

The Golden Rule



Discovering God's Word

Bible Study Series

The Golden Rule

Learn about Jesus' "Golden Rule" and how to apply it to your life

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Study Number: DGW190

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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 1:

Four Competing Rules

God is interested in how you treat other people. In fact, Jesus identifies the second greatest commandment in all of God's law as: "You shall love your neighbor as yourself" (Matthew 22:39). This was second only to loving God with all of your heart, soul, and mind (Matthew 22:37).

Jesus said that "all the Law and the Prophets" hang from these two commandments (Matthew 22:40). So, every other commandment that God gives directly relates and is dependent upon loving God or loving others. By implication, if you fail in either of these areas, you will fail to obey God in some way.

But, it is a radical concept to love other people in the same way that you love yourself. This is especially true whenever you consider that there are no limitations to this commandment. Since God commands you to love all people (even those who hate you, Matthew 5:43-48), this can certainly be a challenge.

Yet, the difficulty of this responsibility does not diminish it in any way. Instead, Jesus only enhanced this idea of loving others as much as you love yourself whenever He issued the (so-called) "Golden Rule" in Matthew 7:12. He said, "Therefore, whatever you want men to do to you, do also to them, for this is the Law and the Prophets." In fact, this is just another way of commanding you to love others as much as you love yourself. For, if you

do this, you will always act according to what is in their best interest.

So, you have a choice to make in your life. You *must* decide how you will treat other people. But, this does not just apply to those who love you and treat you well. This choice even concerns the most wicked of all people who treat you with complete contempt. As you make this decision, let's evaluate four competing rules that people have adopted and weigh the merits of each one against the Scriptures. These have all been assigned a different representation of metal – the "Iron Rule," the "Brass Rule," the "Silver Rule," and the "Golden Rule."

The "Iron Rule"

One way that you can decide to treat other people is by following the "Iron Rule." Just as you are often hurt by those who practice this rule, you may decide to take advantage of it whenever it will benefit you. So, let's weigh its merit against the Scriptures.

"Might makes right"

The "Iron Rule" says that "might makes right." Those who follow this rule believe that whatever is yours is mine if I can take it by force. Sometimes, you will find yourself on the losing end of this rule because there will be other people who are more powerful than you are. But, there will be other opportunities that you will surely have to exercise your own force (whether physical strength, a position of authority, etc.) in order to take something that belongs to another. So, even though individuals do not desire to be the victims of the "Iron Rule," this does not keep people from using it to their advantage against others.

Example of Ahab and Jezebel

Consider the example of King Ahab and Queen Jezebel as an illustration of the "Iron Rule." Ahab and Jezebel were the king and queen of Israel and lived in a palace in Samaria (the capital of Israel). And, as 1 Kings 21 discusses, they were willing to use their power to get what they wanted.

There was a man named Naboth who owned a vineyard that Ahab desired to have for himself because it was near to his house. Ahab approached Naboth and said, “Give me your vineyard, that I may have it for a vegetable garden, because it is near, next to my house; and for it I will give you a vineyard better than it. Or, if it seems good to you, I will give you its worth in money” (verse 2). But, the trouble began whenever Naboth refused this offer, saying, “The Lord forbid that I should give the inheritance of my fathers to you” (verse 3). The text teaches this made Ahab extremely unhappy. So, he went to lay down on his bed, turned away his face, and would not eat any food. Whenever his wife came to him, she asked why he was acting in this way.

Then, whenever Jezebel heard what had transpired, she told him, “You now exercise authority over Israel! Arise, eat food, and let your heart be cheerful; I will give you the vineyard of Naboth the Jezreelite” (verse 7). She proceeded to write letters in her husband’s name and put his seal on them, sending them to the elders and nobles who lived in Jezreel with Naboth. She instructed that they proclaim a fast and seat Naboth in a place of high honor among the people. Then, they were to seat two wicked men before him so that they would testify against Naboth, saying that he had blasphemed God and the king. Afterward, Naboth was to be taken out and stoned to death.

When the thing was done, Jezebel told Ahab that Naboth was dead and he took possession of the vineyard. The following verses (17-29) demonstrate that God condemned the wicked actions of the king and queen. And, God promised consequences for their wickedness.

Example of David

Consider the example of an earlier king over Israel, King David. Although he, generally, was a man after God’s own heart, he chose to live according to the “Iron Rule” on one occasion. This, as described in 2 Samuel 11 and 12, concerned another man’s wife.

One evening when David was walking on his roof, he saw a beautiful woman bathing. When he inquired about her, he was told that her name was

Bathsheba and that she was the wife of Uriah, the Hittite (verse 3). Still, David sent messengers and had her brought to him. When she came, he committed adultery with her.

Later, after Bathsheba revealed that she was pregnant, David tried to cover up his wickedness. Yet, Uriah was an honorable man who was loyal in the king’s army. So, David gave instructions to have Uriah set on the front line of the fiercest battle and then to withdraw from him so that he would be killed. After Bathsheba was told about her husband’s death and she concluded her mourning, she became David’s wife.

Then, when God sent the prophet, Nathan, to David, Nathan told David a story that was applicable to the situation (2 Samuel 12). Nathan said that there was a rich man in a city who had a great many flocks and herds, and a poor man who had nothing except one little ewe lamb. This poor man had bought and taken care of it. It grew up with his children. It ate his own food, drank from his cup, and slept in his arms. It was like a daughter to him. But, whenever a traveler came to the rich man, the rich man refused to take from his own flock to prepare a meal for his guest. Instead, he took the one small ewe lamb from the poor man and had it prepared for his guest.

Both of these stories are perfect illustrations of the “Iron Rule.” Both men used what power and influence they had to take what belonged to another. The interesting thing is that David had failed to recognize his error until he heard this story. Then, he became infuriated with the rich man who had done such a horrible thing and pronounced that the rich man should die and restore fourfold to the poor man “because he had no pity” (verses 5-6). After this, Nathan told David, “You are the man,” identified that he had done evil in God’s sight, and promised consequences for his actions (verses 7-12).

Not approved by God

Whenever the merits of the “Iron Rule” are weighed against the Scriptures, it is clearly found to be lacking. Both of these examples plainly demonstrate that God is not pleased by those who use their might to harm others. This surely does not act in a way that shows love and compassion toward

others. Even when the “Iron Rule” is used to make another person “happy” (as was the case with Jezebel and Ahab), it still fails to please God because it always harms someone.

God directly teaches us not to live according to this rule. For instance, 1 John 3:15 says, “Whoever hates his brother is a murderer, and you know that no murderer has eternal life abiding in him.” Although this passage directly pertains to the love that Christian brothers and sisters are expected to have for one another, the implications go even further. For, God equates hating someone with murder and says that they will miss out on eternal life because of their hatred. Therefore, whenever we use the “Iron Rule” we must recognize that we are showing hatred toward someone by trying to harm him/her. And, doing so makes us as guilty before God as a murderer!

The “Brass Rule”

Another way that you can decide to treat other people is by following the “Brass Rule.” I believe this “rule” is far more commonly used than the “Iron Rule.” In fact, this may be the most popular of all these “rules” in the world. So, let’s weigh its merit against the Scriptures.

“Get even”

The “Brass Rule” says that “you should do to others according to what they have done to you.” Those who follow this rule believe that you should try and get revenge for yourself whenever someone treats you in a way that is not right. This “rule” follows the idea that “what goes around comes around.” So, if you follow this rule, you will be looking to “pay back” the evil things that have been done against you in the past. And, even though individuals do not desire to be the victims of the “Brass Rule” (in fact, many people fear the revenge that others will take against them), this does not keep them from using it against others.

Example of Simeon and Levi

Consider the actions of Simeon and Levi (two of Jacob’s sons) in Genesis 34 as an illustration of the “Brass Rule.” A man named Shechem (a Hivite prince) saw Dinah, the daughter of Leah and Jacob, “took her and lay with her, and violated her” (Genesis 34:2). Verse 3 says that “His soul was strongly attracted to Dinah the daughter of Jacob, and he loved the young woman and spoke kindly to the young woman.” This man then went to his father Hamor and requested Dinah as a wife.

Now, there is certainly no excuse for what Shechem did. He acted with wickedness in forcing himself on Dinah. And, the Israelites had no agreement with the Hivites to make marriages with them prior to this time. Remember that the Israelites were God’s special people and God had made three great promises to the patriarchs of Israel (Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob).

Yet, even though Shechem had acted wickedly, this did not give Dinah’s brothers the right to return wickedness to him! For, whenever Hamor came to speak with Jacob about making marriages between the Israelites and the Hivites, living together, and providing a dowry and gift for Shechem to marry Dinah, Simeon and Levi devised a wicked plan. The sons of Jacob told Shechem and Hamor that there could be no such agreement without every male being circumcised. But, if they would comply with that condition, the two peoples would become one.

Shechem did not delay in doing this thing, because of his delight for Dinah. So, all of the men in the city were circumcised in order that they might be one people with the Israelites. However, on the third day, when all of the men were in pain, Simeon and Levi each took swords and attacked the city, killing every male. They also killed Hamor and Shechem and plundered the city, taking of the sheep, oxen, donkeys, all their wealth, and took all their children and wives captive.

This thing greatly displeased Jacob whenever he learned of their actions. He said that it had made him “obnoxious among the inhabitants of the land” and was concerned that the people would gather

themselves against him and kill him and his household (verse 30). Still, Simeon and Levi tried to justify themselves by saying, “Should he treat our sister like a harlot?” (verse 31). Yet, we must recognize that the wickedness of Shechem did *not* actually justify their actions! Instead, they were just as wicked as Shechem was!

Example of the Jews toward Jesus

Consider the example of the Jews toward Jesus as further illustration of the “Brass Rule.” However, I want you to think about a little bit of a different twist to this “rule.” Sometimes it is possible to treat other people badly because of our perception of what they have done to us.

This was the case between many of the Jews and Jesus. Jesus Christ did *not* commit sin the entire time He lived on this earth (Hebrews 4:15). So, this *cannot* be a classic case of the “Brass Rule” (where individuals carry out revenge toward those who have done evil against them). Jesus never did anything that was actually wrong or against the Jewish people (or anyone else). Instead, He only acted with love for all people and did whatever was in the best interest of others (particularly on a spiritual level).

Still, this example illustrates how people can misinterpret the actions of others and try to take revenge on others for the evil they *think* has been done against them. For, many of the Jews (especially the Jewish leaders) saw Jesus as a threat to their power and saw Jesus exposing their hypocrisy to the people. Jesus’ life exposed their own wickedness and they desired to destroy Him for it.

They always put as negative an interpretation on Jesus’ actions as they possibly could so that they could have cause to put Him to death. For instance, John 5:18 says, “Therefore the Jews sought all the more to kill Him, because He not only broke the Sabbath but also said that God was His Father, making Himself equal with God.” On another occasion, John 11:53 says that “from that day on, they plotted to put Him to death.” And, whenever Jesus was on trial, Pilate (the Roman governor of Judea) saw that the Jews had handed Jesus over “because of envy” (Matthew 27:18).

Now, my point is simply this: Sometimes, we can misinterpret the actions of others to think someone is doing us harm when they are really doing what is best for us. Remember that Jesus said (while He was on the cross), “Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they do” (Luke 23:34). Yet, if we live according to the “Brass Rule,” we will attempt to punish and avenge ourselves of even this! Not only can this be seen in the life and death of Jesus, but also in the persecution of Christians who desired to help sinners find salvation through Jesus Christ.

Not approved by God

Whenever the merits of the “Brass Rule” are weighed against the Scriptures, it is also found to be lacking. Both of these examples plainly demonstrate that God is not pleased by those who try to harm those who have harmed (or have been perceived as harming) them. This surely does not act in a way that shows love and tries to do what is in the best interest of others. Even though vengeance is *due* to the wickedness that has been committed against you or another (think about Shechem’s wickedness against Dinah), the “Brass Rule” still fails to please God because it always harms someone and exercises vengeance for yourself or others.

God directly teaches us not to live according to this rule. For instance, Romans 12:17-21 instructs us, “Repay no one evil for evil. Have regard for good things in the sight of all men. If it is possible, as much as depends on you, live peaceably with all men. Beloved, do not avenge yourselves, but rather give place to wrath; for it is written, ‘Vengeance is Mine, I will repay,’ says the Lord. Therefore ‘If your enemy is hungry, feed him; If he is thirsty, give him a drink; For in so doing you will heap coals of fire on his head.’ Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good.”

The “Silver Rule”

Another way that you can decide to treat other people is by following the “Silver Rule.” I believe that there are many well-intentioned people who believe that this rule is the fulfillment of Jesus’

command to love their neighbors. So, let's weigh its merit against the Scriptures.

"Do no harm"

The "Silver Rule" is no doubt a great improvement over the previous two "rules" we have considered. The "Silver Rule" says that you should "do nothing to others that you would not want them to do to you." So, its guiding principle is "do no harm" to others. If you would not want the thing to be done to you, do not do it to anyone else.

Example of the priest and Levite

Consider the example of the priest and Levite in the parable of the good Samaritan Jesus taught in Luke 10:30-36. While we most often think about the good Samaritan, Jesus also gives us these two other individuals to consider. But, before considering these two characters in Jesus' story, it is important to consider the context of the parable.

Verses 25-29 explain that Jesus was being tested by a certain lawyer, who asked Him, "Teacher, what shall I do to inherit eternal life?" (verse 25). When it was established that he must love God with all his heart, soul, strength, and mind and that he must love his neighbor as himself (verses 26-28), this man wanted to justify himself. So, he asked Jesus a follow-up question, saying, "And who is my neighbor?" (verse 29). In response, Jesus taught the parable of the good Samaritan.

The parable depicts a man traveling on a dangerous road from Jerusalem to Jericho and being attacked by robbers. These robbers stripped the man of his clothing, beat him, and left him half dead. It happened that two men traveled on this same road (before the good Samaritan). The first man was a priest. The second was a Levite.

Both should have known God's law about showing love to their neighbors. But, whenever they saw the man, they passed him by on the other side. Now, as these are contrasted with the good Samaritan who acted in the man's best interest by helping him, Jesus demonstrates that these two men did *not* love their neighbor by failing to help the man. Although they did not do anything (directly) to harm the man, they did not help him either.

Thus, they lived by the "Silver Rule" – at least on this occasion. Perhaps they thought that if they did not directly harm others they were fulfilling God's commandments. Yet, they demonstrate that God expects more from His people than just not harming others. They neglected their opportunity to do good to the wounded man. And, that is what God desired from them on that occasion.

Example of the older son

Consider another character in one of Jesus' parables. This example comes from the parable of the prodigal son in Luke 15:11-32. I believe that he is further illustration of the "Silver Rule." But, before studying this individual character, consider the context of his story.

Jesus was teaching people who viewed sinners with great contempt about the value of the soul. In doing so, He taught them about a shepherd searching diligently until he found the one sheep that was lost and a woman searching diligently until she found the one coin that she lost. Then, following these two parables, Jesus teaches about a man who lost his son.

This man had two sons. The younger of the sons demanded his share of his father's inheritance early. And, he took it and wasted it on reckless and wild living. After he spent all that he had been given, he worked to feed pigs. Then, when a famine hit the land, he would have even been happy to eat the food he was giving to the pigs. It was at this point that he came to himself and determined to return to his father, confessing his sins.

When his father saw him, his father ran to him, fell on his neck, and kissed him. The son confessed his sins and his father restored him, put the best robe on him, put a ring on his hand, put sandals on his feet, and threw a great celebration for him. But, when the older son came near and heard all that was going on, he did not have the same kind of positive reaction to his brother's repentance.

Instead, Luke 15:28-30 describes his attitude. "But he was angry and would not go in. Therefore his father came out and pleaded with him. So he answered and said to his father, 'Lo, these many years I have been serving you; I never transgressed

your commandment at any time; and yet you never gave me a young goat, that I might make merry with my friends. But as soon as this son of yours came, who has devoured your livelihood with harlots, you killed the fatted calf for him.”

Now, think about how this is a demonstration of the “Silver Rule.” This older brother did not wish harm on his brother, nor did he do anything to directly harm his brother. However, the error that this individual made was that he did not *do* what was in the best interest of his brother. Instead, his jealousy prevented him from celebrating his brother’s return.

Not all God desires

Whenever the merits of the “Silver Rule” are weighed against the Scriptures, it is also found to be lacking. Both of these examples plainly demonstrate that although these individuals could have done worse, they still did not fully comply with God’s law to love their neighbors as themselves. Surely, it is a great first step for someone who has lived according to the “Iron Rule” or the “Brass Rule” to decide not to harm anyone else. But, it is only a *first* step. As we saw (especially with the priest and Levite), the “Silver Rule” can leave much that is good undone!

God directly teaches us that this rule is good, but incomplete. For instance, Romans 13:10 says, “Love does no harm to a neighbor; therefore love is the fulfillment of the law.” Yet, love also *does* a lot of things that are good (see 1 Corinthians 13:4-7). 1 John 3:16-18 demonstrates. “By this we know love, because He laid down His life for us. And we also ought to lay down our lives for the brethren. But whoever has this world’s goods, and sees his brother in need, and shuts up his heart from him, how does the love of God abide in him? My little children, let us not love in word or in tongue, but in deed and in truth.”

The “Golden Rule”

A final “rule” we should consider regarding how you can decide to treat other people is the “Golden Rule.” This is the most challenging of all the various “rules” that a person could live by

regarding how to treat others. So, let’s weigh its merit against the Scriptures.

“Do unto others”

The “Golden Rule” goes one big step beyond the “Silver Rule” and is infinitely better than the “Iron Rule” or the “Brass Rule.” The “Golden Rule” is exactly what Jesus taught in Matthew 7:12. “Therefore, whatever you want men to do to you, do also to them, for this is the Law and the Prophets.” So, it’s guiding principle is to “do unto others” according to what you would want them to do to you – if you were in their situation. Then, your responsibility is to *act* accordingly.

Example of the good Samaritan

Consider the example of the good Samaritan. Remember that Jesus was teaching this parable in response to a question about who is the neighbor we have responsibility to love as ourselves (Luke 10:25-29). And, remember that Jesus has already shown us two examples (the priest and Levite) who did not show love to the one who had fallen among thieves.

Now, here comes a Samaritan journeying on the road that passed from Jerusalem to Jericho. When he came to the place where the wounded man was, Jesus said that “when he saw him, he had compassion” (verse 33). What follows is an excellent example of doing good to someone as there is opportunity and acting in that person’s best interest (in the same way that we would desire someone treat us if we were in the situation of the wounded man).

Verses 34 and 35 say, “So he went to him and bandaged his wounds, pouring on oil and wine; and he set him on his own animal, brought him to an inn, and took care of him. On the next day, when he departed, he took out two denarii, gave them to the innkeeper, and said to him, ‘Take care of him; and whatever more you spend, when I come again, I will repay you.’”

When Jesus asked the lawyer who had questioned him, “So which of these three do you think was neighbor to him who fell among the thieves?” (verse 36), the man could not deny that it was the one “who showed mercy” (verse 37). Thus, Jesus instructed him, “Go and do likewise” (verse

37). Of the three, the good Samaritan was the only one who truly demonstrated love as a neighbor to the one who was in need. Just seeing him and deciding to do no additional harm was *not* enough. Instead, God desires us to be active in *doing* good to those we have the opportunity to do good toward.

Apply the “Golden Rule” to this situation. Suppose you had been the one who was traveling, was beaten, and left half dead. Would you desire for those who saw you to pass you by without helping you? Or, would you desire to have someone take care of you to the best of his/her ability (like the good Samaritan)? We all know the answer to this question!

Example of Jesus

Consider the perfect example of Jesus as further illustration of the “Golden Rule.” For, not only did Jesus *teach* the perfect law of God so that we could follow His law, but He gave us the perfect example so that we could follow in His steps. This area of how we ought to treat others is no different.

Begin by thinking about what Jesus *could* have done. Jesus was not the one who committed sin. So, He did not need to die for His own sin. Therefore, He could have chosen not to leave Heaven and come to earth to suffer and die. In doing so, He would *not* have done any harm to anyone. The harm that would have come upon them (eternal punishment in Hell) would have been entirely self-inflicted.

Yet, Jesus chose to *do* what He could to save those who were lost in sin. 2 Corinthians 8:9 says, “For you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though He was rich, yet for your sakes He became poor, that you through His poverty might become rich.” Although Jesus could have left us poor and spiritually destitute in our sins, He acted in our best interest by coming to this earth and sacrificing His own life on the cross to save us!

Even though many people showed their contempt for Jesus while He was living on earth, Jesus acted in their best interest. 1 Peter 2:21-25 says, “For to this you were called, because Christ also suffered for us, leaving us an example, that you should follow His steps: ‘Who committed no sin, Nor was deceit found in His mouth’; who, when He was reviled, did not revile in return; when He suffered,

He did not threaten, but committed Himself to Him who judges righteously; who Himself bore our sins in His own body on the tree, that we, having died to sins, might live for righteousness—by whose stripes you were healed. For you were like sheep going astray, but have now returned to the Shepherd and Overseer of your souls.”

In everything that Jesus has ever done, He has lived by the “Golden Rule.” He did *not* live by the “Iron Rule” – even though He was (and is) the Almighty God and could demand anything He desires. He did *not* live by the “Brass Rule” – even though every person who has ever lived (who has reached the age of personal accountability) has done evil against Him and He has the power to do them all harm. He did *not* even live by the “Silver Rule” – even though He did not *have* to sacrifice Himself for us.

Instead, He is the perfect example of the “Golden Rule.” So, whenever we interact with *anyone* (friend or foe), we must consider how Jesus would treat that person if He was on this earth. Ultimately, Jesus is the one we will all answer to for how we have lived our lives on earth (2 Corinthians 5:10). And, Jesus taught us that when we act in the best interest of another, we do the thing to Him. But, when we fail to act in the best interest of another, we fail to do good to Him (see Matthew 25:31-46)!

Exactly what God desires

Whenever the merits of the “Golden Rule” are weighed against the Scriptures, it is found to be exactly what God desires. Both examples plainly demonstrate that proactively doing what is in the best interest of others fulfills God’s law to love our neighbors as we love ourselves! This demonstrates compassion and mercy on others and desires to help someone in whatever way you are capable of helping.

God directly teaches us that this rule is exactly what He desires, not only in Matthew 7:12, but, in many Scriptures. For instance, Romans 12:20-21 says that if your enemy is hungry to “feed him” and if he is thirsty to “give him a drink.” In doing so, you will not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good. Although this “rule” goes against what

many people in the world believes is appropriate, we must not be conformed to this world and be transformed by the gospel of Jesus Christ (Romans 12:2). For, what we often *think* is right (or that *feels* right) will lead us in a way that goes against God and results in eternal punishment in Hell (Proverbs 14:12).

Conclusion

If you desire to please God in your conduct toward others, you *must* live by the “Golden Rule.” No other “rule” that has been devised by man will suffice. They all fall short in some way. And, even though following the “Golden Rule” requires you to sacrifice of yourself for others, remember how much Jesus Christ willingly sacrificed for you! If you will follow Jesus’ instructions in Matthew 7:12 (that has been appropriately called the “Golden Rule”), it will completely transform the way that you interact with others in a way that will please God!

Study Questions

What are the two greatest commandments in all of God’s law? Why are these two the greatest?

1. The “Iron Rule”

What is the “iron rule”?

How does the example of Ahab and Jezebel illustrate the “iron rule”?

How does the example of David illustrate the “iron rule”?

Is the “iron rule” approved by God?

2. The “Brass Rule”

What is the “brass rule”?

How does the example of Simeon and Levi illustrate the “brass rule”?

How does the example of the Jews toward Jesus illustrate the “brass rule”?

Is the “brass rule” approved by God?

3. The “Silver Rule”

What is the “silver rule”?

How does the example of the priest and Levite illustrate the “silver rule”?

How does the example of the older son illustrate the “silver rule”?

Is the “silver rule” approved by God?

4. The “Golden Rule”

What is the “golden rule”?

How does the example of the good Samaritan illustrate the “golden rule”?

How does the example of Jesus illustrate the “golden rule”?

Is the “golden rule” approved by God?

The Golden Rule

Lesson 2:

A

Transformational Commandment

Our first study contrasted the commandment Jesus gave, known as the “Golden Rule,” with three other commonly practiced “rules” regarding how you can treat other people. We saw that God does *not* approve of forcing your will on another because you have power in a certain area (the “Iron Rule”). We saw that God does *not* approve of treating others how they treat you (the “Brass Rule”). And, we saw that even doing no harm to others is not entirely what God desires from your conduct toward others (the “Silver Rule”).

Instead, the standard Jesus sets for how you must treat others is the “Golden Rule” that is given in Matthew 7:12. Jesus said, “Therefore, whatever you want men to do to you, do also to them, for this is the Law and the Prophets.” The standard for your conduct toward others *must be* how you want others to treat you. This certainly involves refraining from harming people in any way (as you would not want others to harm you). And, this also involves doing good to people in the ways you would want people to do good to you.

This is such a simple, yet transformational idea. You see, the fact of the matter is that people do not treat others in this way much of the time. People are often too self-absorbed to see the true needs of others and act in the best interest of the others. Then, even when this “Golden Rule” is practiced, it is often

only practiced toward certain people. Yet, Jesus’ commandment is much more far-reaching than this!

Those who are Christians must be determined to live differently from the “normal” activities that are seen throughout the world. This is because the ways of the world are contrary to the ways of God (see 1 John 2:15-17). So, Romans 12:1-2 instructs Christians to give themselves entirely to the Lord and live in a transformed kind of way. “I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that you present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable to God, which is your reasonable service. And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, that you may prove what is that good and acceptable and perfect will of God.”

Matthew 7:12 is one of the many commandments involved in God’s law that will transform us from the ways of the world to a true imitator of Jesus Christ. So, having established what the “Golden Rule” says (in lesson 1), let’s consider the many ways that it will transform us. If we live according to Jesus’ teaching, it will transform our thoughts, our words, our conduct, and our relationships!

Transformational For Your Thoughts

One of the most important elements in true Christian transformation (from a life of sin to a life of godliness) is the mind. Romans 12:2 demonstrated this to be so. Paul instructed that you “be transformed by the renewing of your mind.” If you are dedicated to living according to the “Golden Rule,” it will surely transform your thoughts!

In focus

The Bible speaks about the importance of your focus. For instance, Proverbs 23:7 says, “For as he thinks in his heart, so is he...” Therefore, what you choose to focus on (what fills your heart/mind) is what you will often find impacting your life – either for the better or the worse!

Jesus also put the focus on *focus* in Matthew 6:19-34. He said that your focus should not be on the earthly treasures because they will not last. Instead, your focus should be on the spiritual (heavenly) treasures that are eternal. Then, He warns about having more than one focus in life, saying that “No one can serve two masters; for either he will hate the one and love the other, or else he will be loyal to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and mammon” (verse 24). Ultimately, Jesus instructs you to “seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness” (verse 33) – even above putting your focus on the pursuit of your physical needs (i.e. food, drink, and clothing).

Now, I want you to think about what applying the “Golden Rule” to your life will do to your focus. If your desire is to treat others how you would want them to treat you, your focus must be on them! So, you must go from a self-centered focus to a selfless focus.

Philippians 2:3-4 helps to understand the kind of selfless focus God wants you to have. “Let nothing be done through selfish ambition or conceit, but in lowliness of mind let each esteem others better than himself. Let each of you look out not only for his own interests, but also for the interests of others.” Then, you could continue reading verses 5 through 11 to see that this was exactly the kind of humble and selfless focus that Jesus Christ had in leaving Heaven, coming to earth, living as a man, and dying on the cross!

Your focus cannot be on your own desires and pleasing yourself if you are going to live according to the “Golden Rule.” It requires you to focus on how other people feel, things that other people need and desire, how other people will interpret what is done, etc. So, living in this way tries to see things through the eyes of the people you are around rather than just from your own selfish perspective. You will want to focus on others, just as you would like others to focus on you.

In judgments

One of the ways in which people often hurt others is by making rash, irresponsible, and false judgments about others. You see, the judgments that

you make about others impact how you treat them. So, you must consider how the “Golden Rule” will transform the judgments that you form in your private thoughts.

Jesus teaches the need to be careful how you judge others. Matthew 7:1-2 says, “Judge not, that you be not judged; and with the measure you use, it will be measured back to you.” Now, a closer study of this passage demonstrates that Jesus is *not* forbidding all judgments from being made. Instead, His primary concern is hypocritical judgments (see verses 3-5). But, even in this, you should see that you must consider how you would want others to judge you.

Jesus also taught about making the proper judgments in John 7:24. When others were trying to judge Jesus in an improper way, Jesus said, “Do not judge according to appearance, but judge with righteous judgment.” So, from this, we can conclude that there are right judgments that should and must be made (as the Scriptures teach on many different occasions). However, we must be very careful how we judge.

It is far too common for folks not to consider others whenever they make judgments. They often reach rash conclusions because they do not weigh out all of the evidence. Perhaps they judge based only on appearance. Perhaps they judge based only on hearsay or gossip. Perhaps they judge based on only having part of the information. Perhaps they judge based on their own suppositions. Perhaps their judgment is without mercy. Then, after forming a rash judgment, they often pass those judgments along to others.

Now, not only does this violate what Jesus teaches about making judgments, but it also violates the “Golden Rule.” Certainly, you would never desire to have those kinds of judgments made about you. Surely, you would desire others to come to you for your side of the story before drawing conclusions. Therefore, the “Golden Rule” will transform your thoughts about other people because you will consider them in making judgments.

In recognizing opportunities

It is far too easy to get caught up in our own lives, worries, pleasures, etc. and fail to have any consideration for others. Thus, there are many opportunities to serve, encourage, and do good to others that pass by unnoticed because our focus is not in the right place. So, as you put your focus on others, this will cause you to recognize the opportunities that are all around you to do good to others and treat them in the way that you would desire to be treated yourself.

Think about Jesus' parable of the good Samaritan in Luke 10:25-37. In lesson 1, we studied how the Samaritan recognized his opportunity to do good to the man who fell among thieves. And, we considered how the priest and Levite passed him by without helping. Now, Jesus does *not* tell us the reason why they did not help the man and show him love.

I suppose there could have been any number of reasons these two men did not help. But, as you make application of the parable, you should consider if there are ever times when you could be passing someone by and failing to act in their best interest because you are not even looking for opportunities to do good to them. Maybe you are in a hurry to get somewhere. Maybe you are focused on your schedule. Maybe you are concerned about your own worries. Maybe you are lost in your own pleasures.

It is interesting and encouraging to me to recognize that God only expects from us what we are capable of giving to Him. He does not expect more than I am capable of giving Him. But, He also does not accept anything less. Therefore, this means that you should be looking for every opportunity that is available to you. Galatians 6:10 says, "Therefore as we have opportunity, let us do good to all, especially to those who are of the household of faith." And, if you are living by the "Golden Rule," you will be focused on others so much that you will recognize the opportunities that are given to you to do what is good for them. You will be looking to do good to others as you want others to look for the opportunity to do good to you.

Transformational For Your Words

The transformation that is experienced due to the "Golden Rule" needs to begin in the mind. Your thoughts should be on others rather than just on yourself. You should be thinking about others how you want them to think about you. Then, this transformation in thought extends to a transformation in words. For, you must recognize that your words are very powerful to others (see James 3:1-12). They have the power to either help or destroy.

Words of truth

Speaking the complete truth must be the commitment that is made by everyone who is a Christian. Since God is a God of truth (Titus 1:2; Hebrews 6:18), He certainly expects this from those who follow Him. So, this is routinely reflected in the Scriptures. And, in application of the "Golden Rule," you should be committed to speaking the truth because you surely want others to speak the truth to you!

For instance, when Paul speaks concerning the transformation of those who become Christians, he said, "Therefore, putting away lying, 'Let each one of you speak truth with his neighbor,' for we are members of one another" (Ephesians 4:25). Then, Romans 1:29 lists "deceit" as something that is "deserving of death" (Romans 1:32).

Notice the things that are *unacceptable* to God and that fail to fulfill the "Golden Rule." You must not lie or deceive. Both condemn any practice of saying things that are not true or that leads another to a false conclusion. Sometimes this happens by just blatantly saying something that is false. Other times this happens by giving misleading information. For instance, on two separate occasions, Abraham told people that his wife, Sarah, was his sister (see Genesis 12 and 20). Now, this was *technically* true (she was his half-sister). However, he purposefully misled them by failing to say she was also his wife.

There are many circumstances in which you might be tempted to be untruthful. Maybe you want to “keep the peace” with someone, so you tell him/her a lie. Maybe you want to flatter someone, so you “stretch the truth” to make him/her feel good. Maybe you are afraid of the consequences the truth will bring, so you lead another to draw a false conclusion based on the truth.

Now, the “Golden Rule” demands that you consider whether you want to be misled by others or whether you want people to always be completely honest with you. For, it is not enough to just *not* lie and deceive. But, you must also speak the truth – even when the truth is not pleasant.

Words of edification

If you were to describe how most people speak about others, would you say that they speak in selfish ways or in ways that are in the best interest of the others? How many times do you and others speak words that harm those who hear you? The simple fact of the matter is that God wants you to be transformed in your speech, and following the “Golden Rule” will go a long way to accomplish that.

Ephesians 4:29 says, “Let no corrupt word proceed out of your mouth, but what is good for necessary edification, that it may impart grace to the hearers.” You must set a guard at your mouth, never allowing your tongue to harm someone else. Now, this does not mean that you must never allow your words to cause someone to feel bad. For, there are plenty of times when the truth will make people feel bad. Instead, this means that you must never allow yourself to speak words that do not meet God’s standards for your speech.

Furthermore, true edification (according to how the word is used in the Scriptures) refers to building up others spiritually. It is *not* always equal to a good feeling. In fact, sometimes you will need to tell people that they are sinning against God. Still, even though they may not like what you say, you edify them because you helped identify sin in their lives so that they can make changes and be right with God.

Just think about all of the ways people speak words that are harmful (physically or spiritually).

People speak words of unproven accusation. People gossip about others. People speak out of anger. People speak without thinking. People speak in hateful ways.

But, in accordance with the “Golden Rule,” you should be considerate in the words that you speak. You should question whether each word will build someone up or tear someone down (spiritually speaking). You should put yourself in the situation of another and consider what you would *need* someone to say to you and how you would *want* him/her to say it. In all things, your speech must be such that it draws others toward God rather than push them away from Him.

Words of love

Speaking the truth and words that edify others is only part of how you should speak to others. Ephesians 4:15 also adds the responsibility of “speaking the truth in love.” Now, this implies that it is possible to speak the truth in ways that are not right. In fact, I would suggest to you that there are many Christians who harm people with the truth.

Even as it pertains to preaching the gospel and correcting sin, many Christians do not harness their zeal for God with the proper degree of love. So, they rebuke others without any consideration of how they would want others to rebuke them. They “preach” to others in ways that they would not want others to teach them. In doing so, they push people further away from God and the truth!

When Jesus sent out His twelve apostles on a “Limited Commission” to the house of Israel in Matthew 10, He told them, “Behold, I send you out as sheep in the midst of wolves. Therefore be wise as serpents and harmless as doves” (verse 16). So, speaking the truth is only one part of what God wants from us. He also wants us to do no harm and be wise in our conduct and conversation toward others.

1 Corinthians 13 will prove to be extremely helpful whenever you consider how you can speak the truth in love. In describing the things love does, Paul said, “Love suffers long and is kind; love does not envy; love does not parade itself, is not puffed up; does not behave rudely, does not seek its own, is not provoked, thinks no evil; does not rejoice in

iniquity, but rejoices in the truth; bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things” (verses 4-7).

Isn't this exactly how you desire for folks to speak to you? Don't you want them to speak in patient ways? In kind ways? In ways that are not about their own selfish desires and egos? In ways that are not rude? In ways that do not provoke an emotional response in you that would be ungodly? In ways that give you the “benefit of the doubt” rather than assume your guilt? In ways that rejoice whenever you do what is right? In ways that demonstrate trust and hope? Therefore, if this is how you want others to speak to you, you must also speak to them in the same kind of ways, according to God's standard of love.

Transformational For Your Conduct

Love should describe every part of how you think and talk about/to others. But, it only *starts* there. Everything about how you conduct yourself must be described by love (as we saw from 1 Corinthians 13). The “Golden Rule” will surely transform your life regarding how you conduct yourself toward others.

Demonstrating mercy

One of the most difficult things any person can be asked to do for another is to show mercy. Mercy involves compassion for another. And, the word is especially used in the Scriptures to talk about forgiveness. Mercy does *not* give someone what is truly deserved.

Everyone who lives long enough on this earth experiences wrong and suffering. But, this is not always just due to the circumstances of living on this earth. Instead, it is sometimes the direct result of someone else's sin. Sometimes people say things that cause us to suffer. Sometimes people think things that cause us to suffer. And, sometimes people do things that cause us to suffer.

Then, there are differing degrees to which people cause us to suffer. Sometimes the things that are done against us are quickly forgotten and moved on from. However, there are things that people do against us that truly leave lasting scars. And, especially in these situations, it is easy to fall for the temptation of seeking revenge or always holding on to the wrong that was committed and never moving on.

Yet, Jesus taught, “For if you forgive men their trespasses, your heavenly Father will also forgive you. But if you do not forgive men their trespasses, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses” (Matthew 6:14-15). And, there are *no* limits to this forgiveness that you should offer to others (see Matthew 18:21-35). Just as God has offered you *limitless* forgiveness whenever you ask Him, you must extend that same kind of forgiveness to those who have wronged you! Now, let me also be clear that the forgiveness God expects you to extend to others concerns situations in which your forgiveness is being sought. For, even God does not forgive if His forgiveness is not sought.

Now, consider how you want others to treat you in this regard. Whenever you realize that you have wronged someone else and caused suffering, do you want him/her to hold on to your sin for the rest of his/her life? Or, do you want an opportunity to start over? Even though you recognize that you do not deserve to start over, this is what you desire. So, if you are going to treat others according to the “Golden Rule,” this is how you must treat them!

Demonstrating kindness

“Kindness” is such a broad idea and is somewhat hard to define. But, it is something that we all recognize. It is gentleness and consideration of others. Unfortunately, much of the way in which the world treats other people lacks genuine kindness. In fact, much of their conduct demonstrates rudeness.

Ephesians 4:32 says, “And be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, even as God in Christ forgave you.” Although there is some overlap between this point and the last one, I think that this one challenges us to go even further. The contrast in this verse is to the kinds of actions

described by verse 31. Christians must let “all bitterness, wrath, anger, clamor, and evil speaking...with all malice” be put away from them. These are to be replaced with kindness, tenderheartedness, and forgiveness.

I like the word “tenderhearted.” How many times do we see people in this world who are “hard-hearted”? It is so familiar to us that we know what this looks like all too well. It is when people have no consideration of others. But, a “tender” heart means that the way in which other people are treated impacts you. Your heart can be penetrated by *their* feelings.

You must remember that one of the characteristics of true love is that love “is kind” (1 Corinthians 13:4). So, if your actions do not show kindness (and if your speech is not with kindness), then you do not love that person. And, if you do not love that person, your life is *not* acceptable to God, no matter how many other good things you may do in serving Jesus Christ (see 1 Corinthians 13:1-3)!

Now, you must consider how you desire other people to treat you. Do you want their hearts to be so hard against you that they do not care how you feel or about what you need? Or, do you want their hearts to be soft enough that your life really matters to them? Don’t you prefer someone to show you acts of kindness and tenderness (even if they are very small gestures) rather than to act with selfishness and rudeness? If so, the “Golden Rule” makes it necessary that you act in the same kind and tender ways toward others.

Demonstrating care

Part of being tenderhearted and kind is showing people that you care about them. But, while there are even small and relatively insignificant ways you can be kind to be people, I want you to think more about helping and serving people at this point. Again, think about the good Samaritan in Jesus’ parable. He cared enough about a complete stranger that he did what he was capable of doing to help the man.

We have already seen that Galatians 6:10 requires Christians to take advantage of their opportunities to do good to all, especially those who

are also Christians. Now, there are many ways in which you can do good to other people. For the purposes of this lesson, we will just be considering the *physical* ways you can do good (as we will consider spiritual things in the next lesson).

I think we often overlook the specifics of what Jesus taught about the Judgment Day in Matthew 25:31-46. Although there are some general applications we should make about the righteous and the unrighteous, we should not overlook the specific criteria Jesus states in the passage. He speaks about feeding the hungry, giving the thirsty something to drink, taking in strangers, clothing the naked, and visiting the sick and those in prison.

While there are other ways to do good to people, this is a good start. There are people who have physical needs living around you. And, as we considered earlier, you should be focused on recognizing these opportunities. Then, you must not just dismiss yourself of any responsibility to them. Instead, you should do the most that you can with your opportunities. For, Jesus said that if you do these good things to others, you do them to Him. And, if you do not do these good things to others, you do not do them to Him.

Now, consider yourself in the situation of those who have a physical need. If you were hungry and had no means to provide yourself or your family something to eat, wouldn’t you want someone to feed you and your family? If you were so poor that you had insufficient clothing, wouldn’t you want someone to give you an extra set of their clothes or buy you your own set? If you were sick and unable to get out of the house or were in prison, the hospital, or nursing home, wouldn’t you want someone to come visit you? So, if you would want others to do these kinds of good things to you and show you that they care about you, the “Golden Rule” makes it necessary that you do the same for others!

Transformational For Your Relationships

I am sure that there are other things we could consider regarding how the “Golden Rule” will transform your thoughts, your words, and your conduct. But, I believe you have the point. Up to this point, we have been talking generically about how we should treat “others.” Now, I want you to start putting faces with these “others” and applying the “Golden Rule” to your specific relationships. For, there is no book on relationships, advice column, counselor, etc. who will do more to transform your relationships than God! And, the “Golden Rule” will go a long way in accomplishing this.

Your neighbors

Jesus taught that your “neighbor” is anyone you have the opportunity to show love toward (go back and review the parable of the good Samaritan in Luke 10:25-37). It is *not* limited to the people who live in your physical neighborhood. For instance, there is no mention of the good Samaritan having any prior relationship with the wounded man. In fact, I believe the two were strangers. Yet, Jesus taught this parable in order to answer the question, “And who is my neighbor?” (Luke 10:29).

So, Jesus expects you to love and apply the “Golden Rule” to all of your neighbors. This includes the people in your neighborhood. But, it also includes strangers you come into contact with. It includes your friends, your adversaries (which we will talk about more in a moment), your co-workers, your classmates, your acquaintances, and *everyone* you contact. Now, just imagine if you applied the “Golden Rule” in such a complete kind of way. Everyone who came into contact with you would be treated with love, respect, and kindness – and would be better off than if they had not come into contact with you.

Your enemies

Sometimes it is fairly easy to apply the “Golden Rule.” But, even those in the world (who often live according to the “Brass Rule” of getting

even) can sometimes deal kindly with those who are kind to them. The real test of the “Golden Rule” is when you are *not* treated with love, dignity, and kindness. Still, Jesus taught, “You have heard that it was said, ‘You shall love your neighbor and hate your enemy.’ But I say to you, love your enemies, bless those who curse you, do good to those who hate you, and pray for those who spitefully use you and persecute you, that you may be sons of your Father in heaven; for He makes His sun rise on the evil and on the good, and sends rain on the just and on the unjust. For if you love those who love you, what reward have you? Do not even the tax collectors do the same? And if you greet your brethren only, what do you do more than others? Do not even the tax collectors do so? Therefore you shall be perfect, just as your Father in heaven is perfect” (Matthew 5:43-48).

The fact of the matter is that the “Golden Rule” applies to how you treat *everyone*! So, you must be committed to applying all that we have been studying in these lessons to those who hate you and want to see you destroyed. Now, just imagine if your enemies who want to harm you were treated according to the “Golden Rule.” Rather than harming them in return, you would only act in ways that were beneficial for them (physically and spiritually).

Your brethren

Christians are part of a spiritual family. Not only is God their Father, but all other Christians are their brothers and sisters. It is very sad that these brothers and sisters often harm each other in how they think, speak, and act toward one another. Sometimes this causes hard feelings, division in local churches, and even brothers and sisters falling into sin.

Yet, God has given Christians the responsibility to love one another, not just in word or tongue but in deed and truth (1 John 3:18). And, there are many responsibilities the Christian has toward all his/her brothers and sisters in Christ. For instance, Romans 12:10 says, “Be kindly affectionate to one another with brotherly love, in honor giving preference to one another.” Now, just imagine if you applied the “Golden Rule” to every brother and sister in Jesus Christ – not just to those who are easy to get

along with, but also to the difficult ones. Rather than fighting and dividing, you would only act in ways that were beneficial to them.

Your family

Every member of the family has the responsibility to love all the other members of the family. However, selfishness can creep into the home unaware and wreak havoc on a home. It can turn husbands and wives into great enemies. And, it can separate the bond that should exist between parents and children. Beyond this, siblings and many other family relationships are often destroyed because of a failure to love and apply the “Golden Rule.”

Yet, we have seen that God expects you to love your neighbor (which includes every member of your family you encounter). This means that you must act like the good Samaritan toward every member of your family, no matter how they act toward you. Now, just imagine if you applied the “Golden Rule” to every member of your family. Rather than contributing to the problems of the family, you would always be part of the solution because you would only act in ways that were beneficial for all the others.

Conclusion

If you want your thoughts, words, and conduct toward others to have God’s approval, you must allow them to be transformed by the “Golden Rule.” And, it is *not* enough just to pick and choose who you desire to show this kind of love toward. Instead, you *must* apply the “Golden Rule” to everyone you come into contact with – no exceptions! If you will, you will be pleasing to God in this area of your life, no matter how other people treat you.

Study Questions

What kind of transformation does God require? How will the “Golden Rule” transform you?

1. Transformational For Your Thoughts

How will the “Golden Rule” transform your focus?

How will the “Golden Rule” transform your judgments?

How will the “Golden Rule” transform your recognition of opportunities?

2. Transformational For Your Words

How will the “Golden Rule” transform your words into words of truth?

How will the “Golden Rule” transform your words into words of edification?

How will the “Golden Rule” transform your words into words of love?

3. Transformational For Your Conduct

How will the “Golden Rule” result in you demonstrating mercy?

How will the “Golden Rule” result in you demonstrating kindness?

How will the “Golden Rule” result in you demonstrating care?

4. Transformational For Your Relationships

How will the “Golden Rule” transform your relationships with your neighbors?

How will the “Golden Rule” transform your relationships with your enemies?

How will the “Golden Rule” transform your relationships with your brethren?

How will the “Golden Rule” transform your relationships with your family?

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?