**Great Principles of Christianity, #4**

**We are forgiven as we forgive, judged as we judge, Matthew 6:14, 7:1-2.**

In other words, if we have a critical attitude toward others, God will judge us more severely. If we are compassionate with others, trying to understand them and their problems, God will tend to be more lenient with us in His dealing with our failures. We might bear in mind that this principle also applies to how others respond to us in this life as well as to how God will judge us in the afterlife.

Forgiveness and judgment are two leaves from the same tree. Forgiveness is best facilitated by our willingness to give another the benefit of the doubt, i.e., we assume that the person in question did not really intend to hurt us or that there was some kind of extenuating circumstance which caused him to act the way he did, just as we are quick to point out the extenuating circumstances connected with our own missteps. Giving the benefit of the doubt is an aspect of trust, and trust is an important ingredient in all human relationships. In the case of forgiveness, trust results in our looking for an understandable reason for another’s actions. Since judgment often requires that we presume to know the invisible motives of offenders, trust is a tool we can use as an alternative to judging the hearts of others. Trusting another’s intentions makes forgiving easier.

Forgiveness also comes easier to those who do not think themselves better than others. If we hold self to be of superlative importance and more valuable than others, when another trespasses against us, we are likely to consider that trespass to be an act of high treason rather than what it probably is, a forgivable misdemeanor. When we diminish our own importance, we make it easier to see that the perpetrator of a “sinful action” against us, although he may have caused us much grief, is really the one who has the greater problem, because he has broken God’s law and must answer at God’s tribunal.

**Great Principles of Christianity, #5**

**Treat others as you wish to be treated, Matthew 7:12**

The injunction to treat others as you wish to be treated is commonly called the golden rule. Most everyone admits that this principle is a good one by which to live, but, unfortunately, living by this principle requires strength of character that some folks lack. Several character traits are required for successful application of the golden rule.

Of foremost importance to a life lived by the golden rule is the ability to live by principle rather than living by selfish considerations such as greed and pleasure. Selfishness often interferes with a principled life because living by principles frequently runs counter to satisfying selfish desires. In short, principles normally conflict with self-service.

Love is at the root of the golden rule. Jesus said**, “You shall love the LORD your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind. This is the first and great commandment. And the second is like it: You shall love your neighbor as yourself. On these two commandments hang all the Law and the Prophets,”** Matthew 22:37. In Jesus’ statement two important ideas beg for our consideration. (1) The first idea that needs explanation comes from the phrase, “as yourself.” This comment defines the required love for others as a love which is as strong as our love for self. Whenever we are faced with a decision involving treatment of someone else the question of cost to self usually comes to mind. If we love others at least as much as we love ourselves there is a chance that we will sacrifice for the welfare of others, but if we love ourselves more than others we will never be able to help others at our own expense. Since helping others is always a cost to self in some way, a dilemma arises for the self-centered individual. (2) “On these two commandments hang all the Law and the Prophets” is the second idea that requires comment. “The Law and the Prophets” (The Law of Moses) embodies God’s attempt to create a society in which everyone is spiritually and physically secure. The physical aspect of this security required that the Jews behaved harmlessly toward each other. Since love is a concern for the welfare of others, he who governs his life by love for others will always help and never harm his fellows, thus he does by love whatever benevolence is required by the law. This kind of sacrificial love for others must be a part of our character in order for us to successfully live by the golden rule under Christ’s kingdom law.

Two other requirements of the golden rule are sympathy and empathy. “Sympathy” suggests ability to feel sorry for someone else and “empathy,” although overlapping a great deal with sympathy, carries the sorrow for another’s plight a little further by adding the ability to feel the same hurt as the person who has the burden. Empathy is often attained by asking ourselves the question, “How would I feel if this were happening to me.” The result of empathy should always be sympathy in action when practicable. If we love others as much as we love ourselves, we will empathize and then sympathize with them. In putting into play the golden rule, we must utilize empathy and sympathy before we act, trying to put self in their place to predetermine what another might experience if we behave ourselves toward him in a certain way.

Sacrifice of self for others is always part of the golden rule; therefore, sacrifice is frequently the chief stumbling block to successfully implementing the golden rule. Consider the Good Samaritan, Luke 10:30. When the Samaritan stopped to help the unfortunate fellow at the side of the road, he was putting his own safety in jeopardy. He probably had other things to do, but sacrificed them in order to help one less fortunate than himself. He paid for the man’s care, thus depriving himself of whatever that money might have purchased. In short, he sacrificed.

This world would be a better place if we all lived by the golden rule. Living the golden rule might be easier if we were to remember James 2:13, **“For judgment is without mercy to the one who has shown no mercy. Mercy triumphs over judgment.”**

**Great Principles of Christianity, #6**

**Error divides and truth unifies, Matthew 10:34**

**"Do not think that I came to bring peace on earth. I did not come to bring peace but a sword. 35 For I have come to set a man against his father, a daughter against her mother, and a daughter-in-law against her mother-in-law; 36 and a man’s enemies will be those of his own household. 37 He who loves father or mother more than Me is not worthy of Me. And he who loves son or daughter more than Me is not worthy of Me.”**

The dilemma about truth and error is that error would not exist if there were no truth. Since truth exists, error does also, which fact causes the existence of division. Jesus embodies all religious truth; therefore, he who contradicts what Jesus taught is in error because Jesus came and revealed truth to us. Whatever contradicts truth is error. 2 John 9-11 informs us (1) We must remain within the bounds of what Jesus teaches us in His word, and (2) If we support error taught by others we are guilty of sin ourselves. If we remain faithful to the truth we will find ourselves divided from others who teach what is not true. In 1 Timothy 4:1-4 and in 2Timothy 4:1-4, Paul cautions that false teachers will lead Christians astray. In Romans 16:17 Paul warns the Roman church that they must initiate separation if there are those who cause division by teaching false doctrine. The only true path to unity is to gather around the truth, even if it causes a division with those who are not faithful to the Christ’s teaching. See also 1 Corinthians 1:10. Jesus, then, causes both unity and division, just as He is both a stone of stumbling and the chief corner stone of our salvation. 1 Peter 2:6-8.