

A TRULY GOLDEN RULE

Matthew 7:12 2016 ESV

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

INTRODUCTION

Our world loves what it calls “the golden rule”: Do unto others as you would have them do unto you. Treat others as you yourself would want to be treated. Do unto others and so forth.

The Wikipedia page on “The Golden Rule” says “It is a maxim that is found in most religions and cultures.” The page goes on to say that the idea of the “golden rule” goes back hundreds of years before Christ to Confucius. One author says it is found in Buddhism, Islam, Christianity, Hinduism, Taoism, Judaism, Zoroastrianism, and most of the world’s religions. Another author, the Humanist Chaplain at Harvard University, says “belief in God is not necessary for the golden rule.”

But the world’s “golden rule” is not Jesus’ golden rule, as we will see this morning. It is an edited version. It has a different definition of love than we see in Scripture. It has a different hope for the world. It has a different goal than what Jesus gives us.

THE CONTEXT FOR [MATTHEW 7:12](#)

If I was teaching a class on Bible study, and you dozed off, and woke up with me expecting you to answer the question I just asked, “context” is probably the right answer. The Scripture tells us what it means; the answer to almost any question about the Bible is going to be found in the Bible itself.

So to understand [Matthew 7:12](#), we need to get the context set in our minds.

Context Chart

Context is actually very simple. There is the verse itself, then the paragraph the verse is found in, then the extended passage. After that is the book itself, other works by the same author, the Testament, and then the entire Bible.

[Matthew 7:12](#) Context Chart

Since we are looking at [Matthew 7:12](#), the paragraph is [Matthew 7:1-12](#), the extended passage is [Matthew 5-7](#), the Sermon on the Mount; the book is the Gospel of Matthew; Matthew didn't write any other books; then, the Gospels, the New Testament, and the entire Bible.

What does the context of [Matthew 7:12](#) tell us? It tells us that [Matthew 7:12](#) is not about being nice to people and doing nice things. It tells us that [Matthew 7:12](#) is about true righteousness, as Jesus has already defined it. It tells us that [Matthew 7:12](#) means leaving condemning judgement to God the Judge. It tells us that [Matthew 7:12](#) means worrying more about your own sin than the sin of others. And it also tells us that [Matthew 7:12](#) calls for discernment, recognizing when someone is unworthy of the Gospel. That is, [Matthew 7:12](#) is loving, but it is also wise.

This is why [Matthew 7:12](#) is a Truly Golden Rule. The “golden rule” of the world is fool’s gold. What Jesus gives us in [Matthew 7:12](#) is worth infinitely more than gold, because it fulfills the Law and the Prophets. It is based on heights of love that only God’s people can comprehend. It embodies a hope that reaches into eternity. And there is a purpose for obedience that only Christians can appreciate.

THE HEIGHTS OF LOVE

The world’s definition of love has almost nothing to do with genuine love. The world defines love as a feeling that one person has about someone or something else. It is emotional, not practical. That’s why unbelievers will hold up signs at protests, thinking that they are accomplishing something meaningful or useful. What they are actually doing is pleasing themselves, stimulating their own feelings, so that they leave with a high view of themselves. They are not concerned whether or not someone else will benefit from their actions; they are content to give expression to their own emotions.

But the Scriptures give us a definition of love that is sound, practical, and godly. It actually means something. Jesus summarizes it here in [Matthew 7:12](#), just as it is summarized in [Leviticus 19:18](#) and [First John 5:2-3](#).

Leviticus 19:18 2016 ESV

You shall not take vengeance or bear a grudge against the sons of your own people, but you shall love your neighbor as yourself: I am the LORD.

1 John 5:2-3 2016 ESV

By this we know that we love the children of God, when we love God and obey his commandments. For this is the love of God, that we keep his commandments. And his commandments are not burdensome.

A fuller definition of this love is found in places like Ten Commandments ([Exodus 20:1-17](#)), which commands us to honor our parents, to not commit murder or adultery, to not steal, or lie, or covet one another's possessions.

We also see love defined in [First Corinthians 13](#), especially [First Corinthians 13:4-7](#):

1 Corinthians 13:4-7 2016 ESV

Love is patient and kind; love does not envy or boast; it is not arrogant or rude. It does not insist on its own way; it is not irritable or resentful; it does not rejoice at wrongdoing, but rejoices with the truth. Love bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things.

If we faithfully follow the Ten Commandments and [First Corinthians 13:4-7](#) and similar passages in Scripture, we will be following the Truly Golden Rule.

ETERNAL HOPE

Why does the world find their "golden rule" so attractive? Because it sounds so good. John Lennon sang "All You Need Is Love" – of course, he sang this while he was committing adultery, and shortly before abandoning his wife and their 5-year-old son. Those of the world often talk about love and their "golden rule," but they clearly follow another rule, one that I'll call the "the mirror rule": it's all about them. Where Jesus says, "whatever you wish that others would do to you, do all to them," the world says, "whatever you wish that others would do to you, you have a right to, but you don't owe anything to them, because you deserve it more than they do."

But our hope is not for people to be nicer, or for heaven to exist on earth, but eternal life in the Kingdom of our God and Father. That hope is infinitely above our hopes and dreams on earth. And so we can do what Jesus commands in [Matthew 5:43-46](#),

Matthew 5:43 2016 ESV

“You have heard that it was said, ‘You shall love your neighbor and hate your enemy.’

– which is exactly the world’s way of loving; this is their “mirror rule” –

Matthew 5:44–45 2016 ESV

But I say to you, Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, so that you may be sons of your Father who is in heaven. For he makes his sun rise on the evil and on the good, and sends rain on the just and on the unjust.

It’s clear from our present culture that enemies are not to be forgive and loved and prayed for, but canceled and hated and dominated.

But because we have an eternal hope in Jesus Christ, and because we ourselves are made subjects of His saving love and forgiveness, and because we ourselves have been rescued from the miry clay of sin, and have been adopted into the family of God, we can treat others not only as we WISH to be treated, but as we HAVE been treated by our Father in heaven. What is the best and greatest thing I can wish for you? That you and I would share in Christ’s glory and heaven’s joys together for all eternity. We have a hope that the world cannot comprehend. The Truly Golden Rules lays up treasures in heaven.

MEANINGFUL OBEDIENCE

What does the world achieve by obeying its “golden rule”? I have no idea, and I don’t think anyone else does either, because they never actually obey even their own version of it. Read the news; look at social media; listen to unbelievers around you. Every single one of them would probably gladly say the “golden rule” is a good way to live, but they aren’t living that. Conflict and angry and division and hostility dominates the world. If the world took even the basic “golden rule” seriously – do unto others as you would have them do unto you – it would be a very different place. Political campaigns would not be so hostile. Social media would not be a profane cesspool. We would accomplish more because people would be willing to give up their rights on occasion to achieve something for someone else. But the sin nature prevents that sort of selfless thinking. The world’s “golden rule”, as I said a few minutes ago, is really the “mirror rule,” because it is primarily focused on self.

But what do we achieve by following the Truly Golden Rule? We will be living in obedience to God’s Word. He will be glorified by our obedience, because He makes it possible through the Holy Spirit’s work within us. When we walk in the Spirit, He produces in us His fruit:

Galatians 5:22–23 2016 ESV

But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control; against such things there is no law.

The Truly Golden Rule is full of these: love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control.

And our obedience will mean that our love possesses genuine substance and meaning, and is not just words. [First John 3:18](#) will be true of us,

1 John 3:18 2016 ESV

Little children, let us not love in word or talk but in deed and in truth.

As the Scripture says, we will “do good to everyone, and especially to those who are of the household of faith.” ([Galatians 6:10](#))

Paul writes in [Colossians 3:12-17](#),

Colossians 3:12-17 2016 ESV

Put on then, as God’s chosen ones, holy and beloved, compassionate hearts, kindness, humility, meekness, and patience, bearing with one another and, if one has a complaint against another, forgiving each other; as the Lord has forgiven you, so you also must forgive. And above all these put on love, which binds everything together in perfect harmony. And let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, to which indeed you were called in one body. And be thankful. Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly, teaching and admonishing one another in all wisdom, singing psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, with thankfulness in your hearts to God. And whatever you do, in word or deed, do everything in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him.

You see, the Truly Golden Rule is rich, practical, meaningful, godly, gracious, holy, and good in every sense of the word. It provides a practical, measurable, tangible benefit to others.

That’s because glorifying and obeying our God will bring about the best works and attitudes toward others. He never commands hatred or intolerance. We are not to leave sin unaddressed within the church – God judges those who are outside; we are to be concerned about brothers and sisters in Christ – but we are never to act with intolerance or judgment. When we obey the Truly Golden Rule, things WILL be better.

BRINGING IT HOME

What does the Truly Golden Rule say? It tells us that fulfilling the Law and the Prophets and the teachings of Jesus and His apostles is the very definition of love. It tells us that pleasing God, not man, is our goal. It tells us that when we live according to Scripture, and glorify God in our words and deeds, other people receive the greatest possible benefit.

It should be clear that following the Truly Golden Rule is impossible for those who are not born again in Jesus Christ. Man's sinful nature makes it impossible to fulfill even the shallow, worldly "golden rule," even though it simply tries to satisfy emotions. As it turns out, and as our world is proving even today, jealousy and antagonism just taste better than love, especially when it comes to loving those who are hard to love. There is only one answer for the sin nature that infects us all: new birth. We don't need a second chance at the same life; we need a new birth and a new life. That's what we receive in Jesus Christ, by grace alone, and through faith alone. Those who are born again receive the Holy Spirit, and the Spirit is the means by which we are able to live in obedience to Jesus Christ.

You will probably look at your life and see all the times that you failed to live by the Truly Golden Rule. You might realize that you have allowed the world to define what it means to love others. You might have followed the world's pattern of talking about love but never actually acting on it. You might have tried to love in deed and truth, and discovered how difficult it can actually be.

This is what Paul says about love in [Romans 5](#):

Romans 5:6-8 2016 ESV

For while we were still weak, at the right time Christ died for the ungodly. For one will scarcely die for a righteous person—though perhaps for a good person one would dare even to die— but God shows his love for us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us.

The love of God – which is the standard for our love – was proven on the cross, when His Son, Jesus Christ, died for sinners. I would not sacrifice my son, or my daughters, for anyone; that’s just the simple truth. If, when they were little, we had been at a movie theater, and a fire broke out, I would have given my life trying to save them, but I would not have left them in order to save someone else’s child. But God shows His love for us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us. He gave His only begotten Son, that the one believing in Him would not perish but have everlasting life. This is love, not that we loved God, but that He loved us, and sent His Son to be the satisfaction for our sins.

The “golden rule” of the world is mere words. The Truly Golden Rule given to us by Jesus Christ is action and deeds, and it is the height holiness. It isn’t going to be easy or quick. It is going to be costly and difficult. We will be pressed so hard by it at times that we will cry out to the Lord because it seems so impossible. But the Father is faithful, and His Spirit will produce His fruit within us when we walk in Him. He is faithful and just, and will forgive our sins as we confess them. He is faithful, and will continue His good work in us until He is satisfied, and we are like His Son. Look to Jesus! Look to the Savior to save you! Look to the Lord to lead you! Look to Jesus!