

The Golden Rule

Lesson 2: A Transformational Commandment



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Discovering God's Word Bible Study Series

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Introduction

A. Our first study contrasted the “Golden Rule” Jesus instructed with three commonly practiced rules concerning how people treat others (the “Iron Rule,” “Brass Rule,” and “Silver Rule”).

B. The “Golden Rule” (Matthew 7:12) requires your conduct toward others to be how you would want others to treat you (refraining from harming others and doing good to them).

C. This is a simple, yet transformational idea most people do not follow – especially when Jesus wants us to practice such beyond just people who treat us well.

D. Christians must live differently from the “normal” activities seen throughout the world, as the ways of the world are contrary to the ways of God (Romans 12:1-2).

E. Purpose: To learn how following the "Golden Rule" will transform our lives from being conformed to the world to being a true imitator of Christ in how we treat others.

1. Transformational For Your Thoughts

A. In focus

1. The Bible speaks about the importance of your focus (Proverbs 4:23). What you focus on (what fills your heart/mind) will often impact your life.

- Jesus put the focus on focus in Matthew 6:19-34. We must not have more than one focus in life (v. 24), seeking God’s righteousness and kingdom above everything (v. 33).

2. Think about what the “Golden Rule” will do to your focus. If you want to treat others according to this rule, your focus must be on them (Philippians 2:3-4, 5-11).

- The “Golden Rule” requires you to focus on how other people feel, things other people need, how other people will interpret what is done, etc. This all requires trying to see things through the eyes of the people around you rather than just your selfish perspective.

B. In judgments

1. One way people often hurt others is by making rash, irresponsible, and false judgments about others. The judgments you make about others impact how you treat them.

- Jesus teaches the need to be careful how you judge others (Matthew 7:1-2). Although this passage does *not* forbid all judgments (His primary concern is hypocritical judgments, vv. 3-5), you must consider how you would want others to judge you.
- Jesus also taught about making the proper judgments (John 7:24). There are right judgments that should and must be made and we must be careful how we judge.

2. It is common for people not to consider others in making judgments. They often reach rash conclusions, judge only based on appearance, judge based on hearsay or gossip, judge based on partial information, judge based on their own suppositions, judge without mercy, and even pass along wrong judgments to others.

- You would never want these kinds of judgments made about you. Instead, you would want others to get your side of the story and make right judgments. The “Golden Rule” demands you do the same for others.

C. In recognizing opportunities

1. It is easy to get caught up in our own lives, worries, pleasures, etc. and fail to consider others (including opportunities to serve, encourage, and do good). This changes when you put your focus on others.

- Think about Jesus’s parable of the good Samaritan (Luke 10:25-37). Remember the priest and Levite who passed him by without helping. There could have been many reasons why they did not help the man and show him love.

2. Consider if there are ever times when you pass someone by and fail to act in their best interest because you are not looking for opportunities to do good to others. Maybe you are in a hurry, focused on your own schedule, concerned about your own worries, or lost in your own pleasures.

- It is interesting and encouraging that God only expects from us what we can give to Him – no more and no less (Galatians 6:10). If you live by the “Golden Rule,” you will be looking for opportunities to do good to others.

2. Transformational For Your Words

A. Words of truth

1. God expects all His people to speak the complete truth, since He is a God of truth (Titus 1:2; Hebrews 6:18). Surely, we also want others to speak truth to us.

- Ephesians 4:25 forbids lying and commands speaking truth. Also, Romans 1:29 lists deceit as something deserving of death (v. 32).
- Both lying and deceiving displease God and do not fulfill the “Golden Rule.” They condemn any practice of saying things that are not true or that leads another to a false conclusion. Sometimes this happens by blatantly saying something false. Other times, this happens by giving misleading information (like when Abraham told people Sarah, who was his wife and half-sister, she was his sister in Genesis 12 and 20).

2. Different circumstances may tempt you to be untruthful. Maybe you want to “keep the peace” with someone, flatter another, or are afraid of the consequences of telling the truth.

- The “Golden Rule” demands that you consider whether you want to be misled by others or whether you want them to be completely truthful with you. Therefore, you must commit to speaking the truth – even when the truth is not pleasant.

B. Words of edification

1. Many people speak words with selfish motives and harm those who hear them. You must consider how often you do the same.

- Ephesians 4:29 requires that you set a guard at your mouth, never allowing your tongue to harm someone else. While this does *not* mean your words can never cause someone to feel bad, it does mean your words must meet God's standards at all times.
- Edification refers to building people up spiritually. It is not always equal to a good feeling. It sometimes requires telling people that they are sinning against God.

2. People speak in many ways that are harmful to others (physically and spiritually). Sometimes these are words of unproven accusation, gossip, words of anger, speaking without thinking, hateful words, etc.

- Following the "Golden Rule" requires you to think about each word and whether it will build someone up or tear someone down spiritually. Put yourself in the situation of the other and consider what you would need someone to say to you.

C. Words of love

1. God expects you to speak the truth in love (Ephesians 4:15). This implies it is possible to speak the truth in ways that are not right.

- Many Christians do not harness their zeal for God with the proper degree of love and rebuke others or preach without consideration of how they would want others to approach them.
- When Jesus sent out His 12 apostles on the "Limited Commission" in Matthew 10, He told them to be wise and do no harm (v. 16).

2. 1 Corinthians 13:4-7 is extremely helpful in considering how to speak the truth in love.

- Speaking in these ways is exactly how you want others to speak to you! Don't you want others to speak in patient ways? In ways that are not about their selfish desires and egos? In ways that are not rude? In ways that do not provoke an ungodly emotional response? In ways that give you the benefit of the doubt rather than assume your guilt? In ways that rejoice when you do what is right? In ways that demonstrate trust and hope? If this is how

you want others to speak to you, you must do the same to others!

3. Transformational For Your Conduct

A. Demonstrating mercy

1. Showing mercy is one of the most difficult things we can be asked to do for another. It involves compassion and forgiveness (not giving someone what is truly deserved).

- We all suffer at times because of other people's sins (i.e. due to their thoughts, words, or conduct toward us). Some things are quickly forgotten and moved on from. However, other things leave lasting scars and it can be difficult to move on from these.

2. Jesus taught the need for us to forgive others who seek our forgiveness (Matthew 6:14-15; Matthew 18:21-35). Just as God has offered this limitless forgiveness when we seek it from Him, we must do the same for others.

- Consider how this is exactly what you would want others to do for you. You do not want your wrongs to be held against you for life.

B. Demonstrating kindness

1. Kindness is gentleness and consideration of others. But, much of the world's conduct demonstrates rudeness rather than kindness.

- Bitterness, anger, wrath, shouting, and slander must be replaced with kindness, compassion (tenderheartedness), and forgiveness (Ephesians 4:31-32).
- A tender heart means that how other people are treated impacts you, that your heart can be penetrated by their feelings and situations.

2. Remember that kindness is a characteristic of true love (1 Corinthians 13:4). So, if you do not conduct yourself with kindness, your life is not acceptable to God no matter how many other good things you may do in serving Christ (1 Corinthians 13:1-3).

- Do you want others to have such hard hearts that they do not care about how you feel or what you need? Or, do you want their hearts to be soft enough that your life really matters to them? The “Golden Rule” requires the same from you.

C. Demonstrating care

1. You must care enough about people to serve them. Think about how the good Samaritan cared enough about a stranger that he did what he could to help the man.

- Galatians 6:10 requires you to take advantage of your opportunities to do good to all, especially those who are Christians. This includes both physical and spiritual good.

2. Matthew 25:31-46 records Jesus’s instructions about how you will be declared righteous or unrighteous in part based on how you have cared for others – feeding the hungry, giving the thirsty something to drink, taking in strangers, clothing the naked, and visiting the sick and those in prison.

- There are people who have physical needs living around you. You should be focused on recognizing these opportunities. For, Jesus said that what you do or don’t do to others, you do or don’t do to Him.
- Consider that if you would want others to care about and help you, the “Golden Rule” requires you do the same for them according to your opportunity.

4. Transformational For Your Relationships

A. Your neighbors

1. Your neighbor is anyone you have the opportunity to show love toward (Luke 10:25-37). It is *not* limited to people in your physical neighborhood.

2. Consider how the “Golden Rule” will transform your relationships with your neighbors – including your friends, adversaries, co-workers, classmates, acquaintances, and everyone you contact.

B. Your enemies

1. Whether you live by the “Golden Rule” will be put to the test when you are *not* treated with love, dignity, and kindness by others (Matthew 5:43-48).

2. Consider how the “Golden Rule” will transform your relationships with your enemies, if you only act in beneficial ways toward them (physically and spiritually).

C. Your brethren

1. Christians are a spiritual family. However, it is sad when Christians do not treat each other properly. God instructs Christians to love and show honor to one another (1 John 3:18; Romans 12:10).

2. Consider how the “Golden Rule” will transform your relationships with your Christian brothers and sisters – not just those easy to get along with, but also the difficult ones.

D. Your family

1. Every member of the family has the responsibility to love all other members of the family. However, selfishness can creep into the home and wreak havoc on it – husbands/wives, parents/children, siblings, etc.

2. Consider how the “Golden Rule” will transform your family relationships, if you always act in beneficial ways toward them and work to do good.

Conclusion

A. 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.”

B. It’s not enough to just pick and choose who you desire to show this kind of love toward. Rather, you must apply the “Golden Rule” to everyone – no exceptions!

C. If you do this, you will please 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?

