



## **Preacher's Pen** *by Gene McCoy*

# **Living the Golden Rule**

Teaching his boy from Matthew 7:12, a father said, "Son, if you follow this Golden Rule, you'll live a great life for the Lord, and God will take care of you." The lesson made a lasting impression on the boy, who eventually started a chain of stores across the country known as "The Golden Rule Store." You have undoubtedly been in one of his stores that later bore his name — J.C. Penney. He treated his customers the way he wanted to be treated — with love, respect, kindness, understanding and encouragement.

This rule must be at the heart of one whose righteousness exceeds that of the scribes and Pharisees (5:20). In a sense, this rule sums up the summit sermon. Jesus says it is the Law and the Prophets.

Then, as now, the most religious people violate this rule, all the while posing as leaders — experts in the law who teach others. Although they have never physically murdered anyone, they are adept at verbally assassinating a brother's character. Righteousness that surpasses that of the strict legalist extends beyond the hands to the heart. The one who lusts is just as guilty as the one who physically adulterates marriage. So you haven't divorced your spouse. Great! But are you being faithful to your spouse as you want your spouse to be faithful to you?

Many who succeed with regard to the prohibitions (e.g., "Don't break your oath.") are utter failures with regard to the positive instructions (e.g., "Simply say what you mean and mean what you say."). They have avoided all the negatives but have evaded the corresponding positives. They stubbornly refuse or neglect to reconcile with a brother with whom they are at odds. Move beyond merely withholding retribution to actually forgiving your enemies.

The context immediately preceding the "golden rule" pertains to making judgments. Who among us is innocent in this matter? We are quick to pass

judgment before we even know all the facts. The tongue is quickly engaged in setting a fire that damages and destroys without regard for others. Those who participate in this "world of iniquity" (Ja. 3:6) have obviously forgotten their pain when they were the ones whose integrity was questioned and challenged.

Those most susceptible to this sin are teachers — by virtue of the fact that they talk a lot. Anyone who assumes the responsibility that comes with being a teacher must give special heed to the stricter judgment, or greater condemnation, that ensues (Ja. 3:1).

There are simple measures we can take to practice the "golden rule." Obviously, a huge part of it involves keeping our mouth shut. Before passing judgment, we should employ the teaching of Jesus in Matthew 18 about dealing with an offending brother. That is how we want to be treated.

We should be quick to hear and slow to speak (Ja. 1:19). The "four-way test" of the Rotary International isn't inspired, but it does reflect Biblical principles.

- ◆ Is it the truth?
- ◆ Is it fair to all concerned?
- ◆ Will it build good will and better friendships?
- ◆ Will it be beneficial to all concerned?

Another measure of this grace is to give the benefit of doubt. Display the mind of Christ by looking out for the interests of others and not just yourself (Phil. 2:4). Through love serve one another as you would want to be served (Gal. 5:13-14). It is interesting that the very next statement relates to the tongue. Paul warns against biting and devouring one another, lest we be consumed ourselves (v. 15).

An underlying principle Jesus taught as he sent out workers is "Freely you have received, freely give" (Matt. 10:8). Living the golden rule is not always easy. But it is always necessary because we teach others by our example of speech, conduct, love, faith and purity (1 Tim. 4:12). ■