

Preaching from St. Stephen's Pulpit

St. Stephen Lutheran Church, Williamsburg, VA

February 23, 2025

The Platinum Rule

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Beloved by God, my siblings in Christ; grace to you and peace from God our Creator and our Savior Jesus Christ. Amen.

“Do to others as you would have them do to you.”¹ What a great sentiment, right? It's such a powerful thought that it occurs in just about every major religion known today:

Buddhism: “Whatever is disagreeable to yourself, do not do unto others” (The Buddha, *Udana-Varga* 5.18 – 6th century BCE).

Confucianism: “Do not do to others what you do not want them to do to you” (Confucius, *Analects* 15.23 – 5th century BCE).

Judaism: “What is hateful to you, do not do to your fellow-man. This is the entire Law, all the rest is commentary” (*Talmud, Shabbat* 31d – 16th century BCE).

Hinduism: “This is the sum of duty. Do not do unto others that which would cause you pain if done to you” (*Mahabharata* 5, 1517 – 15th century BCE).

Islam: “None of you will believe until you love for your brother what you love for yourself” (Hadith 13, The Forty Hadith of Imam Nawawi – 7th century).

Shintoism: “Be charitable to all beings, love is the representation of God” (approximately 500 CE: Ko-ji-ki Hachiman Kasuga – 8th century BCE)

Sikhism: “I am a stranger to no one, and no one is a stranger to me. Indeed, I am a friend to all” (*Guru Granth Sahib, religious scripture of Sikhism*, p. 1299 – 15th century).

¹ Luke 6:31 (NRSVUE)

There's just one problem with this rule. What if the person you are interacting with doesn't want to be treated the same way that you would like to be treated? Personal preference is a thing, after all.

With that in mind, I'd like to suggest a different rule, the platinum rule. The platinum rule is as follows: treat others the way **they want** to be treated. Now, if you think about it, this is just a deepening and clarification of the golden rule. Ultimately, how does each of us wish to be treated? The way we wish to be treated! This can be a challenge as we may wish to be treated differently based on a lot of different, sometimes unpredictable, criteria.

Need an example? I grew up the youngest of three kids. Now, if you ask my siblings they will likely tell you I was the annoying younger brother, always pestering them for attention. Their most common response to my pestering for attention was to tickle me. This became a fairly common part my interactions with them to the point that I interpreted it as affection.

Fast forward twenty years or so and I marry my wife, Christina, an only child. Early on in our relationship I would attempt to show affection to my wife by tickling her. Once again...only child. This was not how Christina was used to receiving affection...and she didn't receive it as affectionate.

I'll be honest, there was some defensiveness in me at times over what I saw as an innocuous action. It took her a while, I can be obstinate, but eventually Christina got through to me that while tickling was a part of how I might like to be treated, it was **not** how she enjoyed being treated.

I could provide more examples of this, especially around the different enneagram types in our household. Each member of the Nelson family look for affection in different ways. Each member experiences things differently and prioritizes things differently. Our past experiences and personalities affect this. All sorts of different things can affect how we wish to be treated.

Gosh, all of this is making a simple "Do to others as you would have them do to you" into something quite complicated. But then again, it is the model we have in Jesus Christ. Again and again in scripture we find Jesus meeting people where they are and again and again he meets their needs; sometimes

even meeting needs they don't realize they have. Jesus is our example *par excellence* of how to treat others the way they wish to be treated...love them.

Love even your enemies and do good to those who hate you. That complicates all of this as well, doesn't it? I'd really rather not love my enemies, but that is the Way of Christ. Now, while Jesus calls us to love our enemies he does not call us to simply take what they do to us. No, he encourages his followers to "offer the other cheek"² when someone strikes you.

What on earth does that mean? The Rev. Dr. Alison L. Boden writes: "Jesus' listeners would have understood it – the slap to the right cheek that he describes is a backhand slap. It couldn't be a slap made with the palm of the hand. The right-handed slapper would have to twist him or herself around and would not get a good swing. A backhand slap was a smack to a subordinate, to someone of lesser status. As if a slap to the face wasn't demeaning enough, a backhanded slap added even greater insult. Jesus' teaching is – when someone smacks your right cheek invite them also, while they're in a smacking mood, to take a whack at your left cheek. To do that of course, would require the slapper to hit you with the palm of the hand, which is to say, to hit you as a person of equal status. Jesus' listeners would have heard this instruction and laughed – what a great way to shame the person who hits you! The joke is on them – imagine the look on their face when you invite them to smack your other cheek! They'll have to think about it! They won't know what to do! Jesus' first audience knew he wasn't telling them to just be nice, but to shame the evildoer and insist on being treated as an honorable human being. 'Go ahead – smack me again – I've got another cheek. Oh! What would it mean to slap me there?!'"³

Even this difficult teaching about loving our enemies seems to involve the platinum rule! Jesus is teaching us to respond to the violence of our enemies by challenging their assumptions about our worthiness. Jesus calls us to

² Luke 6:29a

³ **The Rev. Dr. Alison L. Boden**, Princeton University Chapel, February 20, 2011
<https://chapel.princeton.edu/news/going-extra-mile>

remind one another that we all bear the image of God and that we all deserve love, dignity, and respect.

There's a lot of hate and violence in our world today. And responding to it with more hate and violence will only perpetuate the same cycles we've been stuck in for millennia. Jesus is showing us a different Way. A Way that acknowledges the complexity of human life and the human experience. And a Way that centers the love and grace of God for all people and all of creation.

But it is also a Way that stands in solidarity with those who are being dehumanized. It is a Way that says, you can do violence to me, but I will force you to look be in the eyes and acknowledge my humanity as you do it. It is a Way that often leads to conflict with power too. It is a Way that led to Jesus' death at the orders of the State and the religious authorities of his time. It is a Way that will put us in danger. But the danger is worth it because it means seeing in every face around us the very image of Christ. And that's a beautiful sight worth serving. Amen.