

The Golden Rule

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This widely esteemed maxim is seemingly absent from the first generation Jesus tradition (Mark). It first recognizably appears in the second generation, in this form:

- **Mt 7:12.** “All things whatsoever that ye would that men should do unto you, even so do ye unto them, for this is the law and the prophets.”
- **Lk 6:31.** “And as ye would that men should do to you, do ye also to them likewise.”

Nolland (**Luke** 1/297), “It is doubtful whether v31 formed an original unity with either the preceding or following materials.” Then it may come from something else. What?

Many are the parallels and possible sources. Fitzmyer 1/639 mentions:

- **Lev 19:18** “Thou shalt not take vengeance, nor bear any grudge against the children of thy people, but thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself: I am Jehovah.” Compare Jesus’ response to the lawyer in Mk 12:31,¹ “The second is this: Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself. There is no other commandment greater than these.” The word “neighbor” does not go beyond the traditional Jewish concern for others in the community.
- **Tobit 4:15** “Do not do to anyone what you hate.” This passage is not in the best text of Tobit (Sinaiticus), and represents later Christianization of that text.
- **Aristeas Ep ad Philocraten 207** “As you wish that no evil should befall you, but to be a partaker of all good things, so you should act on the same principle toward your subjects and offenders.” Limited to rulers; not a general precept.
- **Acts 15:29** in Bezae, “Whatever you do not wish to happen to you, do not do to another.” An addition to the Jerusalem Declaration, which otherwise addresses the food laws plus fornication. Bezae’s expansions to Acts are not earlier readings, but attempts at completeness. Here, Bezae may have added what it knew (not incorrectly) as a basic principle of the Jesus movement.
- **Didache 1:2**, “Whatever you would not have done to you, do not do to another.” From Matthew, as are many of the late elements in the Didache.²
- **Hillel (b.Shabbat 31a)**, to one who had asked to be taught the Law while standing on one leg, “Whatever you would not have done to you, do not do to another. This is the whole law and the prophets. The rest is commentary; go and study it.” One of many stories opposing Hillel and Shammai, this one, as with Tobit, is probably a defensive Jewish Christianization of Jewish tradition: the implicit claim is that Jesus, Hillel’s younger contemporary, got it from Hillel.

¹The first part, Mk 12:30, on love of God, epitomizes the daily prayer Shema.

²For the Mattheanization of the Didache, see Brooks **Before**.

That is, the most plausible of these seem to be derivative. But from what?

In China, this idea arose among the followers of Mwòdž. They were traders, and thus from a sub-elite stratum of 05c society. It was at first *rejected* by the Confucians:

- **LY 5:12** (c0470). Dž-gùng said, If I do not wish others to do something to me, I do not wish to do it to them. The Master said, Sž, this is not something you can come up to.

Beneath this is a business principle: deals should be beneficial for both parties. Traders and their opposites should be amicable, not antagonistic. What would strangers find antagonistic? For one thing, religion: they are from different cultures. The answer is: The necessary common ground is within yourself. The human wish not to be harmed is universal, and is thus a reliable basis. The Micians made that basis into a maxim..

Later, the Mician maxim came up again, this time for *approval* by the Confucians:

- **LY 12:2** (c0326) “Jùng-gùng asked about benevolence (rǎn 仁). The Master said . . . What he himself does not want, let him not do it to others . . .”
- **LY *15:24** (c0301) “Dž-gùng asked, Is there a saying that one can practice in all circumstances? The Master said, That would be empathy (shù 恕) would it not? What he himself does not want, let him not do it to others.”
- **LY *4:15** (c0294) “The Master said, Shǎm! My Way, by one thing I link it together. Dzǎngdž said, Yes. The Master went out, and the disciples asked, What did he mean? Dzǎngdž said, Our Respected Master’s Way is simply loyalty and empathy (shù 恕).” In the last two of these, not only is reciprocity accepted, it is made *the guiding principle of the entire Confucian Way*.

Not only do we have here a principle stated in language indistinguishable from that in Tobit and others, but its identification as a *fundamental* principle.

That East Asian ideas circulated in the Mediterranean is seen in other examples.³ In that new context, Matthew and Luke changed the original negative formulation to a seemingly nicer (if impracticable) positive one. Its identification *as fundamental* occurs only in “Hillel” and in Matthew (perhaps the source of the “Hillel” story).

The thing was going around. Sometimes simply as a one-liner, and sometimes in a form resembling its latest Chinese formulation, *as a basic principle*. That distinction suggests that the Chinese version of the Mician form, carried westward by traders, was the source for Luke and Matthew, both situated near the major Antioch trade route, and not in Mark’s Palestinian backwater.

Works Cited

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- John Nolland. *Luke 1-9:20*. Nelson 1989

³See Brooks **Steward**.