

Just a Word...

from Steve Dickerson, Communications Secretary

“I’ve got an **improvement** on the Golden Rule.” Those were the words of my university professor. He wore blue jeans and a smart-alecky attitude. His list of adjectives seemed to be limited to those starting with the letter F. I had taken an instant dislike to him, but then he said those words that I quoted above.

The Golden Rule has been around for a long time, though not necessarily in the words that many of us memorized as children: “Do to others what you would like them to do to you.”



Jesus: Treat others as you’d like to be treated.”
Professor: “Treat others as they’d like to be treated.”

The Old Testament had it this way (Leviticus 19:18): “You shall not take vengeance or bear a grudge against your countrymen. Love your fellow as yourself: I am the Lord.”

That was about 700 years before Christ. In about 600 BC, Zoroastrianism put it like this: “That nature only is good when it shall not do unto another whatever is not good for its own self.”

Buddhism (500 BC) teaches this: “Hurt not others in ways that you yourself would find hurtful.”

Confucianism says, “What you do not want done to yourself, do not do to others.” (500 BC)

Socrates, the Greek philosopher said (in about 400 BC), “Do not do to others what would anger you if done to you by others.”

You probably notice the difference. Jesus took what all these others had said and turned it around. Instead of saying, “Don’t do to others what you don’t want done to you,” he said, “**DO** to others what you’d like done to you.” I like that. But my professor said he had an improvement. Here it is:

Jesus: “Treat others as you’d like to be treated.”

Professor: “Treat others as they’d like to be treated.”

This assumes two things:

1. What they want is indeed best for them (and most of us would agree that’s not always true).
2. We can truly know what it is that they want (and that’s a pretty big assumption, too).

We see others through the lens of our own experience. In a recent Family Circus cartoon, Dad is holding Billy upside-down by his ankles. Billy says, “So this is what it must feel like to be an Australian!”

No, Billy, I’m pretty sure it isn’t.

So...you were in a car accident and broke your leg? I know what that’s like. Well, I know what it was like for *me*, but I’m not sure I can ever get inside your head and know what it was like for you. You lost a family member? Had to file bankruptcy? Just learned you have cancer?

As much as we might wish it, we can never “see through someone else’s eyes.” We can only see through our own. So Jesus had it right when he said the guide for our treatment of others must be our own experience.

Sorry, professor.