

## **Applying the Golden Rule in Political Discourse**

Even when there is a genuine desire to do so, it is sometimes very difficult to know how to practice the Golden Rule. This can be especially true in dealing with those who have different political views or who see the world from a different perspective. The “Golden Rule” that we should “treat others as we would like to be treated” clearly also applies to the world of politics; and yet we rarely hear a discussion of how to apply that rule in the midst of intense political debate. However, if enough people applied the Golden Rule to political discourse it could help change the way we talk to each other and perhaps even help break the stalemate that keeps us from addressing some of our most pressing national problems.

For those who are interested in applying this central ethical principle to political discourse, the best place to begin is this question: **How would I like others to behave towards me when I’m in a political discussion where there is disagreement?** Different people would offer a range of answers, but some common responses to this question would probably be things like: show respect; listen; tell the truth; acknowledge areas of agreement; don't distort my position; don't question my motives or patriotism, etc. If those are the ways we want to be treated, then it makes it possible to begin to make a list of actions we can take to apply the Golden Rule in interactions with others. Below are two lists that may be helpful in trying to answer the question of how to apply the Golden Rule to political discussions.

### **To apply the Golden Rule in Political Discussions:**

#### **I Will**

- Always show respect for the other person
- Listen patiently and with curiosity to understand another’s point of view—especially when there is disagreement
- Use precise and truthful language that communicates my views without exaggerating
- Look for areas of mutual agreement
- Encourage others including our political leaders to be civil

#### **I Won’t**

- Use inflammatory words, or derogatory names
- Interrupt the other
- Make broad generalizations about individuals or groups
- Assault the character of others or falsely impugn their motives
- Question another person’s beliefs, values or patriotism
- Demonize or describe as enemies, those who hold political beliefs different from my own

Guidelines like these “do’s” and “don’ts” provide a way to think about what it really means to apply the Golden Rule when dealing with those of other political views. While each person must determine the specific actions they will take to “treat others as we want to be treated,” there is no denying the fact that, even in the contentious world of politics, we should do exactly that.