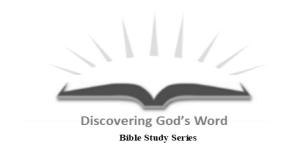
The Golden Rule

Lesson 3: Spiritual Application





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Learn how to apply the "Golden Rule" to your spiritual responsibilities of teaching the lost, edifying the saved, and correcting the erring

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Discovering God's Word Bible Study Series

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About the author: My name is Eric Krieg. I am a disciple of Jesus, a Bible student, a truth seeker, and an evangelist. My interest is in using the Bible as my only guide in my faith. My desire is to help others understand the message of the Bible and pursue true, New Testament Christianity.

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My plea: It is my hope and prayer that you are searching for the truth that is contained in God's word, the Bible. My desire is to help you understand and obey these truths God has revealed in the pages of His word. It is to that end that I write this material. Please observe all of the Scripture references and evaluate whether the conclusions I have drawn are in harmony with God's word. If they are, I ask that you make honest application of those truths to your life and obey God's instructions.

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The Golden Rule Lesson 3:

Spiritual Application

Our first two studies have focused on establishing what the "Golden Rule" is, how it is contrasted with some other "rules" people live by, and how it will completely transform how you interact with others. So, by applying the "Golden Rule," I hope that you will conduct yourself with greater kindness, mercy, grace, and compassion toward others. Whenever you see an opportunity to do good to someone else (even if it is your worst enemy in this world), I hope the first two lessons will help you to treat them just as you would want someone else to treat you!

Unfortunately, I am afraid that this is where many Christians leave the "Golden Rule." Yet, I believe that this is only where the "Golden Rule" begins! Let's hear Jesus' commandment once again: "Therefore, whatever you want men to do to you, do also to them, for this is the Law and the Prophets" (Matthew 7:12). Remember that Jesus said the greatest commandments in all the law is to love the Lord your God with everything you are and to love your neighbor as yourself. All the Law and the Prophets hang on these two commandments (Matthew 22:37-40).

So, you need to consider that the physical responsibilities you have to do good to someone is only one small part of the way you must show your love to them. Yes, Jesus did do good things for people *physically* in fulfillment of the "Golden Rule"

(i.e. He fed the hungry, He healed the sick, and He even raised the dead). Yet, Jesus did not come for this purpose. His purpose in loving others was focused on a spiritual level. In Luke 19:10, Jesus said, "for the Son of Man has come to seek and to save that which was lost." He came to teach people the way of salvation and to die to make their salvation from sin possible!

It is interesting to me that immediately following the "Golden Rule" in Matthew 7:12 is Jesus' teaching about the need to enter by the narrow gate (verses 13-14), the warning that most people take the wide gate that leads to destruction (verses 13-14), the warning about false prophets who are working to deceive people (verses 15-20), the warning that not everyone who professes Jesus as Lord will be saved (verses 21-23), and the warning that people need to be like a wise man and do the will of God rather than just hear it (verses 24-27).

Certainly, if you are going to follow Jesus' example and truly live by the "Golden Rule," what you should love the most about other people is their souls and want to do as much good for their souls as you possibly can, just as you would want others to do for your soul! After all, do you really think that Jesus Christ (the one who died to save the souls of the lost) will be pleased with how you have followed the "Golden Rule" if you have only helped people *physically*? Rather than stopping here, you must recognize the need to use your opportunities to help people spiritually by teaching the lost, edifying the saved, and correcting the erring.

Teach The Lost

The fact is that you cannot be pleasing to God as a Christian if you do not try to use your opportunities to teach those who are lost in their sins. A failure to teach is just as much of a sin as is murder, adultery, idolatry, stealing, or anything else! This is because it violates God's command to teach the lost and fails to follow the example of Jesus Christ. Then, it also violates the "Golden Rule." Surely, if you were the one who was lost in sin and headed for eternal torment in Hell, you would want someone to

teach you what you needed to believe and do to be saved!

The need to teach the lost

The need to teach the gospel of Jesus Christ to the lost can be demonstrated by considering four passages in the book of Romans. First, Romans 1:16 says, "For I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ, for it is the power of God to salvation for everyone who believes, for the Jew first and also for the Greek." Second, Romans 3:23 says, "for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God." Third, Romans 6:23 says, "For the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord."

Now, pause to consider the significance of what these three verses teach us. The gospel of Jesus Christ is God's power to save anyone who has sinned against Him. Everyone has sinned against Him (of those who have reached the age of moral accountability). And, those who have sinned against God deserve to spend eternity separated from God in Hell. Therefore, everyone needs to hear the gospel so that they can learn about their opportunity to be saved through Jesus Christ. This is the greatest piece of news that anyone could ever learn.

So, the fourth passage to consider is Romans 10:13-15. "For 'whoever calls on the name of the Lord shall be saved.' How then shall they call on Him in whom they have not believed? And how shall they believe in Him of whom they have not heard? And how shall they hear without a preacher? And how shall they preach unless they are sent? As it is written: 'How beautiful are the feet of those who preach the gospel of peace, Who bring glad tidings of good things!'"

Everyone needs to call on the name of the Lord to be saved. Note that calling on the name of the Lord involves obeying His commandments (i.e. to be baptized, Acts 22:16). But, before a person can call on the name of the Lord to be saved, he/she must first believe in Jesus. But, a person cannot believe in Jesus without hearing the gospel be preached to him/her. And, a preacher must be sent.

Now, let's work all of this in reverse to understand how Jesus' "Golden Rule" applies to this

situation. At one time, you were the one who had sinned against God and deserved to experience eternal torment in Hell. You needed to call on the name of the Lord to be saved. But, you could not do that without believing in Jesus. You could not believe without hearing the gospel. And, you could not hear unless a preacher was sent and preached the gospel to you!

Aren't you appreciative that *someone* (and perhaps more than one person) cared enough about your soul to teach you the gospel of Christ when you were lost in your sins? Now, if that is how you would want others to treat you, the "Golden Rule" requires that you do the same for those you meet and have the opportunity to teach! There are many people living all around you who are lost in their sins and need you (who have been sent by Jesus Christ) to preach the gospel to them! Won't you love them enough to help them be saved from Hell?

Who to teach

The Bible helps you to see the lost in the way that God sees them. For instance, in Matthew 9:35-38, as Jesus went through all the cities and villages teaching and preaching the gospel, healing the sicknesses and diseases among the people, He was "moved with compassion for them, because they were weary and scattered, like sheep having no shepherd." So, He told His disciples that the harvest of souls was truly "plentiful, but the laborers are few" and they should pray "the Lord of harvest to send out laborers into His harvest."

Look at how Jesus saw those who were lost in their sins. They were like sheep without a shepherd. They were weak and tired, spiritually, and did not know which way to go. Because of this, Jesus had compassion on the people and taught them. Now, is there anyone you know who is lost and wandering, like a sheep without a shepherd?

2 Timothy 2:24-26 also provides you with some help in seeing the lost. It says, "And a servant of the Lord must not quarrel but be gentle to all, able to teach, patient, in humility correcting those who are in opposition, if God perhaps will grant them repentance, so that they may know the truth, and that they may come to their senses and escape the snare

of the devil, having been taken captive by him to do his will."

Recognize that those who are lost in sin are in "opposition" to the Almighty God and need to know the truth and come to repentance. They have been ensnared (trapped) by the devil, "having been taken captive by him to do his will." Now, is there anyone you know who does not know the truth, who is caught in one of Satan's many traps, and is a slave of Satan to do Satan's will rather than God's?

Then, 2 Peter 2:1-3 provides a different view of some others who are lost. "But there were also false prophets among the people, even as there will be false teachers among you, who will secretly bring in destructive heresies, even denying the Lord who bought them, and bring on themselves swift destruction. And many will follow their destructive ways, because of whom the way of truth will be blasphemed. By covetousness they will exploit you with deceptive words; for a long time their judgment has not been idle, and their destruction does not slumber."

There are many people who are teaching and preaching false gospels which do not really lead to salvation. Instead, they keep people enslaved to sin. And, there are many people who have followed after these false and destructive gospels, having been misled by the deceptive words of the teachers. These people believe they are saved and following the way of truth, but are actually headed for eternal destruction. Now, is there anyone you know who is teaching a false gospel or who *thinks* he/she is saved while following one of these false gospels?

Surely, you know someone in these situations. You can see it because you were once in that situation yourself. In fact, you know very well that there is no lack of opportunity to teach the gospel of Christ. You know that most people in this world are not following Jesus Christ. So, there are many opportunities for you to teach people the saving message of the gospel!

How to teach

I believe that many Christians recognize their responsibility in teaching and their opportunities to teach. But, I think what gets in the way many times is a knowledge of how to teach someone the gospel. I believe the "Golden Rule" and a few other passages will help us solve this matter.

The "Golden Rule" should help you teach people in the way that you would desire to be taught. So, you must make a determination to teach. Since you would want someone to teach you, you must teach as many people as you have the opportunity to teach (everyone who is your neighbor), following the commission Jesus gave in Matthew 28:19-20 and Mark 16:15-16. Jesus' command involves a four-step process of making disciples.

Step #1 is "Go." You can choose many different ways of going to the people who need to hear the gospel. You can invite folks to attend services with you, you can invite them to study the Bible with you, you can give them a Bible and some material that will help them learn and apply God's teachings to their lives, you can utilize many different ways of contacting people (i.e. phone, email, social media, face-to-face, letters), etc. Surely, you would want someone to take advantage of any/every opportunity to teach you the gospel of Jesus Christ if you were lost.

Step #2 is "Preach." Whenever you have an opportunity, preach Jesus to the individual(s). Maybe he/she attends services with you and hears a gospel lesson, maybe he/she agrees to study the Bible with you, maybe you follow up with that person about the study material you had given him/her, maybe you publish a gospel message on your social media page, etc. But, you should know that there can be no reaping if you do not plant the seed of God's word in the heart of another through preaching. And, the only kind of teaching you should do is concerning the gospel of Jesus Christ (2 Timothy 4:2). You must not preach any false gospel, your opinions, your traditions, etc.

Step #3 is "Baptize." Whenever someone you have been teaching accepts what he/she has heard and is willing to be obedient to it, you must make sure that he/she is baptized (either by baptizing the person yourself or having someone else do the baptizing). But, since there is no salvation without baptism (see Acts 2:38 and 1 Peter 3:20-21), you

must make sure that the baptism happens as quickly as the individual is ready to be baptized.

Step #4 is "Continued Teaching." Discipleship only begins whenever an individual obeys God's plan of salvation. Satan will be working to trap this person very quickly and keep him/her from serving the Lord throughout his/her life on earth. So, you will need to continue using opportunities to teach those who have decided to follow Christ what this looks like in their lives and help them become stronger in their faiths.

Now, regarding the *how* of teaching, the "Golden Rule" should also help you consider your demeanor while you teach. For, Jesus has always wanted those who preach the gospel to be "wise as serpents and harmless as doves" (Matthew 10:16). The implication is that you can actually harm someone in trying to preach the gospel if you do not do it with wisdom. Yet, many Christians do this and actually turn people away from Christ. So, consider a few points about how to teach others with wisdom and how you would want others to teach you.

First, you must teach with love. Ephesians 4:15 refers to "speaking the truth in love." You would not want someone who was teaching you to be mean-spirited. Instead, you would want him/her to teach you in a way that considered you and would be in your best interest.

Second, you must be gentle, patient, and humble in your teaching. These were seen in 2 Timothy 2:24-26. People will not always accept the gospel right at first. In fact, it may take them a great while to fully accept what the gospel teaches and the changes the gospel requires them to make. Just as you would not want someone to grow impatient with you, you must be willing to teach with longsuffering (2 Timothy 4:2), gentleness in how you respond, and humility to recognize that you too need the grace and mercy of God for salvation.

Third, every word you say must be with grace. Paul instructed, "Walk in wisdom toward those who are outside, redeeming the time. Let your speech always be with grace, seasoned with salt, that you may know how you ought to answer each one" (Colossians 4:5-6). Preaching the gospel is not just about *what* you say, it is also important *how* you say

it. Certainly, you know how you would want others to speak to convey the truth to you. You should do the same to them, speaking in a way that reflects the grace of God and is "palatable" (seasoned with salt) to those who hear, while also not comprising *what* is said.

The fact of the matter is that God wants you to consider others in how you teach them. Listen to Jude 1:22-23. "And on some have compassion, making a distinction; but others save with fear, pulling them out of the fire, hating even the garment defiled by the flesh." I believe this passages helps you to see that you will need to take a more forceful approach in teaching some than others. This is where your wisdom and ability to apply the "Golden Rule" will come in.

Edify The Saved

Your spiritual responsibilities toward others do not end whenever they are taught the gospel and become Christians. Surely, as a Christian, you should want the help of other Christians to be strong in the faith of the gospel. Therefore, part of loving others includes helping those who are saved be built up in the faith (edified) and overcome the devil.

The need to edify the saved

The need to edify (build up) the saved in the faith of the gospel of Jesus Christ can be demonstrated from three passages. First, consider Hebrews 3:12-13. "Beware, brethren, lest there be in any of you an evil heart of unbelief in departing from the living God; but exhort one another daily, while it is called 'Today,' lest any of you be hardened through the deceitfulness of sin."

For now, I want you to recognize how the devil is working to lure those who have become Christians back into the ways of sin. Notice that this passage is addressed to "brethren." Even these could develop an "evil heart of unbelief" and depart "from the living God." For, Satan (who is the great deceiver) is trying to harden the hearts of Christians against serving God "through the deceitfulness of sin." He is working every single day, trying to pull

Christians away from the Lord. He wants Christians to be more concerned with the cares of this life (i.e. getting the bills paid on time, the physical health of family members), the pursuit of earthly wealth, enjoying physical pleasures, etc. more than following the Lord. Therefore, since Satan is trying to lure Christians away from God every day, God wants His people to be exhorting (encouraging) each other every day to combat this threat and help one another remain faithful to Him and become stronger in their faiths!

Second, consider Hebrews 10:24-25. "And let us consider one another in order to stir up love and good works, not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together, as is the manner of some, but exhorting one another, and so much the more as you see the Day approaching."

Sometimes it happens that those who had been Christians stop serving the Lord completely. They stop calling themselves "Christians," stop attending services, etc. However, what may be even more common is for individuals to continue attending services (regularly or irregularly) and call themselves "Christians," but not do good works or show love to God and others throughout their daily lives. The Hebrew writer says that we need to consider one another in this regard so that we can stir each other up to do more in God's service! So, Christians ought to be encouraging and pushing one another to do as much as we can do in serving God so that we will not just look like we are "Christians," but actually live as true Christians should!

Third, consider 1 Thessalonians 5:11 and 14. Verse 11 says, "Therefore comfort each other and edify one another, just as you also are doing." Verse 14 says, "Now we exhort you, brethren, warn those who are unruly, comfort the fainthearted, uphold the weak, be patient with all."

The context of the statement in verse 11 is a discussion about the return of Jesus Christ. Those who are Christians ought to be eagerly anticipating the Day when Jesus comes. This will be the Day when all those who have lived in faithful service to God will go with Christ and live eternally in Heaven, putting all the sufferings and trials of this earth behind them! Those who are Christians, then, should

be encouraging and comforting one another through the difficulties and trials we all endure on this earth. We should be strengthening and upholding one another in patience and love to help each other remain faithful until that Day!

Who to edify

There is clearly a need to edify the saved. Satan is working and finding some success at drawing Christians back into his traps. But, who must you love so much that you help them stay strong in the Lord (just as you would want others to help you stay strong in the Lord)? The answer was found in Hebrews 3:12-13.

The Hebrew writer instructed Christians to "exhort one another daily." This is a responsibility, then, that Christians have toward others who are also Christians. Those who are lost do not yet have true saving faith to edify (build up). They must be taught so that they can develop that saving faith. So, it is those who are Christians who must be edified.

Now, remember that your neighbor is anyone who is around you who you have the opportunity and ability to help (Luke 10:25-37). Just as you must use any opportunity you have to teach lost people the gospel of Jesus Christ, you must use any opportunity you have to edify Christian brothers and sisters. So, this does *not* just apply to your family members who are Christians or the brethren you get along with the best. Instead, it applies to everyone who is a Christian! Wouldn't it be great if every Christian did whatever he/she could do to edify every other Christian? The fact is, this is exactly what God desires!

How to edify

Once again, perhaps the problem with Christians edifying one another is not the recognition of the responsibility or the lack of opportunities, but the knowledge of *how* to edify each other. And, again, the "Golden Rule" (along with some additional passages of Scripture) will help you to accomplish this work. For, you should consider what you would want a brother or sister to do to edify you.

Surely, you would want them to do something that *actually* edifies you. Unfortunately,

there are many things that people do that do not truly edify. For instance, just spending time with another person does not edify. Just speaking to another person does not edify. Just having a good and positive feeling is not the same as true spiritual edification.

Instead, the source of all true edification is the word of God. For instance, whenever the apostle Paul was speaking to the Ephesian elders, he said, "So now, brethren, I commend you to God and to the word of His grace, which is able to build you up and give you an inheritance among all those who are sanctified" (Acts 20:32). Notice that it is the word of God's grace (the gospel of Jesus Christ) that is able to build up Christians (edify them) and give them an inheritance in Heaven. It is the only true source of spiritual edification that we have! Although there are many ways we can build people up *physically*, spiritual edification only happens when the word of God is involved.

Although there are many physical responsibilities Christians have toward one another (i.e. bear one another's burdens, rejoice with the rejoicing, weep with the weeping, show hospitality toward one another, etc.), you must consider the *spiritual* aspects of each of these. For instance, although hospitality may provide for a physical need, it also provides an opportunity for Christians to get close on a spiritual level and help one another grow in the faith, stand strong against the devil, and accomplish more in the service of God.

You accomplish this by hoping together in the promises that are made by God in the pages of His word and helping each other develop a greater understanding of God's word. Then, whenever there are difficulties that are experienced by your brethren, you should also be encouraging them to hold on to the anchor of hope and respond to their difficulties in ways that would please God. For, whenever you preach the word constantly, you convince, rebuke, and exhort those who hear you (2 Timothy 4:2)!

If your goal is living in Heaven one day, isn't this exactly how you want other Christians to edify you? Do you want them telling you things that have no real spiritual benefit? Do you want them making you feel good about yourself even if it does you no

spiritual good? Do you want them giving you solutions to your problems that go against God's word? Of course not! If you truly want to go to Heaven, you want your brothers and sisters to be constantly encouraging you through the word of God that is able to build you up and give you an inheritance in Heaven! Therefore, this is exactly what you must do for others!

Correct The Erring

All of these spiritual responsibilities toward others push us beyond what we are often comfortable doing. Yet, because we love others as ourselves, we do what is in their best interests. This same thing is true whenever you see a Christian who has gone back into sin. Just as you should want someone to correct you if you were living in sin, you must determine to correct those you see living in sin.

The need to correct the erring

Hebrews 10 should help you recognize the great danger those who have become Christians and have gone back into sin are in. Listen to verses 26-39.

"For if we sin willfully after we have received the knowledge of the truth, there no longer remains a sacrifice for sins, but a certain fearful expectation of judgment, and fiery indignation which will devour the adversaries. Anyone who has rejected Moses' law dies without mercy on the testimony of two or three witnesses. Of how much worse punishment, do you suppose, will he be thought worthy who has trampled the Son of God underfoot, counted the blood of the covenant by which he was sanctified a common thing, and insulted the Spirit of grace? For we know Him who said, 'Vengeance is Mine, I will repay,' says the Lord. And again, 'The Lord will judge His people.' It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God.

"But recall the former days in which, after you were illuminated, you endured a great struggle with sufferings: partly while you were made a spectacle both by reproaches and tribulations, and partly while you became companions of those who were so treated; for you had compassion on me in my chains, and joyfully accepted the plundering of your goods, knowing that you have a better and an enduring possession for yourselves in heaven. Therefore do not cast away your confidence, which has great reward. For you have need of endurance, so that after you have done the will of God, you may receive the promise: 'For yet a little while, And He who is coming will come and will not tarry. Now the just shall live by faith; But if anyone draws back, My soul has no pleasure in him.' But we are not of those who draw back to perdition, but of those who believe to the saving of the soul."

Yes, it is possible to go back into sin after becoming a Christian. Notice that these are said to have sinned "willfully" after having "received the knowledge of the truth." Because they go back into sin, they will experience the vengeance of God and eternal destruction. They have cast away their reward of eternal life in Heaven and God will have no pleasure in them.

How sad to think that someone has considered some physical treasure and pleasure to be more important than eternal salvation in Heaven through Jesus Christ! Yet, this is something we *all* do from time to time. When the apostle John wrote to Christians, he said, "If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves and the truth is not in us" (1 John 1:8). So, you need to consider what you want your brethren to do for you whenever you go back into sin – and then do the same to others!

Who to correct

Those who are not Christians are lost in their sins and need to be taught the gospel of Jesus Christ (as we discussed previously). So, this point is *not* about them. Instead, this point is about those who have become Christians and go back into sin. Consider two passages.

First, James says, "Brethren, if anyone among you wanders from the truth, and someone turns him back, let him know that he who turns a sinner from the error of his way will save a soul from death and cover a multitude of sins" (James 5:19-20). So, if any Christian "among you" (who you are in contact with) wanders away from the truth, you have

the responsibility to turn him/her back. If you do, you will save his/her soul from spiritual death in Hell and cover the sins that have been committed, through the blood of Jesus Christ! Isn't this exactly what you would want someone else to do for you if you wandered from the truth and were headed for Hell?

Second, the apostle Paul says, "Brethren, if a man is overtaken in any trespass, you who are spiritual restore such a one in a spirit of gentleness, considering yourself lest you also be tempted" (Galatians 6:1). It may be that there is a brother or sister who is focused on serving the Lord, but he/she slips in some way so as to commit sin. God says that this is your concern and responsibility. For, just as you should want a brother or sister to work to restore you to the Lord, you should work to do the same for him/her.

How to correct

Like the previous two points, I think many Christians understand this responsibility. But, they become fearful and do not know *how* they should go about it. Again, I believe that a combination of the "Golden Rule" and some other passages will help you find the answer.

There is no doubt that telling someone he/she is living in sin and headed for eternal punishment in Hell is a hard truth to get many people to accept. So, for the good of the one who is in sin, you must consider how you would want to be told. For, I am afraid that there are many Christians (even with good intentions) who speak in ways they would not like to be spoken to and do things they would not like to have done to them in this area.

Let's revisit Galatians 6:1. Paul said that you should restore such a one who has been overtaken in sin "in a spirit of gentleness, considering yourself lest you also be tempted." So, just as you would not want someone to act morally superior and self-righteous in correcting your sin, you must not do this either. And, the kind of rebuke that you offer must be loving, kind, and considerate of the one you are rebuking.

Then, consider the process that Jesus gives in Matthew 18:15-17. "Moreover if your brother sins against you, go and tell him his fault between you and him alone. If he hears you, you have gained your

brother. But if he will not hear, take with you one or two more, that 'by the mouth of two or three witnesses every word may be established.' And if he refuses to hear them, tell it to the church. But if he refuses even to hear the church, let him be to you like a heathen and a tax collector."

First, you would not want a brother or sister to know of your sin and not say anything to you. Second, you would want that brother or sister to have the decency to come to you privately about the sin (if it is a private sin) rather than broadcasting it in front of everyone and gossiping about it. Third, if you refused to make the necessary corrections in your life, you would not want your brethren to give up on your salvation. So, you would want them to continue to make you aware of your sin and your need to repent. Fourth, if you still refused to repent, you would not want your brethren to act like everything is okay. Instead, you would want them to withdraw from you (as is commanded in 1 Corinthians 5 and 2 Thessalonians 3) in order that you would be ashamed of your sin and return to the Lord before it is too late.

This is how you should want your brethren to respond to your $\sin -$ if you are interested in being saved eternally. Although you may not appreciate it while you are in your \sin , you would appreciate it one day! So, you should treat others in this same way and follow these same steps in correcting them whenever they have committed \sin .

Conclusion

Jesus' "Golden Rule" is simple, yet powerful. "Therefore, whatever you want men to do to you, do also to them, for this is the Law and the Prophets" (Matthew 7:12) This is exactly how you should treat other people. Not only will this transform how you treat them physically, but it will also transform how you treat them spiritually. In everything you do, you will be acting according to their best interests and love them as much as you love yourself!

Study Questions

How is the "Golden Rule" applicable to the spiritual conditions of others?

1. Teach The Lost

What is the need to teach the lost?

Who should you teach?

How should you teach?

2. Edify The Saved

What is the need to edify others?

Who should you edify?

How should you edify?

3. Correct The Erring

What is the need to correct the erring?

Who should you correct?

How should you correct?