

## PAY IT FORWARD Matthew 7:12

### INTRODUCTION:

In October of the year 2000, a movie was released that only climbed to 77 in the Box Office rankings for that year. The movie starred Kevin Spacey, Helen Hunt and Haley Joel Osment. The movie was, *Pay It Forward*.

*Pay It Forward* is the story of how a boy who believed in the goodness of human nature set out to change the world.

Trevor McKinney is a twelve-year-old boy in a small California town who accepts the challenge that his teacher gives his class, a chance to earn extra credit by coming up with a plan to change the world for the better. But to earn the credit, Trevor must also put that plan into action.

Trevor called his plan “pay it forward”. Trevor chooses three people for whom he will do a favor, and then when those people thank him and ask how they might pay him back, he will tell them that instead of paying him back, they should each "pay it forward" by choosing three people for whom they can do favors, and in turn telling those people to pay it forward. It's very like a human chain letter of kindness and good will.

And it is very like a principle that Jesus taught in his Sermon on the Mount. We often call this principle “The Golden Rule”. As disarmingly simple as Trevor McKinney’s idea to Pay It Forward, Jesus merely told us to treat other people the way we would wish to be treated. Matthew 7:12 reads as follows:

<sup>12</sup> *So in everything, do to others what you would have them do to you, for this sums up the Law and the Prophets.*

Trevor McKinney said to “pay it forward”. Scholars call it the Ethic of Reciprocity. Either way, it is the concept that we should treat others the way we want to be treated. And I would like to make a few observations about this ethic we have come to call The Golden Rule.

### I. **THIS IS A RULE WE CAN LIVE BY**

First of all, I would assert that this is a rule we all can live by. Twelve-year-old Trevor McKinney understood that taking the initiative to do first to others the way we would like others to do to us is a plan that everyone can adopt. Student and teacher, parent and child, employer and employee, young and old, democrats and republicans, Americans and Iraqis - - everyone can resolve to do to others as they would wish others to do to them. This is a rule we all can live by.

It is a rule we can all live by because it has universal **application**. It can be employed no matter who the person with whom we are relating. Everyone wants to be treated with dignity and with respect, therefore, this rule is universal in its application.

This rule is also universal in its **breadth**. When we express the Golden Rule in negative terms, we might say that people are to avoid doing to other people that which they would not wish to have done to them. When we actually live like that, this principle will prevent us from injuring others, whether by our words or by our actions. We will not say things that are hurtful, spiteful and mean. And we will not do things that will wound, harm or damage another person.

And when we express the Golden Rule in positive terms, it will encourage constructive actions that are expressions of love toward others.

The universal breadth of this rule of life is also to be seen in that it concerns the inner man as well as the outward man. Jesus said "*in everything, do to others as you would have them do to you.*" That means we not only are to avoid doing to others what we would not want them to do to us and that we are to do to them that which we would have done to us, it also means that we are to think about others the way we would want people to think about us.

Have you ever known someone who always assumed the worst about others? Has it ever seemed that someone always assumed the worst about you? Your actions may have been innocent enough or well intentioned enough but this other person seems always to impute a wrong motive to you. You would not want to be thought of in the worst possible light, would you? If we apply the Golden Rule as Jesus said, "in everything", that means that we will think of other people the way we would want other people to think of us. We will assume their motives are pure until and unless they are proven otherwise. We will think highly of them, kindly of them and favorably of them...of everyone.

Not only is this rule universal in its application and universal in its breadth, it is universal in its **implementation**. This rule is to be invoked in our giving: our giving of ourselves to serve others; our giving of our time to benefit others and in our giving of our money to assist others.

And it is to be invoked in our **forgiving**. In Ephesians 4:29-32, the apostle Paul wrote:

*<sup>29</sup> Do not let any unwholesome talk come out of your mouths, but only what is helpful for building others up according to their needs, that it may benefit those who listen. <sup>30</sup> And do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God, with whom you were sealed for the day of*

*redemption.* <sup>31</sup> *Get rid of all bitterness, rage and anger, brawling and slander, along with every form of malice.* <sup>32</sup> *Be kind and compassionate to one another, forgiving each other, just as in Christ God forgave you.*

Paul expects that we will forgive each other just as we were forgiven.

Earlier, in the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus taught us to pray that God would forgive us in the same way and to the same degree that we forgive those who have wronged us.

The disciple of Jesus is expressly forbidden from carrying a grudge, harboring resentment and nursing bitterness. We are required to remove all of that hostility and replace it with an eagerness to do good to all people...even those who have done ill to us.

I said this law of Jesus is a rule we can live by but I did not say it would be easy. It won't. Are you man enough to live the Golden Rule? Are you woman enough to live the Golden Rule? Are you tough enough to live it?

## **II. THIS IS THE BEST RULE WE CAN LIVE BY**

This law of Jesus is a rule we all can live by. And it is the best rule we can live by. Think of its merits.

This is a maxim that is short enough to be remembered. Everyone can remember this rule. Even me. My pitiful memory is legendary among those who know me very well. This past week, Sandy and I went out to eat with another couple and on the way home, I remarked that I really enjoyed the halibut I had just eaten. And other husband who ate with us had to point out that I had eaten flounder. As near as I can remember, it was still good even if it was flounder...or whatever it was.

My memory is shorter than my stature! But even I can remember Jesus' rule for us to live by: *"In everything, do to others as you would have them do to you."*

This rule is short enough to be remembered yet full enough to encompass the entire Law and the Prophets. The term "Law" in this context means the first five books of the Old Testament. These are the books that Moses wrote and they were (and are) collectively referred to as the books of the Law.

The term "the Prophets" would apply to all of the inspired writings of the Old Testament prophets from Isaiah and Jeremiah right through to Zechariah and Malachi.

When Jesus said that this Golden Rule sums up the Law and the Prophets, he was saying that this one sentence is a summation of the entire Scriptures of his day. This law is that complete in that it encompasses the entire sacred writings of the Jewish religion.

Furthermore, this rule is the best rule we can live by because it treats all men as equal. Jesus did not qualify the scope of this law by saying we are to treat our friends like we want to be treated. He did not limit the range of this law by saying we are to treat our family the way we want them to treat us. He did not limit the span of this law by saying we are to treat other Christians the way we want to be treated, or our fellow countrymen the way we want to be treated, or the people we like or the people who like us or any other limitation on the application of this rule. Jesus simply said we are to treat others the way we would like them to treat us. This is the best rule we can live by because it treats all men as equals.

People, just imagine if we would all obey this rule. Don't you know it would bring peace to our planet if we all obeyed this simple yet profound principle? War would be impossible. Terrorism would be eliminated. Crime would disappear. This is the best rule we can live by because if it were universally practiced, the result would be universal peace.

And it is the best rule we can live by because of its universal appeal. Those who have ever been hurt by someone else (and who hasn't been hurt by someone else?) know the appeal of this law. And those who have been hurt the most by the unkind actions of another, know best the value of this rule.

Brothers and sisters, this law of Jesus is a rule we can live by and it is the best rule we can live by.

### **III. THIS IS THE RULE WE MUST LIVE BY**

Furthermore, this law of Jesus is the rule we must live by.

It is conclusive, decisive, definitive and distinct. Once this rule has been invoked, no other rule needs to be added. It is sure and perfect because Jesus gave it.

It is comprehensive. It applies to all people in all ages and in all circumstances.

It is complete. Jesus said it summed up the known Scriptures of his day and, as such, it conveyed the essence of the heart of God. But it is also complete in that it includes every axiom of human relationships that has ever come from the mind of man. It is complete.

Do you see why I can say so boldly that this rule is the rule we really must live by?

**CONCLUSION:**

I want you to consider the context within which Jesus gave this principle that we have come to call The Golden Rule. Jesus had just said we are not to judge. But he also told us to be discerning. Then he told us to pray with the confidence that God will be sensitive to our wishes. Therefore, we are to be sensitive to the wishes of others. In fact, more than merely being sensitive to the wishes of others, we are to do unto others as we would have them do unto us.

History tells us that the Roman Republic first recorded its laws around 450 BC. According to tradition, common citizens, called plebeians, insisted that all the people had a right to know the laws. So government officials organized and wrote the laws onto twelve tablets, probably made of bronze, called the Law of the Twelve Tables. The tablets hung in the Roman Forum, which was a place for public meetings, court proceedings, and other public events.

It is said that the Roman emperor, Servus, as a way of elevating respect for Roman law, had his imperial laws carved in letters of gold, displayed in the courts of justice and proclaimed to all offenders. Under Servus, those imperial laws came to be known as the golden rules of Rome.

We, too, have a golden rule. Our emperor, King Jesus, proclaimed it to us...to each of us because we are all offenders. Jesus' Golden Rule is that we are to do to others as we would have them do to us.

So let me ask you, how has the Golden Rule held up in your life? Is it a bit tarnished from lack of use? Or is it bright and shining because you have put it into practice?

The story line of the movie, *Pay It Forward* is that we do not wait for others to do good to us so we can pay them back...we go first; we take the initiative; we do unto them as we would have them do unto us. Oh what a bond would tie our hearts to one another if only we lived what Jesus taught!

**INVITATION:** #426 – “*Blest Be The Tie That Binds*”