

“Obedience’ means more than obeying an arbitrary rule; . . . breaking the rule and breaking your connection with truth and wholeness are part of the same process.” -Tal Cohen.

Rules for how we treat others are often called morals. But in the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus is talking about much more than morality. Jesus’ sermon continually directs us into a connection with our heavenly Father, and anyone who sees Jesus as merely providing sound moral guidance, is missing the point. We should listen to Him not because we find that what he says is true, but because of who he is. As C. S. Lewis points out in “Mere Christianity:”

“I am trying here to prevent anyone saying the really foolish thing that people often say about [Jesus]: ‘I’m ready to accept Jesus as a great moral teacher, but I don’t accept his claim to be God.’ That is the one thing we must not say. A man who said the sort of things Jesus said would not be a great moral teacher. He would either be a lunatic -- on a level with the man who says he is a poached egg -- or else he would be the Devil of Hell. You must make your choice. Either this man was, and is, the Son of God; or else a madman or something worse. You can shut him up for a fool, you can spit at him and kill him as a demon; or you can fall at his feet and call him Lord and God. But let us not come with any patronizing nonsense about his being a great human teacher. He has not left that open to us. He did not intend to.”

This week’s passage is more than a set of rules designed to help us get along with others; it is a guide to staying connected to the truth and wholeness found only in God.

Monday – Judge Not!

1. Please read Matthew 7:1-5. Have you ever judged someone incorrectly? What is Jesus saying about judgment?
2. How do Jesus’ words expand upon the beatitude we find in Matthew 5:7?
3. Jesus uses a broad overstatement in verses 3-5. Can you imagine someone actually having a plank sticking out of their eye? Now, can you imagine the result if that person tried to get close enough to someone else to remove a speck from the other person’s eye? Bonk! Ow! Why does Jesus use this humorous overstatement to warn of the dangers of judgment?

Tuesday – Judge Yes!

Don’t bother wrestling with a pig in a pigsty. The only results are that you get muddy and the pig enjoys it.

-An American Proverb

1. In Matthew 7:6, Jesus tells us to judge rightly. What do you think he means by “what is sacred?”
2. Jesus used the analogy of a pearl again in Matthew 13:45-46. What does the valuable pearl refer to? How does this help you understand the need to keep from tossing your faith into a pigsty?

Text Insight - John Stott helps us with this potentially confusing verse. He suggests that this verse warns us against sharing the gospel with “those who have had ample opportunity to hear and receive the good news, but have decisively – even defiantly – rejected it.” This is not an excuse for giving up on people. In fact, very rarely will we meet people who fit into the category of “pigs.” Still there may come a time in your life when to press the gospel with someone is like throwing your sacred faith before swine.

Wednesday – Seeking

And without faith it is impossible to please God, because anyone who comes to him must believe that he exists and that he rewards those who earnestly seek him. Hebrews 11:6

1. Matthew 7:7-8 discusses our searching nature. What assurance does Jesus give to those who search?
2. Jesus himself is a seeker, according to passages like Luke 15:3-7 and Revelation 3:20. In Luke 15:5, what is the Shepherd’s reaction to finding the lost?
3. In Psalm 119:176, the writer acknowledged his need for God to look for him. Have you ever felt that need? When? Have you ever known God to fulfill that need? How did he do so?

Making it Personal: If you do not yet belong to Jesus, are you searching? In numerous places throughout the Bible, God esteems our searching. Hebrews 11:6 (above) underscores this truth – that God will surely respond to our efforts to seek him out!

Thursday – Golden Rule, part 1

1. In Matthew 7:9-12, Jesus urges us to treat others well, just as God the Father is good to us. How does God the Father shower us with his goodness?
2. Is treating others how we would like to be treated as simple as saying, “I would like this, so I will do it to them?” Sometimes other people do not want to be treated in just the same way that we like to be treated. How then would you go about treating that person as you would like to be treated?
3. Now take a look at James 2:8, Romans 13:8-10, and Galatians 5:13-15 for an expansion on the notion of loving our neighbor. James tells us this is the “royal law.” What strikes you about these verses? According to Galatians 5:15, what results from breaking that law?

Friday – Golden Rule, part 2

“So in everything, do to others as you would have them do to you, for this sums up the law and the prophets.” Matthew 7:12.

Text Insight: Whenever you find the phrase “the law and the prophets” in the New Testament, it is a reference to the Old Testament. So a fulfillment of the law and the prophets is a fulfillment of the Old Testament scriptures.

1. The first recording of the Golden Rule in the Bible is found in Leviticus 19:18 (please read). Who are we to love as ourselves? What does God say at the end of verse 18 to emphasize our duty?
2. The idea is visited again in other Old Testament passages such as Deuteronomy 10:18-19 and Proverbs 24:17-18. Please read these passages. Is our duty to treat others well restricted only to our neighbors? Who does God identify as deserving our help in Deuteronomy? In Proverbs?

Putting it into Practice – Is there a relationship you are in at present that is strained or broken? How can this passage help you to bring about reconciliation?

For the Weekend: Read through Luke 10:25-37, pray this weekend, asking God to show you how you can treat others as you would like to be treated -- how you can love your neighbor as yourself.