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The Golden Rule and the Moral Law

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IS IT NOT obvious that we were born into a world governed by law? And so far as human welfare is concerned, the most important part of natural law is the moral law. When we break a physical law the punishment may be immediate, as when we lay our hands on a hot stove. That our world is one in which moral law rules is, however, not so obvious, since the penalty for breaking moral law is not, in many cases, immediate. In fact, many people seem to think it is possible to avoid the penalty entirely.

What I would like to point out is that in a world of law the rewards and penalties we experience are the direct results of our acts—also that these results begin to become apparent immediately and are not postponed to some distant judgment day. Every day is judgment day. If we obey the laws of health, we are healthy. If we disobey, the penalty of sickness is inflicted here and now.

If Henry George is correct and we have no employment and poverty with its accompanying crime because we break the moral law, "Thou shalt not steal," we cannot expect to get out of trouble through the belief that Christ died for our sins. We have got to stop doing the wrong thing and begin doing the right thing.

It was a triumph of reason that allowed Faraday a little over one hundred years ago to see the relations that must exist in a dynamo to transform mechanical power to electrical power. Reason taught men how to fly, make dynamite and cannons and battleships, making possible the engines of destruction as well as the machinery that adds to our pleasure and comfort. Unless we obey the moral law, however, there is a real chance that the engines of destruction may destroy civilization. Character cannot be developed without free will, and it is likely that a hundred years from now character will be accepted as the most important thing in the universe.

So we may say that Good is the end and aim of the Divine Being, but not without conditions. Not by compulsion. Perfection as of machinery alone would be too dull and low an achievement. Something higher is sought—the creation of free creatures who, in so far as they go right, do so because they will, not because they must.

As William James says: "A football team desires to get a ball to a certain spot, but that is not all they desire; they wish to do it under conditions and overcome inherent difficulties—else might they get up in the night and put it there."

Christ's object in life was to get the people to see and act on the belief that salvation or happiness here and hereafter could only be obtained by obedience to the moral law; and the first part of His program was to teach the Commandments. Probably everyone would admit that the Commandments are an expression of the will of the Creator. If anyone does not like

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the words "keeping the Commandments," let him use Jesus' summary of them, which is to love God "with all our strength and our neighbor as ourselves." Is it not clear that heaven is simply a society in which everyone obeys the Commandments or the moral law? Is it not similarly clear that hell is a society in which the moral law is more or less completely disregarded?

The second part of Christ's program was the proper relations of people to each other. Jesus said that relation was to "love thy neighbor as thyself." Some of us come to believe that this program would bring the Kingdom of Heaven to earth, and we marvel at the intellectual capacity of Jesus who proposed this way of bringing the Kingdom of Heaven to earth two thousand years ago. At the same time, we know that Jesus' program of proper human relations was and is very difficult to realize. People apparently are ready to treat each other any way except the way they would like the other person to treat them.

In the matter of relations between employer and employee, is it not a matter of fact that the application of this rule is as harmonious and happy relation? The employer should receive fair treatment from his employees and give them fair treatment as well. Under such a rule, in politics, the minority would raise a grievance while the majority would refrain from using this means of increasing its power. In international relations the Golden Rule would make for fair treatment from other nations as well as establishing fair treatment for other nations. It would, in short, prevent the strong from oppressing the weak.

Is it not true that the Golden Rule includes all of the Commandments? There would be no murder or theft or lying if this rule were served. The more we think about it, the clearer it becomes, that if we followed the Golden Rule, the Kingdom of Heaven would be on earth.

When the power of the State is used to hold religion, we all know that the influence of religion declines. The kind of religion that existed in France before the French Revolution was far from that taught by Christ who was here on earth. Washington Gladden a few years ago published a book with a striking title *Religion Ideas of the Present*—is there anything more powerful than ideas?

Christ founded His kingdom on two ideas: first, that the Creator was a kind loving father; and second, that the Golden Rule is part of the moral law. This statement is denied by those who believe that the moral law is contained in the Ten Commandments. Such people claim that the Golden Rule is merely a beautiful dream and that a who practices it in the conduct of his life is sure to go broke.

But is it true that the most selfish people in the conduct of a business is the best paid? A hundred years ago the Latin phrase, *carpe diem* may have been the motto of one man's successful business, but in modern times manufacturers will go to a great deal of trouble and expense to be sure a new product is on the market. It is up to his claims. The man that treats his help so that they are tired is the successful business, not the one who takes every possible advantage of his employees. Recently some concerns have paid their employees twice the prevailing wage but have been able to get a measure of cooperation in that makes the returns to the stockholders satisfactory. The great danger facing the labor movement today is that of doing a conscientious job, the way we are encouraged to do as little as possible for the money they get. The most forward-looking employers and labor leaders are beginning to see that in any dispute the best way to treat the other fellow the way you yourself would like to be treated.

When we look at the matter fairly, we see that in the ordinary relations of everyday life, obedience to the Golden Rule brings dividends, and disobedience inflicts severe losses. The fact that a large majority of us today probably do not believe this to be true doesn't make any difference. The law is a large majority of people in Columbus were sure that the earth was flat, but they knew that the world is round. Many are beginning to see that Christ was not far from the truth when He taught that human relations should be satisfactory, successful and harmonious if the application of the Golden Rule.

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