

## A RULE THAT SHINES AS GOLD

by Rev. Donald L. Rose

The Sermon on the Mount proclaims a rule about doing to others as you would have them do unto you. (Matthew 7 verse 12.) Did you know that it has been called “the Golden Rule” for more than three hundred years?

It is a rule simple enough to be recited by the youngest in Sunday School classes. And yet it carries within it the sum, so to speak, of all the ancient scriptures. Jesus said an amazing thing about this seemingly little rule. It encompasses and embraces all of Scripture. He said, “This is the Law and the Prophets.”

Here are a few of the ways modern translators have rendered it.

“In everything, do to others what you would have them do to you, for this sums up the Law and the Prophets.” (New International Version)

“Do for others what you want them to do for you. This is the teaching of the laws of Moses in a nutshell.” (The Living Bible)

“Treat other people exactly as you would like to be treated by them—this is the essence of all true religion.” (J. B. Phillips translation)

The Jerusalem Bible says, “Always treat others as you would like them to treat you.”

In my own religious tradition, this “rule” is paramount. Theologian Emanuel Swedenborg quotes it often calling it “the law of charity set forth and given by the Lord.” He says that it is a “heavenly law,” and being heavenly it is also a Christian law. In heaven there emanates from an angel an atmosphere or aura of good will, an aura that is reciprocated in blessed ways. We on earth say that our prayers and good wishes “go out” to others. And this can be more true than we realize. In prayer and good will there is a kind of doing unto others.

My message to you today has to do with your motive in making this law a part of your daily life. An individual may observe this rule from mere self-interest. “He begins from a selfish motive,” says Swedenborg. Think about it. The rule can be superficially regarded without religious consideration and indeed without any real consideration for others.

“Be nice to others, so that they will be nice to you.” This kind of thinking does not sum up the Law and the Prophets!

As an individual looks to God in life, God gradually provides a new heart. A process of rebirth or regeneration takes place. One can think less about self and one can reflect compassionately on what is best for the neighbor. In so doing, says Swedenborg, one “begins from really willing what is good.”

No, that ancient rule is not of the substance of self-interest. Self-interest is dull. It does not sparkle or shine. But this rule coming to us from the Scriptures can shine in our lives. In a spiritual manner of speaking it is made of gold.

*Reprinted with permission from The Intelligencer-Record, Doylestown, PA, USA.*