

Matthew 7:12

<https://thebiblesays.com/commentary/matt/matt-7/matthew-712/>

Jesus commands His disciples in every circumstance to treat people the same way we want them to treat us. This is both a distillation of everything He has been teaching throughout His Sermon on the Mount, and a distillation of the Old Covenant delivered through Moses.

The parallel account of this teaching is found in Luke 6:31.

Jesus summarizes the main social ethic of His kingdom platform. This command is often called “the golden rule.” It is nearly identical to the chief social rule taught by Moses, “you shall love your neighbor as yourself; I am the Lord” (Leviticus 19:18).

Jesus taught: *In everything, therefore, treat people the same way you want them to treat you.* He includes the word, *therefore*, to demonstrate how this ethic is an important culmination of what He has been teaching all along.

The golden rule is the principle behind the particular commands Christ has cited such as: do not murder or harbor hatred in your heart toward a brother (Matthew 5:21-22); settle your debts and seek reconciliation (Matthew 5:23-26); do not commit adultery or lust after a woman (Matthew 5:27); do not be false with your oaths (Matthew 5:33-37); turn the other cheek, go the extra mile, and do not turn away a borrower (Matthew 5:39-42).

Christ’s golden rule is also a broadening of the mercy principle. The mercy principle teaches that we receive mercy and forgiveness from God on the basis of the mercy and forgiveness we offer others (Matthew 5:7, 6:12, 14-15). We offer mercy because we want mercy for ourselves. Likewise, the golden rule is an expansion of the judgment principle, “For in the way you judge you will be judged; and by your standard of measure, it will be measured to you” (Matthew 7:2). Both the mercy principle and the judgment principle point to the fullness of the golden rule, which applies not only to mercy and judgment, but *everything*. There is no occasion, circumstance, or *way* where Christ’s followers are not to apply this principle in how they *treat* other *people*.

Jesus teaches His disciples to *treat people the same way you want them to treat you*. Christ assumes a built-in mechanism of acting according to one’s self-interest within every human being. Christ assumes everyone wants to be treated with fairness, kindness, and mercy. And a big part of why this principle is so powerful is because His assumption is true. Everyone always seeks what they perceive to be in their self-interest.

Christ’s command is a call to action. Instead of saying “don’t *treat people* in any way you would not *want them to treat you*,” Jesus frames His command positively. He declares the *way* we should act and *treat people*. This positive, active framework goes beyond a bare command to avoid something negative. If Christ’s command was negative, it could be obeyed by doing nothing. But the Messiah is not calling people to merely avoid messing up. He is calling them to

act in love. And love often requires action rather than inaction. By framing His words positively, Jesus's command applies both ways. In treating *people the same way we want them to treat* us, we are both actively doing for *them* the kind of things we would like *them to* do for us, and we are avoiding doing the kind of things to *them* that we would dislike if done to us.

Jesus underscores the centrality of this ethical summary, *for this is the Law and the Prophets*. If we do this one thing, we are obeying the entire Old Testament. Christ's teaching does not replace the Law of Moses. It fulfills it (Matthew 5:17, John 1:17).

Biblical Text

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