

Do Unto Others Before They Do Unto You? No!

Matthew 7:12; Matthew 22:36-40

December 19, 2021

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God has greatly blessed us in revealing His will in His commandments—both in the Old Testament and in the New Testament. We are not left wondering each day what standard He would have us use to measure whether our hearts, words, and actions are according to His will or not. However, His will does not just fall into our laps out of nowhere. We will need to be diligent in searching His Word to understand His will (“Search the Scriptures” John 5:39), and even more importantly, we will need God’s Spirit to fill us with His understanding and wisdom to know His will and to do it (Ephesians 5:17-18). For having the right standard does not necessarily guarantee that we will use it correctly apart from the work of the Spirit in our minds. The Jews boasted of having the commandments of God, but they were like a blind man using a tape measure who seeks to give the exact dimensions of a house. The tape measure may be accurate, but unless one has eyes to see, one will misuse the tape measure. The same is true spiritually—we must have both the Word (the tape measure) and the Spirit (who alone can give us eyes to see).

There are hundreds of moral commandments in the Bible given to us by God in order to know His will, and because there are so many, we might tend to get lost at times in searching the Scripture to know God’s will. That is why the Lord gives us faithful summaries of His commandments in the Bible. That is what the Ten Commandments are: a faithful summary of God’s will, giving both our duties to God (1-4) and our duties to our neighbor (5-10). Jesus then summarizes the Ten Commandments in even a smaller amount of space: Matthew 22:36-40. In our text today, Jesus gives yet another faithful summary of God’s commandments related to knowing His will and our duty to our neighbor (Matthew 7:12). The main points from our text are: (1) What Is God’s Will in This Commandment? (2) What Does This Commandment Summarize?

I. What Is God’s Will in This Commandment?

A. Before considering this commandment of the Lord Jesus, let us be clear that none of us are made righteous before God on the basis of our law-keeping.

1. Even one violation of God’s commandments in thought, word, or deeds places us under God’s just condemnation (anger—murder, lust—adultery, Matthew 5:21-28; Romans 3:23; Romans 6:23). It is not one sin alone (though that is all that it takes), but sins that reach to the heavens that condemn us before God. We do what we ought not to do (sins of commission), and that which we ought to do, we do not do (sins of omission).

2. As sinners we cannot pay for our sins, it takes one who has not sinned and is able to bear God’s punishment for sin, the sinless Son of God, who alone can take away the guilt and punishment of sin for all who trust Him. All who look away from their own sins and “good deeds” to Jesus Christ are both forgiven all their sins and imputed Christ’s perfect righteousness (1 Timothy 1:15-16; 2 Corinthians 5:21).

3. Therefore, it’s not our failed attempts at law-keeping that save us, but Christ’s perfect law-keeping that is our salvation. And when we are justified before God, He gives us the desire to keep His law out of love for Him and gratitude to Him. We desire to walk in the light as He is in the light. Thus, even the commandment we are considering today is not a commandment that can justify us before God, but a commandment that holds forth God’s will for us to walk therein out of love for Him.

B. Now let’s look at Christ’s commandment and make several observations about what is sometimes called “The Golden Rule” because of its precious value like gold (Matthew 7:12).

1. First, “Therefore” indicates that the Golden Rule is connected to what He had previously

stated. Jesus had just preached that we are to stop judging sinfully (Matthew 7:1), but are rather to judge righteously (John 7:24—the right standard, the right motive, and the right goal). Gossip about the private sins of others is judging sinfully. Angry outbursts in tearing someone down rather than speaking the truth in love to them is judging sinfully. Judging by our own mere opinion or that of others (rather than according to God’s Word) is judging sinfully. Judging to make ourselves appear righteous in order to elevate ourselves in the eyes of others is judging sinfully. None of these examples express love for God or love for our neighbor. Jesus connects the Golden Rule to what was said about judging others. We should correct others in the way that we would want others to correct us. This is simply a summary statement of love for our neighbor (spouse, child, brother/sister).

2. Second, the Golden Rule is not just a nice suggestion of Jesus that is optional for us to follow. It is a commandment of the Lord which we are to obey out of love for Him (“DO YE even so to them”). This commandment is in the Greek present tense (“DO YE CONTINUOUSLY even so to them”). Don’t stop doing so just because that person is stubborn, hostile, angry, profane, or makes himself your enemy. We need to ask, seek, and knock for God’s grace to help us, because we are weak, defensive, and vindictive. Our sinful response is rather to do to them as they have done to us; but no, Jesus commands just the opposite. That means we need to stop and think before responding to our spouse, to our child, to an offensive email or text, or to an insulting comment from a co-worker. How would I want to be treated if I were that person? Angry retribution—an eye for an eye? Or speaking the truth in love (Matthew 5:44; Romans 12:14)? We can stand for the truth without rendering evil for evil—doing to them as they have done to us (Romans 12:17,19).

3. Third, the Golden Rule is stated in the form of a positive commandment. It doesn’t just forbid us from doing to others what was done to us. It doesn’t just prohibit an angry response. It is a positive command to do what we would want spoken/done to us if we were the offending party. Loving our neighbor is not simply a matter of doing no harm to them, but rather of doing good to them. Thus, this commandment of Jesus does not permit us to be passive and silent when we are verbally attacked; we are to do good to them (Romans 12:20-21).

4. Fourth, the Golden Rule doesn’t simply apply to small or slight offenses against us. It applies to all offenses committed against us (“Therefore ALL THINGS whatsoever”). We may like to limit in what ways we are willing to obey this command, but Jesus does not give us that option to pick and choose when we will obey Him as Lord. Even if we are hurt greatly by what is said/done to us, we are to follow this positive command. He does not say, “Therefore SOMETHINGS whatsoever”, but “Therefore ALL THINGS whatsoever”. When we narrow His command, we are no longer His servant—we are acting as His Lord, dictating to Him.

5. Fifth, the Golden Rule does not only apply to those who are our friends, but also to those who make themselves our enemies (“ye would that MEN [in general—not just friends] should do to you”). Just as Jesus commanded, “Love your ENEMIES” and do them good (Matthew 5:44), so likewise God commanded Israel to do the same (Exodus 23:4-5). Loving those who make themselves our enemy also means we defend the truth, we rebuke, we reprove, we speak the truth, but we do so not out of personal anger, bitterness, hatred, or vindictiveness, nor out of pride and self-exaltation, but out of love for God, love for the truth, and love to see even enemies turn to the truth and become friends by God’s grace.

6. Sixth, the Golden Rule is not a rule to be abused by the law-breaker to his/her own sinful advantage. When Christ’s command is used to justify some sin, error, or crime by not rendering a just judgment or punishment, then it becomes not a law of love, but a law in promoting injustice. For example, when the arrested thief can turn the Golden Rule on its head by saying, “Since I would release you if you were caught stealing or looting, you ought to do the same to me.” “Since I would tolerate your error, you must tolerate mine.” “Since I would not rebuke your obstinate sin, you cannot rebuke my obstinate sin.” In none of those examples would we be doing good to our neighbor. We would be doing evil to our neighbor and expecting our neighbor to do evil to us in return. This commandment means, “Do GOOD to others as you

would have them do GOOD to you”; not let me be irresponsible as I would let you be irresponsible, or let me do evil as I would let you do evil.

II. What Does This Commandment Summarize?

A. In the last few words of this verse, Jesus gives to the Jews to whom He was speaking a biblical reason for this commandment (“FOR this is the law and the prophets”).

1. If any of the Jewish leaders should balk at this command, declaring that this command is not found in God’s Law in the Old Testament, Jesus declares this commandment is a summary of God’s Moral Law. This is not a new commandment, but one that God gave in substance to Moses and the prophets: Exodus 23:4-5; Leviticus 19:18,34; Psalm 35:11-14; Proverbs 25:21.

2. Why is it important that Jesus added this as a biblical reason for this commandment? It is important because it demonstrates the unity of God’s Word—the Moral Law of the Old Testament is yet binding upon us in the New Testament. Many churches and professing Christians today sadly cite the Golden Rule as that which they should keep and follow because it is in the New Testament and not the Law of Moses. But Jesus teaches that the Golden Rule is simply a summary of our duty to our neighbor that is found in the Law of Moses and in the prophets. Whenever someone claims a right to do what is wrong because they are not under the law but under grace, they are abusing the teaching of Scripture. They falsely claim they do not have to follow the Ten Commandments any longer—“Jesus has set me free from the law and I am under grace” (Romans 6:14—we are not under the condemnation of God’s law or under the law to be justified before God); but the God’s Moral Law is yet God’s light to our path that we might walk in His will, that we might know how to love and serve the Lord, and that we might submit to His Lordship (Matthew 5:17-19; Romans 3:31; Romans 7:12; James 2:8—“the royal law”). Jesus did not die that we might become lawless, but that we might by His grace, power, and Spirit walk in faithfulness and obedience to His Moral Law in our sanctification.

3. When Jesus states that “this is the law and the prophets”, He is not replacing or abolishing God’s Moral Law. He is not giving us a different moral standard than the law and the prophets. He is actually giving us a reason to keep His commandment (the Golden rule): this is what the Law of Moses and the prophets also teach. This is simply a summary of God’s Moral Law as found in the Old Testament. When you summarize a document/article, you do not intend to replace the original document/article. Likewise the Golden Rule doesn’t replace or abolish God’s Moral Law but briefly summarizes it (Matthew 22:36-40; Romans 13:10). The **Moral Law** is perpetual; whereas the **Ceremonial Law** is abolished in Christ’s death and the **Judicial Law** is expired as it relates to those laws uniquely belonging to the Jews dwelling in the Promise Land.

B. It is time to examine ourselves in the light of Christ’s commandment (the Golden Rule). We all fail to keep this commandment and that is why we need a Savior. When we do so, we repent, seek His forgiveness, and renew our obedience. Let this Golden Rule prevail at home, at work, and in the church. If you want to know God’s will in responding to one another, ask yourself, “How would I want my neighbor to speak/act toward me?” Then do so to him/her. This is the love of God in action. Jesus says, “If ye love me, keep my commandments.”

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