



# SHOULD I FOLLOW THE GOLDEN RULE?

A Question of Moral Atheism

*from blog.iamanatheist.com*



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THE GOLDEN RULE states that you should treat others in the way you would like them to treat you. This sounds like a good piece of ethical advice, but should the moral atheist rely on it?

The Golden Rule has been around for centuries and it has been used in one form or another in many cultures. Unfortunately, it has a problems.

Because it is a little vague, the Golden Rule has the potential to be misleading. For example, by a literal reading of the Golden Rule:

- If parents would not want to be treated like children, they should not treat their young offspring like children.
- If a man wants a woman to hug him, he should hug her.
- A Christian should treat an atheist like a Christian (and vice versa).
- A woman should treat a man like a woman.
- A masochist should act like a sadist.
- A self-destructive person should attack people.

Some of these examples point out that projecting your desires onto other people isn't always the correct path to acceptable behavior. This is because the Golden Rule deals only with behavior and not with the thought behind that behavior.

Perhaps the Golden Rule would be more globally valid if it were phrased, "You should treat others in the way you would like them to treat you *if you were in their place*." That's a little more difficult to wrap your head around, but it leads to far fewer problems.

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# QUESTIONS OF MORAL ATHEISM: INSTRUCTIONS

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1. Print pages one and two of this document, one on each side of the same piece of paper (if you don't have access to a duplex printer, print page one, put the page back in the paper tray upside down, and print page two — depending on the type of printer, you may have to experiment a bit).
2. Cut the printout in two, using the thin rules across the middle of the page as a guide.
3. Fold the two pieces of paper in half, making a pair of small pamphlets.
4. Keep one of the pamphlets to read, and give the other away to an interested friend or stranger.

That's it! If you have any questions, suggestions, or comments, we invite you to share them by leaving a comment on [blog.iamanatheist.org](http://blog.iamanatheist.org). Thanks!

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