

UNTO OTHERS

Rediscovering
THE GOLDEN RULE—
the Lost Key
to Relationships

Dave Swavely

Foreword by Dave Deuel

UNTO OTHERS

**Rediscovering the Golden Rule –
The Lost Key to Relationships**

Dave Swavely

To my wife Jill, who has lived “unto others”
more than anyone I know.

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“One of the most comprehensive and practical treatments I’ve ever seen. You won’t want to miss this!”

“A practical guide, anchored in rich theology, about how to live out the Golden Rule daily in community and culture.”

“Historical perspective, skillful use of Scripture, and sound doctrine act as a foundation and context.”

“A breath of fresh air... just the right balance of law and gospel... as useful for evangelism as it is for edification.”

“Sorely needed for the divisive, dysfunctional times in which we live.”

“Confronts the confusion and cultural misgivings that have jaded the meaning of this most consequential command.”

“Practical, life-altering truth... clear, doable, life-changing, relationship-changing, church-changing, and society-changing.”

“Readable, positive, and interesting... historical, theological, and biblical. Ideal for group study or classroom use, with questions that conclude each chapter.”

“In reading it, I have rediscovered the Golden Rule. This central teaching of Jesus really is a treasure.”

“The Golden Rule is truly a key that unlocks priceless treasure and not a mere truism. I highly recommend Unto Others.”

“Recent biblical law studies demonstrate that **the essence and purpose of the law was to display the perfect character of God in values.** Rather than look for current applications to specific OT laws, we as twenty-first century Christians should understand and amplify the values behind the law in every aspect of our lives. **Dave Swavely’s study reduces these values to one, because Jesus did.”**

Dave Deuel, ThM, MPhil, PhD, Academic Dean Emeritus, The Master’s Academy International and Senior Research Fellow and Policy Advisor, the International Disability Center at Joni and Friends

“In this book, Dave Swavely has explained, illustrated, and applied the truths found in a statement made by Jesus Christ as part of the greatest sermon ever preached, commonly called The Sermon on the Mount. **Dave has corrected the misunderstanding and misapplication of the statement called The Golden Rule,** clearly demonstrating its relevance and applicability to living in our present-day world.”

Wayne Mack, DMin, author of *A Practical Guide for Effective Biblical Counseling* and *Discipleship and the Christian Life Issues* series based on *The Pilgrim’s Progress*

“You have likely heard the expression, ‘It goes without saying. . .’ I had put the Golden Rule from Christ’s Sermon on the Mount in that category. I assumed everyone knew it and understood it. Dave Swavely’s book, *Unto Others*, made me realize how naive I was. In this clear and concise exposition, Dave clarifies what the Golden Rule is and what it is not, and how it reflects God’s wisdom for healthy relationships. This book is **solely needed for the divisive, dysfunctional times in which we live.**”

Stan Gale, DMin, author of *Finding Forgiveness: Discovering the Healing Power of the Gospel* and *The Vine-Ripened Life: Spiritual Fruitfulness Through Abiding in Christ*

“Dave Swavely **takes us to a new place of understanding** this ancient belief and bold claim by Jesus. He explains the history, philosophy, and theology of the Golden Rule, highlighting the

fact that it is so much more than just a nice thought. In fact, it is impossible to follow without the transformation of the Gospel and the power of the Holy Spirit. *Unto Others* is **insightful and motivating** for us to become more like Christ by applying the Golden Rule.”

Elaine Griffith Petty, MS in Bioethics, international consultant, speaker, leadership coach

“This book is a **practical guide, anchored in rich theology, about how to live out the Golden Rule daily in community and culture.** Dave explains and illustrates well the tragic and devastating effects of disconnecting this saying of Christ from gospel and theological truth. When that happens, it becomes a self-serving path to self-promotion and a self-righteous path to self-redemption. Devoid of its gospel roots, the Golden Rule becomes merely a shallow, moralistic slogan. But, when understood and practiced in the context of all Scripture, it robustly displays God’s magnificent mercy and grace.”

Bill Hill, MM, DRS, Executive Director of Equipping Nationals Worldwide and author of *Toward a Theological Examination of The Call, Election and Evangelism: Pursuing Balance and Biblical Clarity*, and *Pastors Training Pastors: Restoring the Pauline Model*

“In *Unto Others*, Dave Swavely draws readers’ attention to the importance of understanding and living by the Golden Rule. He explains well how followers of Christ not only must believe correctly (i.e., orthodoxy), but also act correctly (i.e., orthopraxy). The description of the true meaning of the Golden Rule is **one of the most comprehensive and practical treatments that I’ve ever seen.** This is a book that you won’t want to miss!”

Matthew Akers, PhD, Associate Dean of Doctoral Studies, Director of the Hispanic Institute, Mid-America Baptist Theological Seminary, author of *Equally Yoked* and *One Lord, One Faith*

“The Golden Rule and its call for agape love is a summary command, one that encapsulates other commands (Rom. 13:10). Dave Swavely picks up on this biblical priority in his book, *Unto Others*, as taught by Jesus. **The Golden Rule is truly a key that unlocks priceless treasure and not a mere truism**—when its practice is motivated by the gospel of Jesus and gratitude to God. Swavely reminds us to treat people not as they wish per se, but according to the Scriptures—an excellent clarification—and provides helpful practical steps for how to apply the Golden Rule. I highly recommend *Unto Others*.”

Greg E. Gifford, PhD, Associate Professor at The Master’s University and author of *Heart & Habits: How to Change for Good*

“*Unto Others* revives the biblical understanding of the Golden Rule and provides practical case studies that show Christians how to apply it. It’s timely, and not just because the Rule has suffered abuse even from churchgoers: We live in an age where people redefine morality, reinvent themselves, and set ungodly standards for relationships. **The book is a breath of fresh air. Swavely’s exposition is solid and puts the Golden Rule in its proper context of salvation, presenting just the right balance of law and gospel** to make the book every bit as useful for evangelism as it is for edification.”

Robert J. Burrelli Jr., ThM, PhD, Senior Minister, Pilgrim Reformed Bible Church

“Reading Dave Swavely’s book helped me to hear Jesus’ instructions to ‘treat others as I would want to be treated if I was in their situation, doing what is best for them according to the principles of Scripture.’ **His historical perspective, his skillful use of Scripture, and his explanation of doctrine act as a foundation and context to everything he is saying.** As a mental health professional I am always looking for practical, life-altering truth to pass on to my clients. Dave’s application steps at the end of the book are very clear, practical, doable, life-changing, relationship-changing, church-changing, and society-changing, although he makes it clear that no one can consistently live the Golden Rule

without true conversion and the power of the Holy Spirit. World and church history would have never been tainted with prejudice, slavery, oppression, and other forms of injustice if the Golden Rule had been practiced.”

Vincent L. Calloway, MSS, LCSW, CEAP, Founder of V. Calloway Counseling Associates and author of *Who’s Your Daddy? I’m Your Daddy*

“Dave Swavely has done us all a favor in focusing our attention afresh on the Golden Rule. **His book at the same time is readable, positive, and interesting. It is historical, theological, and biblical.** Finally, it is very practical. It’s ideal for group study or classroom use with questions that conclude each chapter. For me the book lives up to its title, for in reading it, I also have rediscovered the Golden Rule. This primary teaching of Jesus really is a treasure.”

Curt Young, DMin, Pastor Emeritus at Church of the Atonement and author of *The Least of These*

“Jesus was asked, ‘What is the greatest commandment?’ He answered, “Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind.” This is the first and greatest commandment. And the second is like it: “Love your neighbor as yourself.” It is amazing how many folks do not know that this is the summary of the Ten Commandments. In like manner, **people have no idea that the Golden Rule is a summary of Jesus’ teaching on how to live in relationships. This work will help you understand how we lost the Golden Rule and encourage you to regain and practice it.**”

Howard Eyrich, ThM, DMin, Director of Doctor of Ministry and MA Biblical Counseling Program at Birmingham Theological Seminary, author of *The Art of Aging: Preparing and Caring, Life Lessons from Ancient Prophets*, and *James: The Other Side of the Coin*

“As the west continues its march to a secular tune, even the most basic biblical themes and ideas are becoming increasingly foreign. The Golden Rule, taught by Jesus in the Sermon on the Mount,

is one such example. Dave Swavely has written an interesting, accessible book on a **text whose meaning we misunderstand—or outright miss—to our own theological peril.** *Unto Others* reminds us that the Golden Rule is no platitude, but as Swavely perceptively notes, is **important for our salvation, spiritual growth, and service to others.**”

Ryan Rindels, PhD, Pastor of First Baptist Church, Sonoma, CA and author of *Andrew Fuller’s Theology of Revival*

“Dave Swavely’s hard work on *Unto Others* has been a blessing to me. The analysis of the loss of the Golden Rule is spot on, as well as his navigation to rediscovering the Golden Rule. I really appreciate his focus on examining your own life long before seeking to help others—this resonates with the sound doctrine of the Holy Scriptures. **Help others to rediscover the Golden Rule by encouraging the reading of this book!**”

Johnny Touchet, pastor, missionary, founder of Partner 10:15 Ministries

“C.S. Lewis once remarked that a good moral teacher does not teach new morality but reminds us of the old. Dave has done just that by offering the reader a clear and convincing reminder of the foundation of the Golden Rule by confronting the confusion and cultural misgivings that have jaded the meaning of this most consequential command. In a world where substantial relationships seem impossible, Swavely reminds us of God’s truth that grounds meaningful relationships and roots them deeply in the life-giving and life-sustaining Word of God.”

T. Dale Johnson, Jr., PhD, Executive Director of the Association of Certified Biblical Counselors, Associate Professor of Biblical Counseling and Director of Counseling Programs at Midwestern Baptist Theological Seminary, and author of *The Church as a Culture of Care* and *The Professionalization of Pastoral Care*

Author

Dave Swavely (M. Div., The Master's Seminary) served for seven years as an assistant to Dr. John MacArthur and as a pastoral staff member at Grace Community Church in Los Angeles. Since then he has planted and pastored two churches and is currently working on a third plant, while also serving as the Advancement Officer for the international missions organization PAK7.

He coauthored *Life in the Father's House: A Member's Guide to the Local Church* (with Wayne Mack) and *From Embers to a Flame: How God Can Revitalize Your Church* (with Harry Reeder), and is the sole author of two titles that were published by P&R. He has worked as a journalist for *World* magazine and has three novels published by Macmillan. His website is DaveSwavely.com and he blogs at TheWayWithWords.net.

Dave and his wife, Jill, have been married for more than thirty years, with seven kids and three grandkids. Together they've started several innovative educational programs and housed many people in need. Dave's life journey has included many failures as well as successes, and he's learned the most from his failures.

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Foreword

Dave Deuel

Jesus sends us into all the world to witness. He also sends us unto others in our midst to help them. Many take his Golden Rule to mean that if you want others to treat you well, then you need to treat them well first. But Jesus made a much bolder claim on our lives: treat others well regardless of whether they treat you well in return. No wonder he also commands, “Love your enemies.”

Our Savior explains that the Golden Rule fulfills the law and the prophets, all the Old Testament. Recent biblical law studies demonstrate that the essence and purpose of the law was to display the perfect character of God in values. Rather than look for current applications to specific Old Testament laws, we as twenty-first century Christians should understand and amplify the values behind the law in every aspect of our lives. *Unto Others* reduces these values to one because Jesus did—love others.

In response to the Old Testament law, David models the Golden Rule. King Saul continually mistreats David, humiliating him and attempting to take his life. In response, David refuses opportunities to retaliate. The Apostle Paul does unto others. Leaders aim to harm him with false accusations undermining his

good testimony. On several occasions opponents beat and stone Paul, nearly taking his life. But the apostle responds with love and kindness. He will not retaliate.

We would like others to focus on us and do for us. We are born self-interested and we live in a reciprocating world. Some say, “You scratch my back and I’ll scratch yours.” Jesus’ message challenges the very basis of reciprocity and calls for a radical alternative: sacrifice yourself by doing unto others.

What would happen if Christians in all institutions practiced Jesus’ Golden Rule? In the home, family members would draw unconditionally close in the face of mistreatment, abandonment, and divorce; in the church, people would not take offense but would generously care for others; and in society, Jesus followers would model relationships that shine bright in dark places.

In a world tragically bent on harming others before they harm you, Jesus calls you to do unto others regardless of what they do to you. This tall order comes from a God who consistently and completely does unto others with fail-safe perfection.

Dave Deuel

Academic Dean Emeritus

The Master’s Academy International

Senior Research Fellow and Policy Advisor

International Disability Center, Joni and Friends

How This Book Got Started

And How I Failed: An Introduction

Imagine you've got a nickel sitting in your closet. The coin has been there for so long you don't even notice it anymore when you reach for your clothes. It lies there under the shoes and a couple of old boxes—in the dark, forgotten. What if, one day, you found out that it was worth millions of dollars?

That's what happened to the heirs of the famous coin collector, George Walton. Walton died in a car crash in 1962. His will stated that his coins were to be divided up among his relations—his sister Melva got the nickel. At the time, everyone thought it was a fake, but Melva decided to keep it nonetheless. She put it in an envelope and kept it at the back of her closet—and that's where it stayed, for thirty years. When Melva died, it was passed on to another member of the family who put it in his bedside table drawer. Another ten years passed. No one in the family thought much about the nickel, or whether the coin was worth anything.

In 2002, a group of coin collectors became obsessed with finding the lost 1913 Liberty Head Nickel. They had four nickels out of the original set of five, and they were desperate to find the fifth. They offered a one-million-dollar reward. Walton's family remembered the old nickel in the envelope and

brought it in for inspection. The experts declared it to be authentic and the coin was auctioned off—fetching the extraordinary sum of \$3,172,500.

What I've discovered in the Golden Rule, and want to tell you about in this book, is something like that coin—you've seen it before, but you haven't been noticing it. You've glossed over it because you aren't aware of its value.

People are fascinated with lost treasure and hidden truth. Lost treasure is a big part of the appeal of entertainment like *The Count of Monte Cristo*, *The Hobbit*,

By the late twentieth and early twenty-first century, people were no longer familiar with the Golden Rule and the saying has largely vanished from our collective consciousness.



and the Indiana Jones movies. Hidden “truth” was a big reason for the success of best-selling book, *The Da Vinci Code*. But, of course, those are just stories—whereas this book is about lost treasure and hidden truth that are *real*. Treasure and truth that can *really* change your life.

There was a time—not more than a century ago—when all Christians in America knew about the Golden Rule. Most unbelievers did too. People thought about it, talked about it, and wrote about it;

it was a prominent thread in the fabric of society. “Do unto others what you would have done to you” was displayed above school blackboards, on church banners, and in other public places.

By the late twentieth and early twenty-first century, however, people were no longer familiar with the Golden Rule and the saying has largely vanished from our collective consciousness. Since I realized this several years ago, I have enjoyed asking friends and acquaintances a series of questions to illustrate the point.

My first question is this: “Do you know what the Golden Rule is?” Some people know—but many don’t, especially among younger people. I sometimes think that if I gave them multiple-choice-type answers, a lot of them would pick “A name for the Ming Dynasty in China” rather than “Jesus’ summary of the biblical teaching on relationships.”

Then I ask them a second question: “Is the Golden Rule actually in the Bible, or is it just an old saying along the lines of ‘God helps those who help themselves’?” More than half the people I’ve asked think that it’s just a human saying. But, in fact, the Golden Rule is straight out of the Bible.

The third question I ask is this: “Do you know where to find the Golden Rule in the Bible?” This one stumps almost everybody. In fact, I can count on one hand the number of people over the years who’ve got it right—and they were real Bible geeks! Actually, there

are two possible answers to this question, because the Rule is quoted both in Matthew and in Luke. Here is the Golden Rule from the Gospels, in the most popular modern translation:

So in everything, do to others what you would have them do to you, for this sums up the Law and the Prophets. (Matt 7:12, NIV)

Do to others as you would have them do to you. (Luke 6:31, NIV)

Like me, sociologist Jeffrey Wattle also found there was a lot of confusion about the Golden Rule when he was preparing to give a series of lectures at Stanford University and write a book about the topic. This is what he said:

A volunteer... guessed that the Golden Rule was “An eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth.” A reporter misquoted the rule: “Do to others as will be done to you.” Given a correct formulation, two students debated at length with their professor that the rule meant the same as the motto “Get even.” A pastor’s wife doubted that the rule was biblical.¹

So a pastor’s wife doubted... but what about pastors themselves? In 1989, James Forbes preached a sermon at Riverside Church in New York titled, “Whatever Happened to the Golden Rule?” In it, he admitted that

even he had trouble finding it in his Bible. And he was not only a pastor, but a professor at Union Seminary!²

Public figures who quote the Golden Rule often *misquote* it. For example, former President Barack Obama said in a public speech that the Golden Rule is “Love thy neighbor as thyself.” Another time, he referred to it as “treating others as they would treat me.”³ And, to make sure my illustrations cover both sides of the political spectrum, I’ll add that former First Lady Melania Trump quoted the Rule in a speech about the problems of cyberbullying. But she



What happened? Why has the Golden Rule all but disappeared from evangelical thinking and discussion?

misquoted it too, saying, “Do unto others what you would have them unto you,” leaving out the second *do* in the quotation. Even when people quote the verses correctly, they often don’t understand what it means in the context of the rest of Scripture, or how it should be applied to our lives in a biblical way.

What happened? Why has the Golden Rule all but disappeared from evangelical thinking and discussion? This question fascinated me, so I set out on a mission to figure it out. I got more than I bargained for. Not only did I learn why the Golden Rule has been lost (see

Chapter Two), but I also came to a deeper appreciation of how important this command from the lips of Jesus is. In the pages that follow, I invite you to rediscover the Golden Rule with me, and to see how this simple maxim will help you to believe and apply the gospel in your own life. The Golden Rule is a life-changing, heavenly truth that will be worth far more to you than any earthly treasure, if you understand it rightly and practice it biblically.

Rediscovery

That “Rediscovering the Golden Rule” in the subtitle of this book has a very personal double meaning for me. I wrote the initial manuscript for this book many years ago, when I was walking with the Lord and serving him faithfully in ministry. However, by the time Cruciform Press had picked it up, my life had taken a dark turn. I had drifted away from God and my wife, and there was sin in my life which was exposed as the book was approaching publication. Thanks to God’s grace, I repented of my sin and tried my best to “bear fruit in keeping with repentance,” as Matthew 3:8 says. For me, this meant that, among other measures, I needed to tell my publisher that I did not feel qualified to be teaching God’s Word at that time and ask that the book not be released.

Thankfully, in the years that have passed since then, God has graciously restored me to more godly

patterns of walking with him and with my wife. Praise God for forgiveness and change! During that time, I've been able to reflect on how my failure to keep the Golden Rule led to my sins and their harmful effect on many people. This, in turn, led to a better book. In fact, as I returned to work on this manuscript, I felt like I was rediscovering the Golden Rule personally as much as I'm calling for its rediscovery in the church at large. And I still feel that way—the gospel truth to which the Golden Rule is meant to lead is more meaningful than ever to me, because I see just how far I've been from keeping God's law and how much I need a Savior to keep me.

one

PRICELESS

Why the Golden Rule Is So Very Golden

Back in 2006 a book was published called *The Secret* by Rhonda Byrne, a former television producer. It raced up the bestseller lists at a record pace, notching up almost two million sales in less than six months, with almost as many accompanying DVDs. One reason for the incredible success of this book (besides being featured on the Oprah show, which must have helped!) was the marketing appeal of the title. As one book reviewer said, “It was an incredibly savvy move to call it *The Secret*. We all want to be in on a secret. But to present it as *the* secret, that was brilliant.”⁴

As that article went on to say, *The Secret* was not really a secret at all. It was just a shallow promise, like the “name it and claim it” nonsense that some people still want us to believe. Those kinds of promises always lead to *you* being the focus of everything. And that will leave your life empty and meaningless, as we learn in the book of Ecclesiastes. Ironically, although

this book that you're reading will sell far fewer copies than *The Secret* did, it actually contains much more of a secret to life's challenges and problems.

The Golden Rule is a real secret. Why do I say that? Because for decades it has been lost, largely hidden from common knowledge. It is also a secret in the sense that it is a hidden key that will unlock great riches in this life and the life to come. And the most distinctive thing about it...? This secret, this key, starts not with ourselves, but with a focus on *God* and *others*. As we will find, the irony is that when we focus on God and others by living by the Golden Rule, we discover that it works out much better for us. When you do unto others as you would have them do unto you, better things will be done to you.

Jesus highlights this in Matthew 7:2, where he says, "With the judgment you pronounce you will be judged, and with the measure you use it will be measured to you." We often read that verse negatively—in other words, if you judge others harshly, you'll receive back the same kind of harshness. But it can also be applied in a positive way: if you think and speak about others with fairness and kindness, you'll often be treated with the same fairness and kindness.

I won't go so far as to say that the Golden Rule is the key to everything, but I will say this: this principle is one of the greatest lost treasures anyone can ever find. It's key to our salvation, key to our sanctification,

and key to our society. We'll discuss these ideas in more depth later in the book, but at this point I'll just summarize and introduce them.

The Purposes of God's Law... and the Rule

In Matthew 7:12, the first time the Golden Rule appears in the Bible, Jesus gives a reason why we should “do unto others”: “for this is the Law and the Prophets.” This is the only time Jesus equates a statement with “the Law and the Prophets,”⁵ which is a common scriptural way of referring to the Old Testament by synecdoche (a figure of speech where part of something is used to refer to the whole thing, like “Hollywood” or “a nice set of wheels”). When Jesus says “the Law and the Prophets” just two chapters before, however, in Matt. 5:17-20, its meaning is clearly synonymous with the “commandments” of the Old Testament and therefore very similar to the way Paul uses “the law” in Romans and Galatians—to refer to the perfect standard of the Mosaic law that no one can keep (Rom. 2-7, Gal. 2-5).

In Matthew 7:12, “The Law and the Prophets” is summarized by a command (the Golden Rule), and such commands are being emphasized even when the prophets are mentioned, because one of the main tasks of the prophets was to explain and apply the law, calling Israel back to it and rebuking them for not obeying

it. The prophets did talk about the promise of the gospel and its Messiah, of course (so did the law sometimes, for that matter), and we will see in subsequent chapters how the Golden Rule not only summarizes the law but also prepares us for the gospel and points us to Christ as Savior. But when you see “the Law and the Prophets” in passages like this, the meaning is basically the same as other references to “the law,” because the emphasis is on the moral requirements God laid down in the Old Testament.

But there’s more—the Golden Rule itself is a *new* command of Christ that also represents a perfect standard, and there were many more to come in the rest of the New Testament. So when Jesus said, “this

The Golden Rule not only summarizes the law but also prepares us for the gospel and points us to Christ as Savior.



is the Law and the Prophets,” we should understand it as referring to *all* the commands of God, including those in the New Testament, because they are a consistent extension and application of the ones in the Old Testament. The simplest definition of “the Law and the Prophets,” therefore, is this: “the law of God,” or everything God has commanded in the Bible.⁶

Why is this important to understand? Because it

without success, but all he needed to do was open the cell door and walk right out.¹³

That is how many of us are when it comes to the problems and challenges we face in life. We try all kinds of things to improve our relationships with other people and with God, while forgetting this very important key—the Golden Rule. Rediscovering it and putting it into practice will prove it to be truly golden—not only because it’s so valuable but because it gives us a reliable standard on which to base our life’s choices.

Questions for Thought and Discussion

1. *The Golden Rule summarizes the law of God. Why is the law of God so important in our lives?*
2. *We are not saved by keeping the law, but it plays a necessary role in our salvation. Why can we not be saved without the law?*
3. *Many people mistakenly view the story of the Good Samaritan as teaching us how to be a good person who deserves to go to heaven. How is the main purpose of the story really the opposite of that?*
4. *The Golden Rule can help us in addressing problems we face in life. What is an example of a difficult challenge you face right now in your relationship with another person? How might the Golden Rule help you?*

The Golden Rule and the Gospel

The fact that the Golden Rule is “law” (as opposed to “grace”) is so important to a right understanding of the Rule because we must remember that, by itself, it can do nothing to change us or make us better people (see Chapter Two). For that to happen, the Golden Rule must be accompanied and informed by the gospel of Christ. The Rule is not designed to make us right with God—and we must not allow that to be even part of our motive in practicing it. And because a proper motive is a gratefulness to God for his free grace toward us, we must not practice it for purely selfish goals—like the car salesman I mentioned in the last chapter, who thought he might get rich by applying it to his work.

Remember that the Golden Rule is a summary of the law of God. Martin Luther explains the effect of the law, and therefore, the effect of the Rule as well:

When a man is humbled by the law [or the rule], and brought to the knowledge of himself, then follows true repentance (for true repentance begins at the fear and judgment of God), and he sees himself to be so great a sinner that he can find no means how he may be delivered from his sin by his own strength, endeavor and works. Then he perceives well what Paul means when he says that man is the servant and bond-slave of sin

(Rom. 7:14); also that God has shut up all under sin (Rom. 11:32; Gal. 3:22) and that the whole world is guilty before God (Rom. 3:19).

Now the sinner begins to sigh, and say: who then can help me? Terrified by the law and utterly despairing of his own strength, he looks about and sighs for the help of another, of a mediator and savior. Then comes in good time the healthful word of the gospel, which says, "Son, thy sins be forgiven thee" (Matt. 9:2). Believe in Jesus Christ, crucified for your sins. If you feel your sins and their burden, look not upon them in yourself, but remember that they are translated and laid upon Christ, whose stripes have made you whole (Isaiah 53:5). This is the beginning of health and salvation. By this means we are delivered from sin, justified and made inheritors of eternal life, not for our own works and deserts, but for our faith, whereby we lay hold upon Christ.⁴¹

Realizing that we are sinners and looking to the Savior is not only "the beginning of health and salvation," as Luther said, but it is also the beginning of any true practice of the Golden Rule (and the rest of the law). When we look to Christ and trust in his gospel of grace, our hearts are transformed at the deepest level and we now *want* to obey the one who loves us so much! And we want to treat others the way we would want to be treated, because that is what he commands us to do.

What the Golden Rule Does Not Mean

As we continue to work toward an accurate and complete definition of the Golden Rule, we need to consider and correct some misunderstandings about it. The first and most important misunderstanding, of course, is the one we just discussed—that practicing it or any other good work is “the way to heaven.” But there are other significant misunderstandings as well, and eliminating them will lead us toward a proper grasp of what Jesus was really teaching. Just as a treasure chest can’t be unlocked with the wrong key, you won’t enjoy truly good relationships if you have wrong ideas about the Golden Rule in your mind. So think through this carefully with me...

The Golden Rule is not about what the other person wants. This very common misunderstanding derives from a superficial reading of the command. And some have gone so far as to formulate what they call the Platinum Rule (at a minimum implying it is better than the Golden Rule), which is “treat others as *they* want to be treated.” This is taught in business seminars and even in some churches, where the teachers think they can improve on the Master’s teaching!⁴²

But Jesus does not say to “treat others as they want to be treated”—he says, “treat others as *you* would want to be treated.” This is a significant difference, and it is also significantly better than the other formulation,

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Applying the Golden Rule in Everyday Life

Charles Spurgeon spoke the following words about 150 years ago, and they are still true today.

Everything that has gone before leads up to this.... In this place our King gives us his golden rule. Put yourself in another's place and then act to him as you would wish him to act towards you under the same circumstances. This is a right royal rule, a precept always at hand, always applicable, always right. Here you may be a judge, and yet not be judging others, but judging for others. This is the sum of the Decalogue, the Pentateuch, and the whole sacred Word. Oh, that all men acted on it and then there would be no slavery, no war, no sweating, no striking, no lying, no robbing, but all would be justice and love!⁵⁰

Since the Golden Rule is “always applicable, always right,” we need to know how to use this key to unlock

the treasure of blessed relationships. So the following eight steps provide a guide for practicing the Golden Rule in any situation or decision. Each step will be illustrated by the following scenario, one that someone asked me about while I was working on this book:

- You've noticed some bad behavior by a child in the church, which seems to have gone unaddressed by his parents on numerous occasions. You've thought about talking to the parents about this, but you don't know them very well and you're afraid that would cause an uncomfortable rift between you and them. What should you do?

Step One

Think About the Other Person's Situation

The Golden Rule says that you should treat others as you would want to be treated if you were that person. To do that, you must begin by thinking about their situation. Philippians 2:3–4 teaches this idea:

Do nothing from selfish ambition or conceit, but in humility count others more significant than yourselves. Let each of you look not only to his own interests, but also to the interests of others.

After telling us that we should not be selfish but

