

The Golden Rule

Lesson 1: Four Competing Rules



Discovering God's Word
Bible Study Series

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Introduction

A. God is interested in how you treat other people. Loving God and your neighbor are given as the two greatest commands, on which all the Law and Prophets depend (Matthew 22:36-40).

B. Loving others the way you love yourself is a radical concept – especially when there are no limitations (even including those who hate you, Matthew 5:43-48). Yet, the difficulty of the responsibility to love others does not diminish it in any way. Instead, Jesus enhanced the idea of loving others when He gave the “Golden Rule” (Matthew 7:12).

C. You must decide how you will treat other people – not just those who treat you well, but even the most wicked of all people who treat you with complete contempt.

D. Purpose: To learn four competing rules that people have used in determining how to treat others and weigh the merits of each one against the Scriptures (note that they have all been given a different representation of metal).

1. The “Iron Rule”

A. “Might makes right”

1. Those who follow this rule believe that whatever is yours is mine if I can take it by force.

2. Sometimes you will find yourself on the losing end of this rule. But, there will be other times you can exercise your own force to take something that belongs to another (i.e. because of physical strength, a position of authority, etc.).

B. Example of Ahab and Jezebel

1. A man named Naboth owned a vineyard King Ahab desired to have for himself because it was near his palace. Ahab approached Naboth to purchase the vineyard (1 Kings 21:2). But, the trouble began when Naboth refused the offer (v. 3).

2. Ahab was extremely unhappy, lay down on his bed, turned away his face, and would not eat any food. Queen Jezebel came to him and asked why he was acting this way. Then, she told him to exercise his royal power over Israel and said she would give him the vineyard (v. 7).

- She wrote 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 them to proclaim a fast and seat Naboth in a place of high honor among the people. Then, they were seat two wicked men before him who would testify against Naboth, saying he had blasphemed God and the king. Afterward, Naboth was to be taken out and stoned.

3. When the thing was done, Jezebel told Ahab Naboth was dead and he took possession of the vineyard. Then, God condemned them for their wickedness and promised consequences (vv. 17-29).

B. Example of David

1. One evening when David was walking on his roof, he saw a beautiful woman bathing. When he inquired about her, he found out she was Bathsheba, the wife of Uriah (2 Samuel 11:3). Still, David had her brought to him and committed adultery with her.

- This resulted in Bathsheba becoming pregnant. When David's attempts to cover his sin failed, he gave instructions that resulted in Uriah being killed. After Bathsheba mourned her husband's death, she became David's wife.

2. After all this, God sent the prophet Nathan to David. He told David a story applicable to his situation (2 Samuel 12) about a rich man with many flocks and herds taking a lamb from a poor man to feed a guest. This poor man only had this one ewe lamb and took care of it like a daughter. It ate his food, drank from his cup, and slept in his arms.

3. Both men used their power to take what belonged to another. Interestingly, David failed to recognize his error until he heard this story and became infuriated with the rich man (2 Samuel 12:5-6). After this, Nathan told David that he was the man who had done such evil and would be punished (2 Samuel 12:7-12).

C. Not approved by God

1. When the merits of the “Iron Rule” are weighed against the Scriptures, it is clearly found to be lacking. It does not show love toward others. Even when it is used to make another person happy (as with Jezebel and Ahab), it fails to please God because it harms others.

2. God teaches us not to live according to this rule (1 John 3:15). Using the “Iron Rule” shows hatred by trying to harm another and makes us as guilty before God as a murderer!

2. The “Brass Rule”

A. “Get even”

1. Those who follow this rule believe you should try and get revenge for yourself or others whenever someone treats you or others in a way that is not right (i.e. treat others according to how they have treated you).

2. Following this rule will look to pay back the evil things someone has done.

B. Example of Simeon and Levi

1. Genesis 34 records Shechem (a Hivite prince) raping Dinah (v. 2, the daughter of Leah and Jacob). He became infatuated with Dinah, loved her, and requested her as a wife (v. 3).

2. Dinah’s brothers (Simeon and Levi) devised a wicked plan after Hamor (Shechem’s father) approached Jacob (Dinah’s father) about marriages between the Israelites and Hivites.

- They indicated there could be no agreement without every Hivite male being circumcised. Then, while the men were still in pain after being circumcised, Simeon and Levi attacked the city and killed every male, including Hamor and Shechem, plundered the city, and took their possessions and their children and wives.

3. Jacob was greatly displeased when he learned of their wicked actions (v. 30). Although Simeon and Levi tried to justify themselves (v. 31), they were not at all justified!

B. Example of the Jews toward Jesus

1. Consider this example with a bit of a different twist. Sometimes it is possible to treat other people badly because of our

perception of what they have done to us. Since Jesus did not sin while He was on earth (Hebrews 4:15), this *cannot* be a classic case of the “Brass Rule.”

- This 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 leaders saw Jesus as a threat to their power by exposing their hypocrisy.

2. They always put a negative interpretation on Jesus’s actions so they could have cause to put Him to death (John 5:18; John 11:53; Matthew 27:18).

3. Sometimes we can misinterpret the actions of others to think someone is doing us harm when they are not (Luke 23:34). Yet, if we live by the “Brass Rule,” we will attempt to avenge ourselves of even this – as Jesus was put to death!

C. Not approved by God

1. When the merits of the “Brass Rule” are weighed against the Scriptures, it is also found to be lacking. God is not pleased by harming those who do evil (or are perceived as such) – even when vengeance is *due* for the wickedness that has been committed.

2. God directly teaches us not to live by this rule (Romans 12:17-21).

3. The “Silver Rule”

A. “Do no harm”

1. The “Silver Rule” is no doubt a great improvement over the previous two rules.

2. The “Silver Rule” says you should do nothing to others you would not want them to do to you.

B. Example of the priest and the Levite

1. Jesus taught the parable of the good Samaritan (Luke 10:25-37) to demonstrate who a person’s neighbor is and what it means to love your neighbor (vv. 25-29).

2. The parable depicts a man traveling on a dangerous road from Jerusalem to Jericho, being attacked by robbers, and left half dead

along the road. Then, two men traveled that road (before the Samaritan) – a priest and a Levite (vv. 30-32).

- Both should have known God’s law about showing love to their neighbors. But, when they saw the wounded man, they passed him by on the other side. So, although they did not harm the man, they did not show him love either.

3. Perhaps they thought they fulfilled God’s commandment if they did not directly harm the man. Yet, God requires more than this. They neglected their opportunity to do good.

B. Example of the older son

1. The parable of the prodigal son (Luke 15:11-32) was taught in response to people viewing sinners with great contempt so as to teach the value of the soul.

2. The parable depicts a man with two sons. The younger son demanded his share of his father’s inheritance early and then wasted it on reckless and wild living. After he had spent it all and found himself in a miserable situation, he returned to his father, confessing his sins.

- The father gladly welcomed his lost son, even throwing a great celebration for him. But, when the older son heard what was going on, he did not have a positive response to his brother’s repentance (vv. 28-30).

4. Although the older brother did not do anything to directly harm his brother, he did not do what was in his best interest. Instead, his jealousy prevented him from celebrating his brother’s return.

C. Not all God desires

1. When the merits of the “Silver Rule” are weighed against the Scriptures, it is also found to be lacking. Although worse could be done, this rule does not result in loving one’s neighbors. It can leave much good that is undone.

2. God teaches that this rule is good, but incomplete (Romans 13:10). Love also does a lot of things that are good (1 Corinthians 13:4-7; 1 John 3:16-18)!

4. The “Golden Rule”

A. “Do unto others”

1. The “Golden Rule” goes one big step beyond the “Silver Rule” and is infinitely better than the “Iron Rule” or “Brass Rule.”

2. It is exactly what Jesus taught in Matthew 7:12. It’s guiding principle is to do to others according to what you would want them to do to you if you were in their situation.

B. Example of the good Samaritan

1. Unlike the priest and Levite, when a Samaritan came upon the wounded man, he had compassion (Luke 10:33). What follows is an example of doing what is in the best interest of another and what we would want others to do to us (vv. 34-35).

2. When Jesus asked which one had been a neighbor to the wounded man, it was undeniable that it was the Samaritan (vv. 36-37).

- Doing no additional harm was *not* enough. Instead, God wants us to be active in *doing* good to those we have the opportunity to do good toward.

4. Suppose you had been the one left half dead. Would you desire someone to pass you by without helping you? Or would you desire someone to help you the best he/she could?

C. Example of Jesus

1. Jesus is the perfect example of the “Golden Rule.” He did not just teach us the perfect law; He also left us the perfect example so we can follow His steps!

2. Jesus chose to *do* what He could to save those lost in sin (2 Corinthians 8:9), sacrificing Himself on the cross! Even though we have shown contempt for Jesus, He acted in our best interest (1 Peter 2:21-25).

- He did not live by the “Iron Rule,” even though He is the Almighty God and could demand anything He desires. He did not live by the “Brass Rule,” even though all have done evil against Him and He has the power to do us all harm. He did not even live by the “Silver Rule,” even though He did not have to sacrifice Himself for us.

3. Whenever we interact with anyone (friend or foe), consider how Jesus would treat that person. Ultimately, we will answer to Jesus

for how we treat others (2 Corinthians 5:10). And, whatever we do or fail to do to another is done or not done to Jesus (Matthew 25:31-46)!

D. Exactly what God desires

1. Whenever the merits of the “Golden Rule” are weighed against the Scriptures, it is found to be exactly what God desires. Loving neighbors as ourselves requires doing what is in the best interest of others.

2. God teaches us to follow this rule (Matthew 7:12; Romans 12:20-21). Although it goes against what many believe is appropriate, we must not be conformed to this world and be transformed by the gospel of Christ (Romans 12:2). What we often *think* or *feel* is right will lead us away from God and to eternal punishment in Hell (Proverbs 14:12).

Conclusion

A. If you desire to please God, you must live by the “Golden Rule.” No other “rule” people devise will be sufficient.

B. While the “Golden Rule” requires you to sacrifice yourself, remember how much Jesus sacrificed Himself!

C. If you follow the “Golden Rule,” it will completely transform how you interact with others!

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?

