

THE LAW AND THE PROPHETS

Matthew 7:12

I. INTRODUCTION

II. THE TEXT

KJV—Therefore all things whatsoever ye would that men should do to you, do ye even so to them: for this is the law and the prophets.

NASB—In everything, therefore, treat people the same way you want them to treat you, for this is the Law and the Prophets..

NIV—So in everything, do to others what you would have them do to you, for this sums up the Law and the Prophets

ESV—So whatever you wish that others would do to you, do also to them, for this is the Law and the Prophets.

The Message—Here is a simple, rule-of-thumb guide for behavior: Ask yourself what you want people to do for you, then grab the initiative and do it for *them*. Add up God’s Law and Prophets and this is what you get.

III. BACKGROUND

A. THE ‘GOLDEN RULE’

1. Historical Usage—‘Golden Rule’

a. Term popularized in 1670s—England and Europe

b. Timeless Maxim in other cultures

1. Ancient Egypt—as early as 2000 BC

“Do to the doer to cause that he do thus to you.”

2. Hinduism—Mahabharata—8-9th century BC

“By self-control and making right conduct your main focus, treat others as you treat yourself.”

3. Buddhist—Buddha—6th century BC

- “Just as I am so are they, just as they are so am I”
- “Hurt not others in ways that you yourself would find hurtful.”

4. Greeks—Thales—6th century BD

“Avoid doing what you would blame others for doing “

5. Confucius—5th century BC

“Never impose on others what you would not choose for yourself.”

6. Jewish

a. Book of Tobit—2-3rd century BC

“Do to no one what you yourself dislike.”

b. Sirach—2nd century BC

"Recognize that your neighbor feels as you do, and keep in mind your own dislikes."

c. Hillel the Elder—1st century BC

“What is hateful to you, do not do to your fellow: this is the whole Torah; the rest is the explanation; go and learn.”

7. Romans—Seneca—contemporary with Christ

“Expect from others what you did to them.”

2. Possible Purpose(s)

a. Moral rule—do the right thing, what is fair

b. Moral consistency—don’t expect from others what you don’t do yourself

c. Utilitarian principle

- Individually—practically, this serves one’s own best in the long run
- Socially—this practice helps to build a better society

d. Empathetic principle—put self in the other person’s shoes

3. Criticisms of Golden Rule

a. Subjective nature of decision—*each person* determines the other person wants

b. Relativism—acting in every instance in response to how you expect them to act

c. Other persons may not have the same tastes/perspective/worldview as ours

d. Practical problem—how can we really know what another person thinks/wants?

4. Validity of criticisms
 - a. Those without objective moral base are ultimately unreliable
 - b. Individual Utilitarianism—is too self-centered
 - c. Empathetic principle—is too subjective
5. Conclusions about validity of Golden Rule
 - a. There are three undergirding principles validating it
 1. There is an over-arching, divine absoluteness behind the moral principle
 2. Honesty requires moral consistency—we cannot demand what we do not deliver
 3. Societal stability depends on it—a stable society requires expectation of fairness/reciprocity
 - b. Jesus had just given specific examples of those divine guidelines in His Sermon
 - c. Assumptions:
 1. There is a divine moral imperative behind all human moral interaction
 2. We should want to treat you according to this same moral rule
 3. Others should want to treat us according to this same moral rule
 - d. Other ways of explaining Jesus' message:
 - Treat others the way *God intends* them to treat you
 - Treat others the way they *should want* to treat you
 - Treat others the way they *ought* to treat you
6. Parallel idea
 - The Second Great Commandment = Love your neighbor as yourself.
7. Uniqueness
 - a. The maxim was ageless and an almost universal moral principle
 - b. But nobody had before *defined* what it really meant—and *how* to do it
 - c. It had been basically a common sense rule
 - d. Now—for the first time—in the Sermon on the Mount
 - Jesus gave it real meaning—defined it—and made practical application

B. THE LAW AND THE PROPHETS

1. A general term for Scripture—especially for Pharisees and Essenes
2. Not for Sadducees and Samaritans—who accepted only the Law as authoritative

IV. CONTEXT

A. PARALLEL PASSAGE

- **Luke 6:31**—Treat others the same way you want them to treat you.
- After Lukan Beatitudes
- In the middle of Jesus telling them to love their enemies and to turn the other cheek

B. SERMON ON MOUNT

1. Reference to **5: 17**
 - a. Jesus said He did not come to abolish but to fulfil the Law and the Prophets
 - b. So—everything from **5:17** through **7:11** was commentary on Law/Prophets
 - c. Outline of 5:17-7:11
 1. Fuller explanation of moral Law—how to treat others—6 “You have heard it saids”
 2. Three righteous acts—almsgiving, prayer, fasting—religious duties
 3. What really matters—eternal treasure vs. worldliness
 4. Moral purity—the eye is the lamp
 5. Single-minded devotion—you cannot serve two masters
 6. Trust God—do not be anxious
 - o About things
 - o About others’ business
 - o About sharing holy things
 - o Simplicity and humility in depending on God—ask, seek, knock
2. But this probably should cover the *whole* sermon—back to 5:2
 - a. Everything *before* **5:17** also dealt with Law/Prophets—scriptural principles
 - b. **5:17** —serves as a summary/introductory bridge between the two sermon parts
 - c. So the Golden Rule also covers

1. Responsibility to bless others—the Beatitudes—[5:2-12](#)
2. Responsibility to be salt and light—[5:13-16](#)

C. CONNECTION TO OTHER SCRIPTURE

1. Golden Rule summarizes the Two Great Commandments
 - a. It mirrors the Second Great Commandment—“love your neighbor as yourself”
 - b. But Jesus explicitly said it also extended to the First Great Commandment too
 - o After answering the lawyer’s ‘testing’ question about the ‘great commandment’
 - o [Mt 22:40](#)—Jesus said all the Law and Prophets hang on these *two* commandments
 - c. How this verse encompasses both commandments
 1. It tells us that everything so far has been about how to treat others
 - Showing us how to treat others in order to honor/glorify God
 2. Even passages related more to relationship with God
 - Show us how to relate/depend on Him—in order to witness and help others
2. Also—by extension—it encompasses James’s ‘royal law’

[Jas 2:8](#)—If, however, you are fulfilling the royal law according to the Scripture, “You shall love your neighbor as yourself,” you are doing well.

V. EXPLANATION OF TEXT

A. THE TEXT/TRANSLATION

1. Greek Text

Πάντα οὖν ὅσα ἂν θέλητε ἵνα ποιῶσιν ὑμῖν οἱ ἄνθρωποι οὕτως καὶ ὑμεῖς ποιεῖτε αὐτοῖς οὗτος γάρ ἐστιν ὁ νόμος καὶ οἱ προφῆται

2. Accurate English Translation

[All things therefore whatsoever you would wish that men would do to you, so even you do to them, for this is the law and the prophets.](#)

B. OVERALL STRUCTURE

1. KJV and ESV and The Message retain original structure

- What you want others to do—comes first
- But NIV and NASB—put our action first

C. EXAMINATION OF TEXT

1. **Everything therefore whatsoever** = **Πάντα οὖν ὅσα ἂν**

- The original text has ‘**everything**’ first
 - The only modern version that does this is NASB
 - This draws attention to **all** that has gone before
 - It also sets *absolute* tone for following statement
 - Not selective about what is included in rule
 - Instead—*every* relationship/action comes under divine scrutiny
- ‘**Everything whatsoever**’
 - Only the KJV uses both words
 - o NASB and NIV—say everything
 - o ESV—says whatever
 - o The Message—is weakest of all—simply says ‘what’
 - Using both words is more powerful
 - o Not just all—but all whatsoever—absolutely everything!

2. **You would** = **θέλητε** = to will, intend, desire, wish

- Present, active, subjunctive = you would wish/desire

3. **That men should do to you** = **ἵνα ποιῶσιν ὑμῖν οἱ ἄνθρωποι**

- **ποιέω** = to do, make = present, active, subjunctive = they would/should do

4. **So even you do to them** = **οὕτως καὶ ὑμεῖς ποιεῖτε αὐτοῖς**

- Beginning of phrase is ‘so’—none of the modern versions put it first
 - o It should read—‘so even you do to them’
 - o So—is important—**all this** that we have said—**do it ‘so’**
- Even—is important—do this *just* like I have told you

- c. Interpretation; “Do all this just as I have told you [in this Sermon]”
- d. **ποιέω** = to do, make
 - o Imperative—is not just ‘should’—not a suggestion, but a direct order
- e. Insertion of second person—“you”—is important
 - o Not normally inserted—the ‘person’ is usually part of the verb
 - o Here—‘you’ gives direct responsibility to His hearers—‘you’ do this
 - o Not just a timeless truth—not ‘one ought to do this’—but ‘you do this’
- 5. **For this is the law and the prophets** = **οὗτος γάρ ἐστιν ὁ νόμος καὶ οἱ προφῆται**
 - a. It could be stated with *either* ‘this’ or verb ‘is’—but this includes *both*
 - b. ‘This’ is included—to emphasize the subject (not just included in verb)
 - o This very thing—the content of this very sermon—not just ‘some’ teachings
 - c. ‘Is’ also included
 - 1. **ἐστί** = is/exists = present, indicative
 - 2. Verb is not needed—but emphasizes ‘this is’
 - 3. This establishes an equation
 - Not just a *summary* of the law/prophets
 - But this equals—it *is*—the very heart and intent of the whole message of the Bible
 - d. Using both emphasizes both—‘all this indeed is’

V. SUMMARY OBSERVATIONS

- 1. The Golden Rule as Direct Command to Disciples
 - a. It is addressed directly to us—Jesus said “you”
 - b. It is not something just for “others” to heed
 - c. It is not just a timeless maxim as a general guideline—but a direct command to implement
- 2. This is not about fairness based on expectations from others
 - a. We should not act based on what other’s “should have done”

- b. It is not about what others ought to have done to us
 - c. Rather what God expects us to do—regardless of what others have done
- 3. This is about taking action and responsibility
 - a. Sometimes phrased as the ‘Silver Rule’
 - o “Don’t do to others what you do not wish others to do to you.”
 - b. Problem: this rule can be followed by—doing absolutely nothing
 - c. No—be pro-active—take responsibility for our own actions—regardless of what others do
- 4. This tells us the Sermon on the Mount is ultimately not about ourselves
 - But about God—and our relationship with Him
 - And about others—and how God wants us to reach/help them