

# Editorial: Texas curriculum provides poor religious education

December 4, 2024

On Nov. 22, the Texas State Board of Education approved controversial public education curriculum. But not unanimously.

The [Texas Tribune reported](#) a handful of reasons some members of the State Board of Education opposed the new curriculum, one of which is its religious content. While there is merit to the other issues they raised, the religious content raises particular concern for this Baptist editor.

## Religious content

It's not just that the newly approved [Bluebonnet Learning curriculum](#) includes references to the Bible and Christianity. That the Bible and Christianity appear in public school curriculum for elementary students, by itself, shouldn't raise alarm in a country so profoundly shaped by the Bible and Christianity.

What ought to give us pause and what ought to have stood in the way of the curriculum being approved is what it says about the Bible and Christianity.

Bluebonnet Learning curriculum is available to the public for free. Anyone can read the content for themselves and come to their own conclusions about it. You don't have to take my word for it.

That being said, what is this religious content people are so up in arms about? The story of creation from Genesis, a lesson on King Solomon, lessons on the Golden Rule and Good Samaritan, Daniel in the lions' den,

lessons on Esther and the beginning of Christianity, among others.

Your eyebrows may be raised. You might be thinking: “*This* is the problem? What in the world is wrong with teaching these things?”

For me, the problem is content and context. Lessons on the Golden Rule illustrate my point.

## The Golden Rule

I think everyone needs to learn and live by the Golden Rule. I don’t have a problem with the Golden Rule ... except that it’s so hard to live by consistently.

I don’t even have a problem with a public school teacher—who might not be a Christian—telling my children about the Golden Rule and that they ought to live by it. If I had a problem with it, the rule might not be so golden.

I also don’t have a problem with a public school teacher acknowledging the fact other religions teach a similar principle. There’s no use in denying that fact, and again, if the principle isn’t transferable to other religions, the rule might not be so golden.

I do have a problem, however, with the watered-down treatment of the Golden Rule. I have a problem with its being pulled out of its wider context in the Sermon on the Mount. And I have a significant problem with the insinuation that since other religions teach a version of the Golden Rule that all these religions teach the same thing. They do not. Not even about the Golden Rule.

While the curriculum for the lessons on the Golden Rule are available for free, they aren’t necessarily easy to find. [Here’s a link to the specific teacher’s guide.](#) The pertinent content begins on p. 17.

# Generally right

On p. 18 of the *Serving our Neighbors* Kindergarten Unit 7 Teacher Guide, the curriculum reads: “Jesus said that the Golden Rule sums up all of the important teaching from scripture. ‘So in everything, do unto others as you would have done unto you.’”



## **Show Image 1A-2: What is the Golden Rule?**

The Sermon on the Mount included many different lessons. Some of these included do not judge others; do not seek revenge, or try to get even with someone; and give to the needy. Beyond the Sermon on the Mount, there are many rules included throughout the Christian Bible. Jesus said that the Golden

Rule sums up all of the important teachings from scripture. “So in everything, do unto others as you would have done unto you.”<sup>1</sup>

Page 18 of Bluebonnet Learning *Serving Our Neighbors* Kindergarten Unit 7 Teacher Guide. (screen shot)

Mm, in a general sense, perhaps. But this is one of those instances when I’m not satisfied with the general sense.

Matthew 7:12 reads: “So in everything, do to others what you would have them do to you, for this sums up the Law and the Prophets” (NIV).

The curriculum leaves off “for this sums up the Law and the Prophets,” which might not be a big deal except that Jesus thought it was important enough to include.

“Oh, for crying out loud,” you might say. “The curriculum says, ‘the Golden Rule sums up all the important teaching from scripture.’ Aren’t the Law and the Prophets *all* the important teaching from Scripture? Isn’t the curriculum close enough?”

I like to answer a question with a question, and sometimes I like to be

ornery in the asking: “Is 4.5 close enough to  $2 + 2$ ? Why would we settle for close enough when teaching Christian concepts, but demand exactness when teaching so much else?”

## The broader context

For the record, Christians don’t typically teach the Golden Rule sums up all the important stuff in the Bible. We typically teach the Great Commandment does: “‘Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind.’ This is the first and greatest commandment. And the second is like it: ‘Love your neighbor as yourself.’ *All the Law and the Prophets hang on these two commandments*” (Matthew 22:37-40 NIV, emphasis added).

Jesus said this in reply to “an expert in the law” asking “which is the greatest commandment in the Law” (Matthew 22:34-36). Jesus went beyond the Law to answer what is most important in *all* of Scripture.

What Bluebonnet Learning leaves out—and this should matter immensely to Christians—is that this serving, caring for, loving our neighbors is in direct relationship to our love for, obedience to and worship of the One God and Lord. But including *that* probably would get Bluebonnet Learning a straight ticket to court.

## Other religions

Perhaps I’m just being nitpicky or crotchety about this. Maybe I’m just looking for the tiniest flaw to smudge into a great big scribble. Mm, maybe. And then I get to the bottom of p. 19, and I say, “Hold up.”



**Show Image 1A-4: The Golden Rule**

Besides the two versions in the Bible, there are also versions of the Golden Rule in the ancient books from other religions, including Hinduism and Islam. The Golden Rule suggests that every small act of kindness matters.

Most people think it is important to follow the

Golden Rule. *How can you use the Golden Rule today to be kind to someone you know?*

Page 19 of Bluebonnet Learning Serving Our Neighbors Kindergarten Unit 7 Teacher Guide. (screen shot)

“... there are also versions of the Golden Rule in the ancient books from other religions, including Hinduism and Islam. The Golden Rule suggests that every small act of kindness matters.”

OK. Yes, every small act of kindness matters. But that is not what Jesus was teaching. He was teaching something far more important than kindness. And frankly, public school teachers shouldn't get into that “something far more important” in this context. We as our kids' parents, grandparents, aunts, uncles, pastors, ministers and Bible teachers should.

But the “versions of the Golden Rule” Hinduism, Islam and other religions teach are not equivalent to what Jesus taught. Nor are those versions within the same context as what Jesus taught.

I realize you can't get into all the nuances of religious difference with a kindergartener—or maybe you can with enough time and patience—but Bluebonnet Learning's gloss of this ought to bring into question what else the curriculum may be glossing.

I also realize public elementary school curriculum isn't the place to get into the finer points of religious doctrine. Oh, wait. Then why set that can of worms in front of kindergarteners in the first place? And after doing so, why leave them with the impression that all religions basically teach the

same thing?

And I haven't even gotten to what the curriculum says about creation, Solomon, Esther, Daniel or Paul.

I don't have time to get into how the door is now open for Muslim, Hindu, Buddhist and other scriptures—and their doctrines—to be taught in Texas public schools.

## **Bottom line**

I appreciate the inclusion of important religious history and concepts in public school curriculum. If we're going to raise well-informed citizens of the world, this content must be taught to our kids.

But how it's taught needs to be accurate, and public elementary schools simply aren't the place for that. Public middle and high schools may not be either.

Texas public school districts are not obligated to use Bluebonnet Learning. The choice is left to each school district. Each one should decline to use it, and not just for the limited reasons I've discussed here. They should look for stronger curriculum more appropriate for their setting, even if they forfeit the \$60-per-student bribe from the state to adopt it.

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