

**Text:** Matthew 7:12

**Title:** The Golden Rule

**Truth:** Doing to others is the same as loving your neighbor as yourself.

**Date/Location:** Wednesday 7/28/2021 at FBC

## Introduction

Matthew 7:12 – “Therefore, whatever you want men to do to you, do also to them, for this is the Law and the Prophets.”

### I. Relating This to Other Verses

The phrase “this is the Law and the Prophets” reminds us that there are other verses that give a summary of the Law and Prophets.

Matthew 22:37-40 – “**Love** the Lord your God with all your heart...**love** your neighbor as yourself. On these two commandments hang all the Law and the Prophets.”

Romans 13:8 – “Owe no one anything except to **love** one another, for he who **loves** another has fulfilled the law.”

Romans 13:10 – “**Love** does no harm to a neighbor; therefore **love** is the fulfilment of the Law.”

Galatians 5:14 – “For all the law is fulfilled in one word, even in this: “You shall **love** your neighbor as yourself.”

James 2:8 – “If you really fulfill the royal law according to the Scripture, ‘You shall **love** your neighbor as yourself,’ you do well.”

Notice that in all these verses, the attribute of love drives conduct that by its nature fulfills the law of God toward others. If you love someone, you will not break the 10 commandments with regard to them. If you love God, that love will guide you to do right toward the Lord.

From this I draw the conclusion that love is connected to the “whatever you want men to do to you” measuring stick. If you measure your own behavior by that measuring stick of love, and if you then find that your behavior matches, then you are following the Lord’s command here.

If you do to others as you would have them do to you, then you are loving them at least as well as you love yourself.

### II. Taking Verse 12 Out of Context

The most common way that this verse is used is...out of context. It is lifted from its context and preached as the so-called “golden rule.” Such

moralism by itself is far too often portrayed as the “good work” that we need to do if we are to please God and achieve a good standing before Him. As long as we have done more of this than pleasing ourselves, we will be fine, they claim, and God will be fine with us.

There is a lot missing from this analysis. How is it that you get to the point of doing and in fact desiring to do to others as you would have them do to you? How does such selflessness come about? How do you beat back the sin nature to serve others as you would have them serve you?

Only after exercising repentant faith in God through Christ will you be enabled to carry out such a high calling.

Nevertheless, doing to others as love would direct *is* required of all people, and especially believers in Christ. By this, your conduct will be pleasing to God. Non-believers are called to this standard as well—as they are called to all of God’s moral law, but they find it impossible to carry out properly, difficult to understand, or they apply the wrong standard because they have not received the revealed will of God in Scripture to modify their own ideas of what is right and wrong.

### **III. Thinking About this Teaching**

Stop to think about this in your own life. Think about it generically, as regards how you conduct yourself with people in general. Then plug in some names and see how it sounds with “I” instead of “you” and “person X” instead of “men/them.” This will help you see if you are exhibiting the love of God and fulfilling the Law and Prophets.

Think about what you like and don’t like. Think about what you want and don’t want. Think about what you value and do not value. Think about how you like to be treated and how you don’t like to be treated. Think about how you like kind things said about you, about how you like easy-to-get-along with people instead of difficult people. Think about you like friendly people. Then be that way yourself. Recognize other people have the same kinds of likes/values/dislikes/etc. Apply that to how you treat other people, starting right now. Even if they do not reciprocate now, or soon, or forever, you need to do what is right!

We do not start with “X treated me in such-and-such a bad way, so I’m going to return the favor!” No! We start by considering how we would *like* to be treated, and then act that way, regardless of how other people are treating us. Our behavior then becomes standardized by God’s teaching, instead of being justified or guided by the (sinful) behavior of others.

By the way, the Lord Jesus did come to fulfill the Law and Prophets, did He not (5:17)? This means not just that He came to fulfill the predictions, but also the entirety of the instruction of God. This passage's connection to love as a fulfillment of the Law makes me wonder if perhaps we have misunderstood "fulfill" before. Christ came to love God perfectly and fellow humans perfectly ... *that* fulfills the Law, not just the happening of things prophesied in years gone by.

Remember also that we are not to mechanically apply these "rules," just like we were to remember to look at the heart of the Law in Matthew 5. Mere external compliance doesn't cut it. The real spirit or intention of the Law is this: love your neighbor! So we do not help our neighbor because "we have to" but because "we think that is what I would like done for me, and that would please my neighbor, and be a real help to him, and prevent him from some further loss, etc."

#### **IV. Pondering the *Therefore***

It is profitable to think carefully about the connection of this verse to the prior verses.

The illustration the Lord used of a child asking for bread or a fish and receiving a stone or serpent is the immediate context. It illustrated that even evil people give good things to their children because they love them even in their evil. God is far better than evil people and will most certainly give His children what is necessary and good for them.

Since God *is* love, and this is manifested in that He gives good things to those who ask, therefore if you are a repentant person (4:17), a person who wishes to be perfect just as your Father in heaven is perfect (5:48), a person with more righteousness than the scribes and pharisees (5:20), then you will do to others what you would like them to do to you. In other words, you will act in love toward them, because you would like them to act in love toward you.

Do not be stubbornly rebellious or contrarian by saying, "I *want* people to do *bad* to me!" That's just foolish nonsense. Or, "I like to harm people, and I am fine if they do it to me." That is evil thinking, and it comes from a warped mind—if not one that is demon possessed.

The Law and Prophets, equivalent to the law of love, does good to others. When someone asks of you, you will try to give; when someone seeks, you will try to help them find; when someone knocks, you will try to open. And God may just use you as the agent to answer the ask/seek/knock prayers of another person!

Lloyd-Jones<sup>1</sup> suggests that this “therefore” goes back to 7:1-5 and that there is a direct connection with verse 6 and that the “asking” of verses 7-11 has to do with asking for grace to judge well. That all seems too specific to this reader. The teaching on asking and here on “doing to others” is more general than that. But the point is well taken that “do to others what you want them to do to you” does include the issue of judgment. If you do not appreciate someone being super-critical of you, then you should not be that way toward others! It also includes being like God is toward us in our actions toward others. God treats us very well in giving good gifts. We do not deserve such things, but he gives them anyway!

I am brought to the thought as well that doing to others as you would have done to you by them does not mean that there will always be an immediate reciprocation between you and person X. It may be that you learn this virtue and practice it toward some “hard” person X in your life, and God will arrange things so that person Y will come along and treat you in a nice manner. But even if no person Y comes along, we are still enjoined to live toward X as we would wish X would live toward us.

## **Conclusion: Doing**

Not just thinking, pondering, commenting, or connecting it to other texts. Rather, the Lord wants us to observe/keep/obey/follow/put into practice this principle.

We do not obey because we are sinners. We do not obey to our own hurt. Others do not follow this because they too are sinners. We do not do to others as we would have them do to us because we think on our own things, about ourselves, and we do not stop to think about others.

Further, we do not put God first. We have to love God with all our hearts, and *then* we can love our neighbors properly. If we put self first, God and others come last. We have to put God first, and then others will come along in the right order, and then self last.

I wonder...do you think we should treat God as we like him to treat us?

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<sup>1</sup> *Studies in the Sermon on the Mount*, p. 466.