

# **The Most Famous Thing Jesus Said**

## **Matthew 7:7-12**

**A sermon preached by Dr. Calvin Warpula  
at the West University Church of Christ,  
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What statement from Jesus is universally famous? What did Jesus say that is quoted around the world? If you were to ask the man on the street today, what words of Jesus does he remember, what would he say? Most people would immediately think of what is called “the golden rule” that is found in the gospel of Matthew, chapter 7 and verse 12. “So in everything, do to others what you would have them do to you, for this sums up the Law and the Prophets.”

This statement concludes the teaching in the Sermon on the Mount. The verses following this to the end of the seventh chapter are exhortations to obey what Jesus had taught in chapters 5, 6, and the first part of 7.

### **The Contexts of What Jesus Said**

One of the first things we need to do is to set this statement in context. First, to get the larger context of this verse we must go back to the beginning of the sermon. Jesus is not speaking to the world at large but to his disciples. The qualities of the beatitudes are of those that follow Jesus, not people in the world. “Blessed are the poor in spirit” are those that recognize their spiritual bankruptcy before God. “Blessed are those that mourn” are those that know the depth of their sins and grieve over them. “Blessed are the meek” are those that are dependent on God for everything and that have a gentle, controlled spirit that submits to him. “Blessed are those that hunger and thirst for righteousness” are those that want God more than anything else in life and knowing and serving God is their passion. “The pure in heart” will see God. “The peacemakers” will be called children of God. The “persecuted for righteousness sake” are servants of God in his kingdom. Jesus is speaking to disciples who are serving God. He is not speaking to the general population who are self-serving, self-seeking, controlled by the flesh, live for themselves, and think only of themselves.

Second, Jesus speaks here of the law of love that he says “sums up the law and the prophets.” Jesus spoke about the Law and the Prophets at the beginning of this sermon in chapter 5, verse 17: [read it]. The Law and the Prophets refers to all the O.T. teaching. In chapter 22 of Matthew, someone asked Jesus, “What is the greatest commandment in the Law?” He answered, [read vs. 37-40]. Jesus says that the two greatest commandments are first to love God supremely and second, to love your neighbor as yourself. He says that the entire set of rules and regulations given by God in the OT hang on these two commands: love God and love others. In the Sermon on the Mount Jesus talks about relationships: our relationships to God, to fellow disciples of Jesus, to the world that persecutes us, and to money and material possessions. Jesus also in this sermon corrects the traditional interpretations of the law that focused only on mechanic, external behavior and did not consider the attitudes and values of the inner person, the heart of man. You see that in chapter 5 where six times he points out misconceptions and then gives God’s real meaning of the purpose of the law. These are the statements where Jesus said, “It has been said unto you. . . .but I say unto you” (5:21-48).

Third, in this seventh chapter, the immediate context of the golden rule, Jesus warns against super critical, fault-finding judgmentalism. The counterpart of “judging” (7:1) is forgiving (as found in the model prayer, 6:12). Jesus describes our hypocrisy of seeking to pick out specks from our brother’s eye while at the same time we have big timbers sticking out of our own eye. In v. 6, Jesus tells us to be discriminating about where, when and to whom we preach the gospel lest we merely antagonize the stubborn and disobedient and end up “casting our pearls before pigs.”

### **How Can We Live This Way?**

So, these statements immediately make us think, “How can anyone live this way? How can anyone obey all the teachings of the Sermon on the Mount?” No one can without the forgiveness, strength, support and guidance of God. The natural man without God cannot keep the Sermon on the Mount. I claim to be a man who has been “born again” (John 3:3, 5) and has received the Holy Spirit, and yet I fall down before Jesus here and say, “Oh, God, I have failed so much to live the way you want me to. Every paragraph of this sermon points to weaknesses in me. What hope do I have?”

Jesus answers my questions in verses 7-11. Hear them now: [read]. The only way I can live out this sermon is to “ask, seek, and knock” before God. I am to ask God for his help, I am to seek out what God wants, and I am to be persistent in wanting God more than anything else. The verbs here are present imperatives which mean they describe continual actions. The best translation of the Greek grammar is “Ask, and keep on asking; Seek, and keep on seeking; Knock, and keep on knocking.” The continual verb form is like a movie versus a photograph. The movie keeps going and flowing. The photo is a one-time, still picture. Jesus tells us here to depend on God for help and guidance in living this sermon. That’s the only way any of us can be pleasing to God. Our continual need of God keeps us from becoming self-sufficient, satisfied, or complacent in our relationship with God.

The persons spoken about in “given to you,” “you will find,” and “opened to you” are the disciples Jesus is addressing. The “you” is not the world. So the “everyone” of “everyone who asks” is his disciples, not the world. God has nowhere promised to answer the prayers of those who are not his children. Jesus is not telling the world at large to pray and they will receive; he is speaking to his people and only to them.

What are his people to ask for, seek and knock to obtain? Spiritual blessings found in Christ. There is no prayer in the Bible that asks for us to be happy, comfortable, convenient, or placated in our selfishness. The prayers in the Bible are for us to be holy, to be more like Christ, to honor God, and to be more submissive to his will. It is prayers for those things that God honors. Yes, it is right to pray for material things. Jesus teaches us to pray, “Give us this day our daily bread” (6:11). He assured us that our heavenly Father knows that we need food, drink and clothing (6:32). However, the emphasis in prayers is on spiritual realities. The other petitions in the model prayer are “hallowed by your name,” “your kingdom come,” “your will be done,” “forgive us our sins,” and “lead us not into temptation but deliver us from evil” (6:12-13). The “good gifts” that God gives in Matthew (7:11) are termed “the Holy Spirit” in the parallel passage in Luke (Lk. 11:12).

### **How This Verse Fits the Contexts**

Now, with an understanding of the contexts, we come to verse 12: “So in everything” says the NIV. The Greek text and other translations have the word “Therefore” here (for example, KJV, RSV). The word “therefore”

indicates that what will be said in v. 12 is a conclusion to what has been said previously. What does v. 12 conclude? Why does this verse begin with “therefore”?

Some say that this verse is disjointed and disconnected and has no relationship to the context. I beg to differ. It has everything to do with the context.

First, it relates to the entire context of the sermon because it is the end piece of this sermon sandwich that began in 5:17. The “law and the Prophets” are the two end pieces here.

Second, it says that in our relationships we are not to judge others (7:1) but to treat others the way we would like to be treated.

Third, it says that because we can depend on God to give us what we need and that he will help us be holy that “therefore” we will be able to “treat others as we would like to be treated” (v. 12).

Fourth, since this verse is the end of the teaching in this sermon (the remainder is exhortation) the word “therefore” means that it summarizes all that Jesus has said in the sermon about how to treat people. The law of love sums everything up. Every command of God can be summarized in two sentences: First, Love God; and Second, Love others. The golden rule explains how to love others. The apostle Paul said the same thing in Romans 13:8-10: [read the verses]. He wrote again to the Galatians, “The entire Law is summed up in a single command, ‘Love your neighbor as yourself’” (Gal. 5:14).

### **We Must Practice the First Commandment Before we Practice the Second One**

“Love your neighbor as yourself” is not all that God requires. The first commandment, “Love God with all your heart, soul, mind and strength” (Matt. 22:39) is greater than that one.

People who say, “My religion is the golden rule,” overlook two things:

First, prior to loving our neighbor we are to love God. What good does it do to love people if we don’t first love God? Can that love for humans forgive our sins, give us the Holy Spirit, write our names in the Lamb’s book of life, create the new birth, and assure us that we are forgiven by God and accepted with him? Absolutely not!

Second, no one can keep the golden rule without the help of God. Is there anybody without God who always thinks of others, who is

totally unselfish, who does not promote or elevate themselves at times above others? No. We are a fallen, sinful humanity whose mortal life without God is focused on our selves and this world only. We must first love God before we can love others as God loves us. If we don't have God's love in us, and a love for God that motivates us, how can we show that type of love to others? We cannot. It is humanly impossible. We must first love God and then we will be able to love others who are creatures of our God and valued by him. "We love, because he first loved us" (I Jn. 4:19).

Now that we understand why this verse is where it is, and how it sums up the teachings of Jesus about our responsibilities to other people, and that it in and of itself is not a possible or sufficient way of life, we are ready to discuss the meaning of the golden rule in our lives.

### **What Does the Golden Rule Mean in My Life?**

What does this verse mean? How does it work out in my life?

First, notice that this verse is positive, not negative. As far as I can research, all the writings and teachings of others before Jesus that spoke similarly were negative. The Jewish rabbis, the OT apocrypha, Confucius, Socrates, and others said it like this: "Do not do to others what you would not want them to do to you." That's a negative: "Do no harm." But Jesus is positive, "Do good." There is a world of difference. The negative rule, I call it the silver rule, says, "Anything I do not want others to do to me, I will not do to them." This rule keeps me from doing evil or harm to others. On the other hand, Jesus' rule motivates or guides me to look for good things to do to others and to do them.

The negative rule says,

- "If you don't enjoy being robbed—don't rob."
- "If you don't like being cursed—don't curse."
- "If you don't like being clubbed over the head—don't club someone else."

This rule does no harm but does no good either. The positive rule of Jesus says,

- "If you enjoy being loved, love."
- "If you like receiving, give."
- "If you like to receive encouraging notes, write encouraging notes."
- "If you like being appreciated, appreciate others."

Second, this rule means that in human relationships that I do not need to memorize or remember a long list of rules and regulations. I need to think about what I would like for someone to do for me in the situation and then do that for them. Of course, this rule is not talking about sin or disobedience to God. Someone may say, “Well, I would like someone to do something sinful with me, so I will do something sinful with them.” That is a perversion and misuse of what Jesus said. Jesus is speaking of those things that honor others, show genuinely love and care for them, and help them as God wants them helped.

Here are some practical ways to practice what Jesus says:

- “I want people to forgive me when I do wrong, so I will forgive others when they do wrong.”
- “I want people to understand me, so I will try to understand others.”
- “I want people to care about me, visit me, or ask about me when I’m sick or not present so I care about, visit, and ask about others.”
- “I want people to work with me, to listen to my ideas, to take me seriously, to correct me gently when they see I’m headed for trouble or on the wrong road, so I work with others, I listen to others, I take others seriously, I correct others gently.”
- “I want others to talk to me when I walk down the hall so I talk to others.”
- “I want others to touch me and not be afraid to be close so I reach out to others.”
- “I want others to trust me when I’ve accepted responsibility so I allow others some freedom.”

The practice of this rule would make us generous, understanding and kind. All we have to do engage our imagination, “How would I like to be treated in that situation?” We see others and ask ourselves, “What can I do for them that I would like to be done for me if I were them?”

### **How Practicing the Golden Rule Would Bless Our Lives**

Practicing what Jesus said brings joy and blessing to our hearts. The famous psychiatrist, Dr. Karl Menninger, once gave a lecture on mental health and was answering questions from the audience. One young man

asked, “What would you advise a person to do if that person felt a nervous breakdown coming on?” You would expect the great doctor to say, “Consult a psychiatrist.” But to everyone’s astonishment, he did not say that. Instead, he said, “Lock up your house, go across the railroad tracks, find someone in need and do something to help that person.” Jesus taught that principle. It is by thinking of others, helping others, and doing good toward others that we find the greatest joys in life.

Cark Ketcherside spent his life debating brotherhood issues in the Churches of Christ on how to do church and God’s work. That was such a weariness of the flesh and spirit and seemingly a treadmill to nowhere. In his retirement years, he gave all that up and opened an inner city ministry in St. Louis, MO. Here’s what he said in one of his reports:

We are now working much harder than for several years. Much of it is manual labor and we get so tired that we can hardly walk. Last Thursday, Nell gave away 51 blankets, 10 pillows, a great many groceries, 23 women’s winter coats. We also provided a number of men’s lined jackets and 11 pairs of shoes. The people took about 200 garments from the racks. All of this has to be sorted out, separated and straightened up when they leave. We were open from 9:30 a.m. to 4:00 p.m. for give away on Wednesday and Thursday. We are almost completely isolated from brotherhood hassles and squabbles. I am talking with and counseling alcoholics, drug users and people with marriage problems.

That’s the practice of what Jesus is saying here. Love one another. Get involved. Think of others. Do good.

Columnist Ann Landers was thinking along these lines when she wrote:

Be kind to people. The world needs kindness so much. You never know what sort of battles other people are fighting. Often just a soft word or a warm compliment can be immensely supportive. You can do a great deal of good by just being considerate, by extending a little friendship, going out of your way to do just one nice thing, or saying one good word.

Jesus gave us this now famous saying not so that we could praise it, but so that we could practice it. He didn't give it for me to comment on but for me to carry it out. I hope you'll pray daily this prayer with me, "Lord, write this law on my heart. Write it out in my life. Help me to love others with the same love that you love me. Help me to think of others, and to do something good that will bless their lives. In Jesus name, Amen."

**This Is an Ideal Time  
to Turn to Jesus for Forgiveness and a New Life**

The practice of the golden rule is the fruit of a life that knows God, is rooted in God, and loves and surrenders to God. Practicing the golden rule is the product of a saved life, not the cause of it. We are saved by trusting in Jesus the spiritual son of God. His death and resurrection are the means of our forgiveness and acceptance with God. The Bible says, "Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ and you shall be saved." The Bible says that when a believer is baptized that he is buried with Christ into the benefits of his death and raised with him in the power of his resurrection.

We have everything in readiness for you today to become a new creation in Christ. Whosoever will may come while we stand and sing.

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