ourselves into the shoes of other people and do to them as if it were us. If you were lonely, would you have wanted someone to go out of his or her way to spend time with you? If so, look for lonely people and spend time with them. If you were unsaved, and you could have known it, would you have wanted someone to bring the gospel to you? If that is the case, bring the gospel to unsaved people.

Another word that expresses this activity is love. Love is action. Do you love your spouse, because you don't beat him or her up everyday? No, you love your spouse because you do good things to

him or her. Things that make him or her happy and provide for his or her needs. Jesus says that we have to love God with all that is in us and our neighbours as ourselves. This is activity. You will not fool me when you say that you love God and don't go to church, or don't give your tithes etc. You will not fool me when you say you love the lost world, but you don't move a finger to share your hope and love for God with the people you rub shoulders with everyday.

Paul says in Romans 13:8-10:

*Let no debt remain outstanding, except the continuing debt to love one another, for he who loves his fellowman has fulfilled the law. The commandments, "Do not commit adultery," "Do not murder," "Do not steal," "Do not covet," and whatever other commandment there may be, are summed up in this one rule: "Love your neighbour as yourself." Love does no harm to its neighbour. Therefore love is the fulfilment of the law. (New International Version)*

In the action of love, there is no time to be passive and contemplate on things like “Am I doing something wrong? May I touch this? Should I not do that? Maybe it is better not to go anywhere, since I might just see something wrong! etc.”

#### Driving it home:

1. Have you fallen into this trap?
2. Why do you think churches fall into this trap? Does this have something to do with the fact that one can't easily measure sins of omission? When have you loved your spouse too much? Can you measure that? Sins of commission, on the other hand, are easy to measure. When you have stolen something from someone, it is in your possession and not in the one from whom it is stolen.
3. How can churches come out of this trap?
4. What activities are you going to engage yourself in, after this lesson?