

Charley Reeb:

It's good to see everybody. Some of you, I see your whole faces this day. Just in case you're wondering, my name is Charley Reeb. It's great to see y'all here. Let's be an attitude of prayer together. Lord, we are grateful for your spirit that is alive and well and can never be conquered. There is no pandemic, there is no strife, there is no pain, there is no death that can ever conquer your spirit that lives and breathes in the church and lives and breathes in each of us who believe.

And now, Lord, you've given me the amazing privilege and responsibility of preaching your work to these my friends and your servants. And Lord, this is a task I tremble at. I need your strength to do it. So Lord, speak to me and through me in such a way that all of us do receive a word from you that will make a difference to our lives. It's in Christ's name we pray. Amen.

This morning I want to talk to you what I believe is the most important rule in the universe. It's an extremely powerful, powerful rule that can change your life and improve your relationships, your relationships with your spouse, with your family, with your friends, even with yourself. This rule is that powerful. It can solve most conflict in your life. It really is that powerful. And if you make the choice today to follow this particular rule, I believe your life will change.

But on the other hand, if you choose to break this rule or not follow it, your life will continue to be weighted down by conflict, strife, pain, hatred, and division. When this rule is broken, marriages are torn apart, families are torn apart. Businesses suffer, people are torn apart individually when this rule is broken. And the truth is, we have a choice every day whether or not we're going to follow this particular rule. Now, one could say that if you'd like to take a look at all the terror and the violence and the war throughout history, it can all be traced back towards people in power not following this particular rule. So not only does this rule and the following it or breaking it apply to our community and individual lives, but it applies throughout history. And if you don't believe me, if you think I'm making an oversimplification, I encourage you to continue to listen to me this morning on this particular message and then tell me later whether or not I'm making an oversimplification.

So this is what I'd like for you to do this morning. I want you to reflect on your relationships. Are you estranged from someone? Is there conflict in your relationships in your family? Is your marriage on the rocks? Is it struggling? Are there particular people that you seem to have chronic problems with in your life? I think I just described 100% of people in this room. And the bottom line is, there is a cure to all of it by following this simple rule because this is what I believe. If you take a look at most of the conflict we experience in our lives and trace it all the way back, you will find usually it can be traced back to not following this particular rule.

Now, here's the funny thing. Most of us know this rule real well. We've known it since we were children. We learned it when we were kids, but this is what happens. As we get older, we think, well, this rule is really naive. It's not realistic. And if that's how you feel, let me say this. If your life is weighted down by conflict and hatred and division and you're sick and tired of it, but you can't seem to do anything about it, let me ask you, how's what you're doing working for you right now? Is it working for you? I'm sure in many cases it's not. If you want your relationships healed, if you want more peace and happiness and even fun in your life, I want you to take seriously this rule I'm about to talk about and I invite you to apply to your life.

Now, what I want to do this morning is I want to come at this rule from the back end and trace its history because I really think we see its power that way. Most people think this particular rule is unique to the Christian faith. It is not. In fact, this rule can be traced all the way back to Confucius. And most world religions have some version of this rule. This is how the rule originally appeared. Don't do to

others what you would not want them to do to you. In other words, the rule was in the defensive sense, the past sense.

Just don't be mean to others because you wouldn't want them to be mean to you. Just don't hurt others because you don't want to be hurt. Just get along. And this, there's a lot of wisdom to that. In fact, I remember when I was a kid and my family would take long trips in the car and I would be sitting next to my twin sister and it was a long trip, there would come a time when we really didn't get along. I know you're shocked by that. But we'd be sitting in the back seat, all of a sudden we'd be bickering and fighting, and my mom would turn her head around as mothers do, and she'd say, "You see that crease in the middle of that seat? Stay on your side of the crease."

Well, guess what I would do? I like to annoy my sister, still do. And I would inch my hand closer to that crease and get closer and closer and Nancy, my sister, would say, "Mommy, Mommy, he's doing it again." And my mom would get irritated and she would look back at us and she'd say, "Could you just keep your hands to yourself? Can you just get along?" That's the original version of this rule. Cease fire. Keep your hands to yourself. Don't do any damage. Then enter a man by the name of Jesus. He did something very radical with this rule that changed civilization. In fact, what He did to this rule, really, is He turned it into gold, which is why we like to call it the what? The Golden Rule.

It appears on the Sermon on the Mount, the greatest sermon ever preached. And this is what Jesus did to this rule. So in everything, do to others what you would have them do to you, for this sums up the law and the prophets. Now, did you notice what Jesus did to this rule? Until Jesus, it was always in the passive sense, right? Don't do this and don't do that and keep your hands to yourself. But along comes Jesus Christ and He radicalizes it by doing this, saying, "No. This is proactive. You go out and do to people what you will want done to you. You go out and love people because you want to be loved. You go out and be kind to people. Be assertive about it because that's how you would like to be treated." Go and do. Count it on Jesus Christ to turn a rule into something assertive, to do something rather than not to do something.

But then Jesus continues in this verse, and sometimes we just gloss over it. We really don't pay attention to it, but it is so radical because Jesus then says, "This rule sums up the law and the prophets." Now what does that mean? It simply means this. You know everything we read in the Bible? You can summon up by the Golden Rule. Jesus said, "You know all this stuff, the Commandments and the laws, and all of those doctrines and everything, you want to sum it all up in one sentence? Treat other people the way you want to be treated."

That's it. That sums it up. Now, we don't like that. We in the church and throughout history, people are like, "It can't be that simple." So we put in doctrine and we put in dogma and we put in ritual and we put in ways of baptism and we complicate it. Now all those things are important, but they are secondary to the Golden Rule and the greatest commandment, the essence of the Gospel, the essence of the Christian faith, the essence of following Jesus, the Christian ethic is simply this, to treat other people the way you want to be treated, to love God and love others. And that's it. End of story.

Now Peter underscored the Golden Rule. And 1 Peter, when he was writing to a group of new Christians, 1 Peter was a book written to Christians who were about to be baptized in the faith. And Peter was honest with him. He said, "Listen, you're going to face hatred and you're going to face persecution as a Christian, and here is my advice to you." And he emphasizes the Golden Rule here. He says this, in 1 Peter 3:9, listen closely, "Do not repay evil with evil or insult with insult. On the contrary, repay evil with blessing because to this you were called so that you might inherit a blessing." Now, this is amazing. This is what Peter is saying.

You don't get rid of hatred with more hatred. You don't get rid of strife with more strife. Instead, you overcome it with love. Martin Luther King Jr said, "You can't drive out hate with hate. Only love can do that." But then Peter says this, "When we do that, when we act like that, we receive a blessing." Now, what does that mean? For a long time, I wonder what that meant. What kind of blessing is he talking about? What kind of blessing do we receive when we follow the Golden Rule? The clue is here in verse 15 of the same chapter. Listen closely. "Always be prepared to give an answer to everyone who ask you to give the reason for the hope that you have." The blessing is that people will wonder if you've lost your mind.

When you follow the Golden Rule proactively, people will wonder, "What in the heck has gotten into you? After the way I've treated you, you're going to treat me like this? You're going to be this kind to me and this forgiving to me and this loving to me. What is your problem? What are you smoking?" And then we have the opportunity to tell them why. "You want to know why? Because Jesus Christ has treated me this way, despite how I've acted towards him, despite what I've done. I'm a Christ follower and Jesus Christ is in my heart and that's why I act the way I do."

You see, early Christianity, when we read the pages of how it spread and how it grew, the truth is it did not grow through coercion. It grew through fascination because people were always wondering, "Who are these strange people who always act loving and kind and beautiful and know how the world needs this this day?" I don't think I've ever lived in a time with more conflict and strife and division and hatred. The church needs to step up.

So here's my version of the Golden Rule. It's very scholarly. Treat people in a way that amazes them. Treat peoples with such kindness and love that they are flabbergasted by it.

Some of you husbands, go home to your wives and say, "You know what? I don't want to be right. I'm sorry. I just want to love each other." They may just faint on the spot, the wives. You have trouble with a coworker. You're always fighting and bickering and in conflict, and you can't stand the person. How about going up to them and saying, "Listen, I know we don't see eye to eye, but honestly I respect you and I would like to get to know you. Can I take you to lunch?" That's what Christians do. You see, the great thing about the Golden Rule is that it does not wait for the other person to act.

Did Jesus Christ wait to come down on this earth and to love us and to save us from our sins until we acted, until we said, "I'm sorry"? No, we as Christians take the first step just like Jesus did.

Now, some of you may think this is all unrealistic. "I know, Charlie, it's what a preacher's supposed to say, and it's nice and it sounds good, but does it really work in the real world?" My answer, yes. Let me share with you something that happened at a Starbucks not too long ago. How many of you like Starbucks? Few of you. I kind of don't like having to pay \$25 for a cup of coffee, but many people do.

There was a woman by the name of Susan Basham who lived in North Carolina and still does. And she had three dogs, and she was on her way to take these dogs to be groomed, but on her way, she wanted a cup of coffee, a little jolt. So she stopped by the Starbucks. And lo and behold, when she drove in with her car to go through the drive-through, it was packed like it usually is, especially in the morning.

And when she got there, she saw this big Suburban who got there about the same time she did, and Susan wasn't sure who was to go first when the line moved. And so she rolled down her window to the woman in the suburban and said, "Is it me or is it you? Is it me or is it you?" Well, that woman in the Suburban, she gunned her Suburban forward. She rolled down her window and she began to scream cuss words that I can't repeat in a sermon at Susan. And Susan said, "Listen, you can go. I just didn't know who was supposed to go first." Well, she didn't believe her, and she kept on cussing and cussing and cussing, and yeah, she had a Bichon on her lap that kept barking at Susan.

Well, what do you think Susan did? What would you have done? You know what Susan did? She looked real hard at that woman in the Suburban. And you know what she saw? She saw herself 10 years earlier. The woman's eyes were red and puffy. She had her hair in a bun and she looked exhausted, and she remembered those days, when her kids were young and she drove the same kind of big car, one of those days, the dog vomits on the sofa, the dishwasher breaks. The kids are just acting crazy. They seem possessed. And of course, the husband is mad because she forgot to pick up the dry cleaning and the whole world is falling apart. She remembered.

Well, the woman of course pulled forward in front of Susan, and she ordered her coffee and then pulled forward to wait on her and to pay for it. And then Susan came up and she said to the attendant, "Listen, I'd like to pay for whatever drink or coffee the woman ahead of me ordered, and when you pay for it for me, would you tell her that I hope she has a better day?" Well, Susan watched to see what would happen. The attendant went ahead to the woman in the Suburban and they talked for about a minute or two, and then they exchanged money. And when the attendant came back, Susan said, "She didn't want to take my money, did she?" She said, "No. She said she couldn't believe you wanted to pay for her coffee after the way she treated you. She said she's so sorry. She feels terrible." "Well, did you tell her that I hope she has a better day?" And she said, "Yes, she already has."

And this is what Susan said about that incident, "As I drove away, I began to cry, not because I had been called so many terrible names, but because God had answered my very recent prayer, which was that He would allow me to see people as He sees them, not as I see them, that I might be able to see the hurting inside instead of just the hurtful outside." Well, church, let's be that kind of person. That happened at a Starbucks on an ordinary day, but it could have just easily happened at the Starbucks just up the road on Medlock or at the Publix down the road or in your cul-de-sac or in your neighborhood. Susan, what she did was she diffused anger and hatred with love and showed that woman the amazing love of God. Now, can you imagine what kind of world this would be if we acted that way every day? Can you imagine the relationships that would be restored? Can you imagine the healing that would come?

Can you imagine the number of people who would wonder about this Jesus business and want to know more about it? Can you imagine the change that would come to your life? If this rule from Jesus is this powerful, what's stopping us from following it? In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Let us pray.

Oh Lord, give us the discipline and the patience and the love to see people as you see them, to not be so quick to react in anger, to not be so quick, to make judgements, to not be so quick to be filled with hate, but instead to remember that your love conquers all, and it's the demonstration of that love that makes all the difference. It's in Christ's name we pray. Amen.