

THE GOLDEN RULE

Matthew 7:12 (NKJV)

12 Therefore, whatever you want men to do to you, do also to them, for this is the Law and the Prophets.

The word “**therefore**” indicates that this principle in verse 12 (the golden rule) is connected to what has already been stated. As shown earlier, this formula, according to “**the Law and the Prophets,**” is a bookend for the beginning of the sermon as well as for the end of the sermon, as seen in Matt. 5:17 and 7:12 respectively.

“Embodied in the Mosaic code and amplified in the prophetic word, the golden rule is the underlying principle of all morality.” – **John Phillips**

It is pointed out that other religious leaders had often stated the underlying principle in NEGATIVE terms, but Jesus is the first on record stating it in POSITIVE terms.

For example, the Jewish rabbi Hillel said, “**What is hateful to yourself do not do to someone else.**” The book Tobit in the Apocrypha said, “**What you yourself hate, to no man do.**” The Stoics said, “**What you do not want to be done to you, do not do to anyone else.**” In each case, the emphasis is NEGATIVE.

But Jesus came emphasizing the POSITIVE in what is commonly called “The golden rule!” (cf. Lk. 6:31) This rule says, “Do unto others as you would have them do unto you.” Or as the verse specifically says, “**whatever you want men to do to you, do also to them**”. This principle of treating others the way you want to be treated serves as a good summary of the moral law represented in “**the Law and the Prophets**”.

“Man’s basic problem is preoccupation with self. ... In the final analysis, every sin results from preoccupation with self. We sin because we are totally selfish, totally devoted to ourselves, rather than to God and others. ... How we treat others is not to be determined by how we *expect* them to treat us or by how we think they *should* treat us, but by how we **want** them to **treat** us.” – **John MacArthur**

What a wonderful principle to govern human relationships! J.C. Ryle wrote: “[This truth] settles a hundred different points,...it prevents the necessity of laying down endless little rules for our conduct in specific cases”.

This “**golden rule**” has been called “**The Mount Everest of Ethics**”. Some argue that this is the most famous verse in all the Bible. It is the capstone of the whole Sermon on the Mount.

The 10 commandments consist of what we call the two tablets of the Law. The first tablet is the first 4 commands that are all God-oriented in nature; the last 6 commands all relate to human relationships.

“This [Golden Rule] summary of the OT (the law and the prophets) is a restatement of the second table of the Law (Mt. 22:36-40; Rom. 13:8-10), and rests upon the first, for man’s relation to God is always basic to his relation to his fellows.” – **Wycliffe Bible Commentary**

What we have in “**the golden rule**” amounts to a pithy form of the command to “**love your neighbor as yourself**,” which is a summary of the second table of the law (cf. Lev. 19:18; Mt. 22:39). Those who truly live this way actually fulfill the moral standard of the Law and the Prophets.

Romans 13:8–10 (NKJV)

8 Owe no one anything except to love one another, **for he who loves another has fulfilled the law.**

9 For the commandments, “You shall not commit adultery,” “You shall not murder,” “You shall not steal,” “You shall not bear false witness,” “You shall not covet,” and if there is any other commandment, are all summed up in this saying, namely, “You shall love your neighbor as yourself.”

10 Love does no harm to a neighbor; **therefore love is the fulfillment of the law.**

Galatians 5:13–14 (NKJV)

13 For you, brethren, have been called to liberty; only do not use liberty as an opportunity for the flesh, but **through love serve one another.**

14 For **all the law is fulfilled in one word, even in this: “You shall love your neighbor as yourself.”**

There is a “*glory of God*” moral standard of ethics. Romans 3:23 says, “*all have sinned and fall short*” of this glory of God standard. This standard was represented in the Law of Moses, but no one could live up to it. Then Christ came and modeled it perfectly. And not only that, He taught that obedience to the moral law of God was an internal issue of the heart instead of just outward/external conformity, which was reflective of the righteousness standard of the scribes and Pharisees.

Christ not only taught His disciples how they should then live in keeping with true repentance, but He also sent the Spirit to empower them to live consistently with this kingdom standard. It is this standard that is presented in the Sermon on the Mount, which is summarized in the golden rule.

The golden rule is essentially the rule of LOVE, which is to govern God’s people.

We are not under the Law of Moses, but we are under the law of Christ, which is the law of love (cf. Gal. 6:2; Ja. 2:8). Those who live out the law of love in essence fulfill the spirit and intention of the moral law represented in the Law and the Prophets. It is this standard of righteous living that is indicative of those who will enter the kingdom, which brings us full circle to what Christ said in Matthew 5:20.

Matthew 5:20 (NKJV)

20 For I say to you, that unless **your righteousness** exceeds the **righteousness of the scribes and Pharisees**, you will by no means enter the kingdom of heaven.

It is the law of love lived out in the life that is indicative of true repentance and faith, which is reflective of those who will indeed enter the kingdom. If legalism governs your life and not love, you will not enter the kingdom. This is the difference between the righteousness that will enter the kingdom and that which will not.

The golden rule to do unto others as you would have them do unto you is, in essence, the fulfillment of the moral teachings of the Law and the Prophets.

It is this standard that Christ came to bring about the fulfillment of in the lives of His followers. This standard of righteousness demanded by the OT is now fulfilled in the lives of believers as they walk in the Spirit (cf. Rom. 8:4). Thus, they fulfill the kingdom standard as presented in the Sermon on the Mount.

This brings to a conclusion the formal “Sermon on the Mount”. What remains in the rest of the chapter is a challenge to how people will now respond to Christ and His teaching. This teaching demands a response. Either people will repent and align with it, or they will not.

We have noted that the Sermon on the Mount in the main addresses those who are the true disciples of Christ. However, as noted in verse 28 at the end of the chapter, many people, in addition to His disciples, had gathered to hear what Christ was saying.

“Jesus addresses persons who have heard His teachings (cf. vv. 24, 26), are aware of the options, and must now choose one gate or the other.” – ***Evangelical Commentary on the Bible***