

Matthew 7:12

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Date: 15 July 2018

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[0 : 00] Do you know anybody who doesn't like the golden rule?! I mean, there are plenty of things in the Bible that our society dislikes, right?

! But it's not this one. Even people who dislike Christianity say, I wish everyone would do more of that. The world would be a better place all around if we did.

And that's true. The world would be a better place if everyone practiced the golden rule consistently. But if the whole world agrees that we should practice the golden rule, and it truly would make the world a better place, why don't we do it?

That's the real question. Why don't we, if we all agree that the golden rule is a good thing, the best thing even, the simplest and most thoughtful rule of human behavior, why don't we actually do it?

I mean, certainly we do it sometimes. Sometimes we look around and see Christians and non-Christians alike following this ethic sometimes.

[1 : 23] It seems that everyone likes this rule sometimes. Typically when it calls for love that isn't too difficult, or when the person we're serving is particularly close or particularly important to us.

We all recognize that a world marked by the golden rule would be better than the one we have, but we only see people and ourselves, if we're honest, following it some of the time.

You know, I'm grateful that people follow it at all. We could live in a world where no one thought of others, never acted selflessly.

That would be a terrible thing to behold. A world of pure self-interest. But by God's great grace, that's not the world we live in.

He made humanity in his own image, so as much as we may fight against it, his good law still weighs on our hearts which were made like him and for him.

[2 : 38] And that bubbles up into following the golden rule sometimes. But Jesus isn't content with sometimes. He gives us an always kind of command here, doesn't he?

Let's think about why we do it only sometimes. When we end up living out the golden rule, who do we do it towards? When we are actually faithful to it, who is it to?

Generally, those who do it to us. People who treat us the way we want to be treated. Family, well, sometimes family. Friends.

Maybe those we would like to impress. Right? We find it pretty easy to treat them the way they'd like, but you and I tend to ignore the rest of the world when it comes to the golden rule.

Jesus isn't okay with that. Back in chapter 5, verses 43 to 47, this is what he had to say about that. You have heard it said, or that it was said, you shall love your neighbor and hate your enemy.

[3 : 58] 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.

For if you love those who love you, what reward do you have? Do not even the tax collectors do the same? And if you greed only your brothers, what more are you doing than others?

Do not even the Gentiles do the same? Sometimes doesn't cut it with Jesus. And honestly, sometimes isn't the kind of world that you and I want to live in.

Jesus wants us to keep doing good to those who love us. Excellent. But that's not even half. That's not even half of what he wants from us and for us.

It goes further. First, he wants people to show this golden love to those who we typically ignore. It goes even further. Second, he desires we show this golden love to our enemies.

[5 : 17] So let's take a good, hard look at ourselves. How are we doing with that? How about relationships with people of whom you have very little in common?

Politically. Socially. Racially. How do you do with the golden rule there? The harder question is think of your most difficult relationship.

Have you excused yourself from following the golden rule here? With someone who has hurt you deeply to the point where you think maybe it's beyond repair?

And every small hurt causes waves of pain and anger. Does your heart go out to them as your Savior has called you to?

Do you treat them as he commands? Or are we a sometimes kind of people? If we are going to obey Jesus more than sometimes, we need to ask, why don't we follow the golden rule?

[6 : 37] Why are we a sometimes kind of people? And I think the answer is right there in the verse itself. Right inside the golden rule.

Jesus says, So whatever you wish that others would do to you, do also to them. You see, Jesus knows something about you and about me.

We are always thinking about ourselves. We can't really help it. We might be a sometimes kind of people when it comes to following the golden rule, but we are an always kind of people when it comes to thinking about ourselves.

And even when we selflessly deny our desires, we still know just what those desires are.

We cannot help but know what we want. We can't help wanting them. John Calvin put it like this, Where our own advantage is concerned, there is not one of us who cannot explain minutely and ingeniously what ought to be done.

[7 : 50] Every man shows himself to be an exact scholar of his own advantage. That's even true when we're indecisive.

We can't pick a restaurant, but we still know we want to please our taste buds. And this exact knowledge of how we'd like things to go for us, that's what we have to say.

We have to say no to when we follow the golden rule. And that's what we have to say yes to when we ignore it. There is no supercomputer on earth, more precisely calibrated on a target as our hearts are set on our own desires.

I know that's true. I know that's true. I know that's true because we, myself included, choose our own way over the golden rule, which we all agree is best, every single day.

Now the world would be a better place if everyone followed his rule consistently, but we don't. And the problem isn't out there somewhere, right? My devotion to my self-interest, that's the problem.

[9 : 14] And that's what the Bible calls sin. The deeds that come from that devotion are sinful acts, but the devotion itself, my commitment to my own way, that's what God calls a sinful heart.

I was born with one of those, and you were born with one of those, and the whole world was born with one of those. And so for this to change, for us to change, we need more than a persuasive argument.

We don't need to be taught the golden rule is best. We already agree with that. We don't need education or instruction because the problem doesn't reside in our minds.

We already agree. The problem is our devotion to our own self-interest. And that's a heart-deep commitment. What we need isn't so much a new set of arguments.

We need a new devotion, new affection, new desire. And that is what the Bible calls worship. So what we've said so far, first, the world agrees that the golden rule is the best rule of life.

[10 : 33] And we all follow it. Sometimes. Sometimes. And when we don't follow it, it's because we prioritize something else.

We prioritize. We worship ourselves, our own desires. So how do we fix that problem? Well, first, here's how not to fix that.

The golden rule, and I think I've heard these arguments made, and so I'd like to disabuse us of these notions. The golden rule doesn't mean leverage your karma.

See, there's a way we could still be devoted to ourselves following this. Follow with me if you can. If I'm devoted to my own self-interest, maybe I can convince myself to follow this golden rule in the short term because in the end, all those good deeds, all those positive feelings will come back to me.

Right? All that good karma will come back, and so it's actually good for me. And so I can serve my own self-interest by following the golden rule. Maybe I can remain truly devoted to myself, to my best interest, by forgoing my desires in this moment so that later on I'll get a better return on my investment.

[11 : 59] In other words, I can look at it as a long-term transaction. What goes around comes around with interest, and think of it as deferred gratification.

Which means that I'm trying to leverage my self-worship and follow the golden rule by playing the long game. Give in order to get.

Help in order to be helped. Encourage in order to reap a better harvest. And, you know, the weird thing about it is there is some truth to this. People who are kind to others are generally treated more kindly.

People who are helpful often find more help. But the golden rule is not karma. Jesus isn't teaching us to optimize our outcomes.

He is actually teaching us to genuinely love others. Plus, putting your trust in karma takes a lot of faith. See, everyone else in the world has this same worship disorder that I was born with.

[13 : 08] So, I can't rely on them to give me back the good things I'm hoping to earn with my kindness. And since I can't count on people, I might have to rely on the universe to deliver it to me instead.

To repay me for my good karma. And I don't know about you, but throughout the years, I have found the universe to be a very bad accountant when it comes to repaying me for my good deeds. Friends, karma won't cut it. I don't have enough faith in the universe to repay me, and even if I did, it's still basically love for myself. And so, it contradicts the golden rule.

And, since it's still self-focused, I'm training myself to continue thinking about me. Worshiping me. Which means that eventually, I'm going to say, you know what, in this situation, the math doesn't work out. But, the short-term gain of not loving you, far outweighs the long-term karma, and that moment is going to come sooner rather than later.

[14 : 31] Jesus does not intend for us to generate a heart of love by doubling down on serving ourselves. The golden rule doesn't mean leverage your karma.

It also doesn't mean live and let live. Another way we can try to fulfill, sort of, the golden rule is to very subtly change it.

If you run a web search on the golden rule, you'll soon see that versions of it pop up in other religions and philosophies. Now, that's not because Jesus copied someone else.

It's because he made us all in his own image, and we can't help having his moral standards bubble up from out of our hearts, even when we only follow it sometimes.

But those other versions of the golden rule almost all have a subtle but significant shift from what Jesus says. I'll give you a few of them.

[15 : 35] the ancient Greeks said, avoid doing what you would blame others for doing. Confucius said, what you do not wish for yourself do not do to others.

The Buddhist scriptures say, hurt not others in ways that you yourself would find hurtful. the Wiccan book of the way says, that which ye deem harmful unto thyself, the very same shall ye be forbidden from doing unto another.

The Jewish people of Jesus' day had a book called the book of Tobit which said, what you hate do not do to anyone.

How is that different from what Jesus says? All of those are framed negatively. You can summarize all those other statements with Google's old motto.

Have you heard of it? Don't be evil? That was their original motto. I'm not sure if you knew that. It's still in some of their ethical literature.

[16 : 53] But can you spot the difference between that and what Jesus says here? See, in theory, don't be evil restrains evil.

But it does not promote good in any way. You can fulfill all those versions of the golden rule by doing nothing.

by ignoring everyone around you. So long as you don't harm them, you've fulfilled your duty. They prohibit me from doing evil but don't require me to do anything good.

But Jesus does not let us do nothing. Whatever you wish that others would do to you, do also to them.

Jesus commands activity. Which means that Jesus commands introverts like me to reach out and talk to that person who really needs it even if that's not what I want to do.

[17 : 57] Imagine if Jesus had followed live and let live. We would still be dead in our sins. The golden rule doesn't mean leverage your karma.

It doesn't mean live and let live and it doesn't mean set a reasonable bar for yourself. This is the most dangerous trap of all.

Some people look at the end of the verse this is the law and the prophets and assume I can do this to God's satisfaction. I've been commanded I'm going to do it and make him happy.

And when I do it he'll be pleased with me. I'll be saved. I'll be good with God welcomed into heaven by following the golden rule.

If you think you can do this two things are true. First you have to grade yourself on a curve or a sliding scale. You just have to ignore all the places in your life where you don't treat others with a golden love.

[19 : 05] love. And Jesus isn't into lowering the bar. Right after he said love your enemy he said you therefore must be perfect as your heavenly father is perfect.

That's not lowering the bar. He doesn't let us out of that. And more troubling the second thing that is true is that if I think I can satisfy God's law so fully that he'd owe me anything I have become the good news in my own eyes.

I am the gospel. There is no higher blasphemy and there is no higher foolishness than that.

The golden rule doesn't work when we leverage our karma. It doesn't mean live and let live. We don't fulfill it when we set a reasonable standard for ourselves.

We need a better solution. One that works better than transactional karma. One that works broader than live and let live.

[20 : 29] One that recognizes that Jesus sets the bar super naturally high. We need a solution that works in the hardest of situations.

Not just following the golden rule for the people we love. We need power to follow the golden rule when it's inconvenient. We need a solution that works when the golden rule feels terrible to us.

Loving when it's costly. Loving our enemies. Those who hate us. And that solution exists.

Jesus gives us the answer to it in verse 12. It is the most important word in the whole verse.

what do you think it is? Is it the word whatever reminding us that there's no exclusion to where this is covering?

[21 : 39] Is it the word others telling us where our focus must rest? Is it do reminding us that this is an active command?

the most important word in the golden rule is its first word so. So reminds us the golden rule does not stand on its own.

It is not just a proverb to slap on a picture frame and look at as you pass by. It's not just a reminder that stands by itself.

It is not an isolated command for God's people. It's built on something. It rests on the truth that came before in verse 11.

That last passage verses 7 through 11 was about going to God in prayer for everything. What did Jesus tell us last week in verses 7 through 11?

[22 : 50] Christians can go to the God who created the stars at any time for any reason. Why?

Verse 11. They have the infinite God as Father.

God will live to this out. So friends before we go any further forward I can't offer you the power to live this out and I can't remind you of this highest privilege unless God is your Heavenly Father.

Here's how that can be possible for you. Jesus lived this golden rule at its absolute hardest.

We by nature and by choice are devoted to ourselves. That may not seem that terrible but before the throne of the perfect one to whom all praise and obedience is due that is treason.

[24 : 04] We were born his enemies. And to be a traitor to the most high God is a path that leads to hell. But Jesus loved traitors with a golden love.

He did for us what we would have wanted if we even knew what to ask for rescue. He came to us stood in our place and willingly went to the cross and suffered a traitor's!

That's what crucifixion was reserved for slaves and traitors in the Roman Empire. And on the third day he cast off the bonds of death rose to everlasting life friends the tomb is empty.

And because he satisfied the demands of justice he now offers pardon to traitors like us. So for all who renounce self devotion and trust in his cross and in his empty tomb he gives pardon and new life a home in heaven a family in the church of God and we have a new relationship we have God as father.

So if you've never done it please will you repent and believe and receive his grace. And from that point all of us who have God as father everyone for whom Jesus has bought the right to be called children of the most high God verse 11 tells us that we have access to him in prayer at any time for any reason and verse 12 starts with the word so because it's built on that same truth the golden rule on that ground we can pray to God because he's our father and we can love with a supernatural love only because God is our father we can hope to live the golden rule because we have God as father how does that work how does having God as father give us power to fulfill the golden rule in two ways first it gives us truth to remember and second it gives us something to do truth to remember we said already we don't need just good arguments to convince our minds to agree with the golden rule we need new desires in our hearts because that's what stops us from living out what we already agree is best and having

[27 : 10] God as father speaks exactly the kinds of truths that change hearts truth to remember when it looks like following the golden rule won't be appreciated having God as father changes everything we have a loving heavenly father so we don't have to extract affection and appreciation from others we already possess his love greater than any earthly love so self interest doesn't really have to enter our calculations anymore we are already loved completely and forever and so if I love and I'm not appreciated in return that is not what I was there to do anyway

I've already satisfied that need in God truth to remember when it looks like following the golden rule will cost too much having God as father changes everything we have a giving heavenly father so we don't have to use others to get what we want he has already given us the greatest gifts of all he gave his son for our redemption he gives himself as our father he gives his holy spirit to all his children as comfort and power and promise that this is just the beginning of the inexhaustible riches he plans to pour out on us his beloved children friends we don't need to be stingy when it comes to showing love because we have an eternal inheritance beyond measuring truth to remember when following the golden rule looks loathsome because it would mean doing good to an enemy having God his father changes everything we have a loving heavenly heavenly father so we don't have to get even while human hatred may come and go his love will never disappear and his love is a taller mountain than anyone else's hatred is a valley his love for me outweighs any human hatred even my own so we can give love even when it hurts even when it's not returned even when it's repaid with insult because we stand under a bigger and better love than the hate even our greatest enemy could ever drum up having

God as father changes everything Jesus gave himself for us so we can give ourselves to others truth to remember and I pray that those are precious truths for you and I hope they do indeed change your heart as you meditate on them and I hope they drive you one step further from your own meditation into your father's presence that's the something to do Jesus commands to do to others what we'd like done for us is an echo of what he did for us at the cross when we stood beneath an unquenchable guilt he did for us what we most needed he rescued us by sacrificing himself on the cross and because of that everyone who repents and believes is reconciled to the living

God reconciliation means all those truths we just discussed are real for his children and reconciliation means help is near at hand in that moment because he is near at hand always something to do when following the golden rule won't pay off for you don't simply remember the truth that God is the better portion go seek your father and see that it's true look to him find him in his word behold the weight of his glory and recognize that the cost of loving the person in front of you looks big only when you don't have a big God in front of your eyes something to do when following the golden rule will feel awful because the person you're called to love hates you don't just remember that Jesus loved you when you were his enemy go to him in prayer and feel the weight of it pray

[33 : 16] Jesus you allowed them to nail your hands your feet to that cross out of love for me will you overwhelm me with the magnitude of your love will you help me stand here loved beyond understanding and turn to my brother and sister in love as well something to do and when you grow weary from following the golden rule towards the same person again again and again don't just remember that Jesus purchased for you the indwelling Holy Spirit to empower you for works of righteousness go to him and be strengthened by his presence let us be people on our knees confessing in humility to the

Lord begging him Lord by your spirit work obedience to this most beautiful Christ exalting commandment in us so friends let's go to him in prayer now Lord thank you that you have established for us the greatest ethic the world has ever known Lord thank you that you have not only proclaimed it to us but that you sent your son and he lived it out on the greatest stage for us on behalf of us and so Lord I ask that you would not only convince us that it is good and right but Lord that you would swell our hearts with joy and gratitude and so empower us to do this Lord by your spirit work obedience to this commandment in us we pray these things in the name of Jesus Christ our King Amen