

GOLDEN RULES 5

Some More Golden Rules

**A Thirteen Lesson Bible Study
by Jeff S. Smith**

Introduction

They are the axioms of uncertain origin. Some of our most repeated expressions are actually found in the Bible, but are so far removed from their contexts that the original intent of the Holy Spirit is all but forgotten. In this fifth series of lessons, we will go back to the Bible to find the origin of these “Golden Rules” and then apply them according to the context provided.

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Lesson 1: *By The Skin of My Teeth*

Most everyone has heard the expression, “By the skin of my teeth” and most everyone has heard of Job, but how many are aware that the latter is responsible for the former? It was Job who made that expression notable, which today has the meaning of “by an extremely narrow margin; just barely; scarcely.” The teeth are imagined to have a thin layer of skin lining them, which is roughly analogous to a close call in life.

QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION

1. Consider the origin of this expression in Job 19:7-22. What was Job trying to tell his friends in this passage and with this phrase?

2. Here is a challenge. Locate a copy of the Douay-Rheims translation of the Bible in print or online and copy down its rendering of Job 19:20.

3. Here is another challenge. Write a few sentences about a time in your life when you felt like you escaped only by the skin of your teeth. Is there some way that you understand God to have been involved?

4. Did Noah escape the flood “by the skin of his teeth” (Genesis 6-7)? Why or why not? What lesson might we learn about escaping sin and its consequences from Noah’s example (cf. Hebrews 11:6-7)?

5. Would you say that Lot escaped from Sodom “by the skin of his teeth” (Genesis 19:1-29)? Why or why not (cf. Genesis 13:8-13)? What might this teach us?

6. Did Lot’s wife escape “by the skin of her teeth”? Why or why not (cf. Luke 17:20-37)? What do we learn from her example?

7. Some are hoping to avoid Hell by the skin of their teeth. What might this reveal about them and their preparations and whether their hope is realistic (Second Corinthians 5:2)?

8. One of the usually temporary effects of being saved by the skin of one’s teeth is a sense of overwhelming gratitude mixed with renewed faith. In what sense are believers saved against all odds (Romans 5:6-11, Matthew 19:23-26, First Timothy 1:15)?

9. Peter gives the impression that our escape from damnation should inspire renewed gratitude and faith (Second Peter 3:10). How does he suggest we express and perpetuate that attitude (Second Peter 3:11-18)?

Lesson 2: *Can A Leopard Change Its Spots?*

Recidivism is not a common word but the malady it describes is quite common. Recidivism is the “tendency to relapse into a previous condition or mode of behavior; *especially*: relapse into criminal behavior” (*Webster’s Dictionary*). Can a leopard change its spots? Obviously not, and sometimes it works out that sinners are unwilling to change theirs too.

QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION

1. Read Jeremiah 13:20-23. What are the answers to the two rhetorical questions found in verse 23? What is God trying to communicate here?

2. What are some of the reasons that people today fail to change their sinful ways?

3. Why did the leopardesses that Paul describes in Second Timothy 3:6-7 have difficulty changing their spots?

4. A sinner becomes like a leopard, unable to change his spots, when iniquity becomes natural and instinctive to him. How did Paul describe this problem in the following passages?

- First Timothy 4:2:
- Ephesians 4:17-19:
- Ephesians 2:3:

5. Although a leopard's spots are permanent, a sinner's need not be. What makes the difference (Matthew 18:1-3, Luke 3:7-14)?

6. Some assert that the womanizer, homosexual, and substance abuser are all born that way and like the leopard, they neither can nor must change their God-ordained spots. What does the Holy Spirit say, though (First Corinthians 6:9-11)?

7. Did Jonah think the Ninevites could change their spots? What made it possible? What is our version of this today (Second Corinthians 5:9-11, Second Timothy 3:16-17)?

8. How does Peter employ two other animals to make the same point Jeremiah had about the leopard (Second Peter 2:20-22)?

9. What is the point of the warning in Hebrews 12:12-17?

Lesson 3: *A Drop in a Bucket*

It is easy to imagine what one means when he compares something to a drop in a bucket. It is something almost completely insignificant compared to what is required. Contributing a quarter to pay off a man's million-dollar debt is just a drop in a bucket. Isaiah used that phrase first and today we are sometimes hamstrung by fears that our best efforts are but insignificant drops in a bucket.

QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION

1. Consider Isaiah 40:12-31. What would you identify as the theme of the passage?

2. What then is the impact of “a drop in a bucket” in verse 15?

3. No one knows for sure the population of the Earth in the days of Noah, but we do know the number of those who survived the flood. How many traveled with Noah (First Peter 3:18-22)? Were they not a drop in the bucket? What did God do with that drop (Genesis 9:18-19)?

4. On one occasion, Elijah the prophet felt like a human drop in a bucket compared to the overwhelming number of idolaters. How did God answer his pessimism and discouragement (First Kings 19:1-18)?

5. We often sing, “There is room in the kingdom of God, my brother, for the small things that you can do.” Yet when it is time to do the small things, we are prone to make excuses so that we can do nothing. What kinds of excuses do we sometimes make?

6. Sometimes we are discouraged from doing some good work because we become convinced it will be judged insignificant or that our talents are too meager to merit much success. What did Jesus teach about such considerations (Luke 16:10, Matthew 25:14-30)?

7. What did Jesus do with twelve loaves of bread and a small number of fish (Matthew 14:13-21, 15:32-38)? What’s the point?

8. Explain why the widow’s temple contribution was so impressive to Jesus, when richer men were actually putting in far more (Mark 12:41-44).

9. Feelings that we amount to or produce only a drop in the bucket can be crippling individually and congregationally. What does Paul recommend?

- Galatians 6:9:
- Second Thessalonians 3:13:

Lesson 4: *Sour Grapes*

Sour Grapes is a toxic cocktail of resentment and envy, often served chilled with vengeful words and deeds. Few know it, but the problem of sour grapes dates as far back as the Bible and even refutes the most common false religious doctrine in the world today.

QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION

1. Consider Jeremiah 31:27-30. What is the expression that Israel used and which God hated to hear? What does it mean?

2. From where did they get this idea (Exodus 20:5, Numbers 14:18)? Was their interpretation of this warning what God intended? Explain.

3. Name a few famous buck-passers in the Old Testament.

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4. Ezekiel, a prophetic contemporary of Jeremiah, spent an entire chapter on the same sour proverb. According to Ezekiel 18, which soul shall die? Which soul shall live? What does this do for the hope of securing salvation through a sour grapes defense?

5. Where is there any place in this concept for conversion and repentance (18:21-23)? Why isn't the righteous man once saved, always saved (24)?

6. What is God's common standard under both Moses and Christ (Ezekiel 18:30-32, Second Corinthians 5:9-11)? Where does grace enter into the equation (Romans 3:23, 6:23; Galatians 2:21, Colossians 1:6)?

7. Who do I have to blame for my sinful condition (Romans 5:12-14)? Adam? My grandparents or parents? God? A friend who is a stumbling block? Explain your answer.

8. What does Paul say about personal accountability in Philippians 2:12-13? What does this prove? What does it not prove?

9. How does "sour grapes" harmonize with the Christian's attitude toward his enemies and regarding personal vengeance (Romans 12:14-21, Proverbs 24:17-18)?

Lesson 5: *The Land of Nod*

Everyone has been to the Land of Nod, although no one knows for sure where it is. Today, the land of Nod is a colloquial expression that describes going to sleep, but it began in the Bible with the banishment of Cain. It seems Jonathan Swift first used the phrase in its modern way in *A Complete Collection of Genteel and Ingenious Conversation*, published in 1738.

QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION

1. Read Genesis 4:1-16. Why did Cain go out and dwell in the land of Nod? Where was Nod?

2. Because of its connection to the English expression, “nodding off,” the land of Nod has become associated with going to sleep. That land of Nod—sleep—is a frequent metaphor throughout the Bible as well. Sometimes it is negative one—what does the writer have in mind in Proverbs 6:6-11?

3. What does the New Testament say about the lazy land of Nod in these passages?

- Titus 1:12-16:

- Second Thessalonians 3:6-15:

- Ephesians 4:28:

4. Why did many in Corinth “sleep” (First Corinthians 11:20-34)?

5. What six sins does Paul identify as works of darkness from which we must awaken in Romans 13:11-14?

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6. Sleep and darkness are obviously knotted together, especially as they denote works of iniquity. Consider Ephesians 5:8-17. What is to be our association with such matters?

7. List a few sins that seem to be more prevalent at night. According to the apostle Paul, what two qualities will keep us out of this land of Nod (First Thessalonians 5:4-6)?

8. The same letter uses the land of Nod to mean something entirely different from being in sin. To what does sleep refer in First Thessalonians 4:13, 5:9-11?

9. Jesus repeatedly referred to dead people as sleeping temporarily (Matthew 9:24, Mark 5:39, John 11:11-12). These he raised from the dead; when will others who sleep in Jesus arise (First Thessalonians 4:14-5:3)?

Lesson 6: *Blood on Their Hands*

Maybe the expression “caught red-handed” has some connection to the Bible axiom about “blood on their hands.” In any event, it is a sure sign of guilt and the judge is never wrong about these things.

QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION

1. Consider Ezekiel 23:36-49. How did the blood get on the hands of the accused?
2. Isaiah made a similar case against the people back in his day (1:10-15). What was the cause and effect of the blood on these people’s hands?
3. What solution did God recommend to them (Isaiah 1:16-20)?
4. A little more to our point, Isaiah repeats the same theme in chapter fifty-nine of his prophecy. What was the effect there of their blood-stained hands?
5. People today would probably reserve the phrase “blood on their hands” for what they would consider more serious or heinous sins. Are bloody hands the only things that God hates (Proverbs 6:16-19, cf. Romans 1:28-32)? Explain.

6. What is the answer for removing blood from a sinner's hands?

- Acts 22:12-16:
- Ephesians 5:25-27:
- Titus 3:4-7:
- First Peter 3:21-22:
- First John 1:8-9:

7. Consider Matthew 27:11-25. How did Pilate try to keep Christ's blood off of his hands? Did the Jewish people there make a similar effort?

8. What did Caiaphas prophesy in this regard (John 11:45-57)?

9. Did the apostles' audience on Pentecost have blood on their hands (Acts 2:29-37)? What were they told to do about it?

10. Why is the effect of the mob's proclamation before Pilate still such a plague today (Second Corinthians 3:12-16, Romans 10:1-4)?

Lesson 7: *No Peace For The Wicked*

God's word in Isaiah 57:21 has enough variants to make it seem like multiple expressions. The original phrase—"no peace for the wicked"—has mutated into "no rest for the wicked" and then "no rest for the weary." The original is best of course and the absence of peace in the heart of the wicked is great disincentive for doing the wrong thing.

QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION

1. Consider Isaiah 57:14-21. God is here concerned with healing the guilty conscience of the backslider. What kind of spirit does he need to develop to be healed? Define your terms.
2. What particular sin is noted in this context as bringing on the anger of God? How does this sin seem to promise peace to the one who pursues it? Why does it fail (Ecclesiastes 5:10-17, Luke 12:13-21)?
3. What are the wicked like, according to this passage (see also Jude 12-13)? Explain.
4. What constituted wickedness at the end of the Sermon on the Mount (Matthew 7:21-27)?

5. Prayer is a good idea when one seeks peace, yet James warns that the attitude behind prayer can produce as much instability as the initial trial. What is the problem attitude that he identifies (James 1:2-8)?

6. How does the prayer of the righteous bring him peace (Psalm 55:22, Philippians 4:4-8)?

7. The conscience is a prime suspect in removing peace from the heart of the wicked, yet even the conscience can be crippled. How does Paul describe the lifeless conscience in these passages?

- Ephesians 4:17-19:
- First Timothy 4:1-2:

8. What does the writer of Proverbs 13:15-16 argue adds to the lack of peace for the wicked?

9. Satan surely attempts to disturb the peace of the righteous as well as the wicked. How does the Christian maintain his peace (First Peter 5:6-10)?

Lesson 8: *Preaching to the Choir*

Are you preaching to the choir or preaching to the converted? It probably depends on whether you have a choir, but the point is the same. You are making your point before those who already agree. Is that a scriptural solution; does it have any value at all to teach the converted?

QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION

1. How do people get to be converted in the first place?
 - Romans 10:14-17:
 - Romans 10:8-11:
 - Luke 13:1-5:
 - Matthew 18:1-5:
 - Romans 6:1-7:
2. What value did Peter find in preaching to the converted (Second Peter 1:12-15, 3:1-4)?
3. Some like to argue that you preach to the lost and teach the converted, making a distinction between preaching and teaching. They argue that you must never preach to the converted. By contrast, the New Testament often uses the terms interchangeably, so that the converted receive preaching as well as teaching. What is preached in these passages and to whom:
 - Romans 1:15:
 - First Corinthians 15:1-11:

4. The Hebrew writer reveals what must be a pivotal reason the gospel is preached even to the converted. Identify this reason from Hebrews 5:9-6:9.

5. What is the danger when the converted receive no more preaching, according to Hebrew 2:1-4? What is the specific remedy mentioned here?

6. What value would there be in reciting a passage like First Corinthians 11:22-26 during a worship service?

7. How does the original King James Version render Second Timothy 2:15? What does the same writer add in First Timothy 4:12-16? Is there room in there for preaching to the converted, even if the converted is oneself?

8. According to First Thessalonians 5:1-11, especially the last verse, what are our aims when we preach to the converted? Consider also Romans 12:1-2.

Lesson 9: *God Is My Witness*

Remember when Scarlett said, “As God is my witness, as God is my witness they’re not going to lick me. I’m going to live through this and when it’s all over, I’ll never be hungry again. No, nor any of my folk. If I have to lie, steal, cheat or kill. As God is my witness, I’ll never be hungry again”? In *Gone With The Wind*, Scarlett O’Hara called God as her witness that she would gladly sin against him than be hungry again, but the same phrase is used in the Bible to much nobler ends.

QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION

1. Consider Romans 1:8-12. What is Paul’s purpose in adding “as God is my witness” to his speech? Had he been to Rome to preach yet (1:15-17, 15:20-32)? Might this have something to do with his statement?
2. The phrase is repeated in Philippians 1:3-8. What is Paul’s purpose here? Is there perhaps a slight difference?
3. Think about the idea of calling God as witness. How would God testify about someone’s truthfulness anyway (Romans 8:12-17, cf. Galatians 5:16-26)?
4. How did God bear witness for Abel (Hebrews 11:4)?

5. What did some say about the fact that Paul had not visited Corinth either (Second Corinthians 10:7-11)? How did Paul respond to that assertion (Second Corinthians 1:15-23)?

6. What accusations among the Thessalonians did Paul refute with God as his witness (First Thessalonians 2:1-12)?

7. John adds more to this matter of God's witness. What is the necessary element for obtaining that testimony (First John 5:6-13)?

8. What sin would one be guilty of committing if he called God as witness to a lie?

9. Calling God as witness is akin to swearing to God and other expressions common today (swearing on my mother's grave, etc.). How did the Pharisees and scribes use swearing to their advantage (Matthew 23:16-22)?

10. Consider Matthew 5:33-37. What is the fix for the habit of swearing to falsehoods?

Lesson 10: *Judases and Jezebels*

Benedict Arnold and Typhoid Mary are just newer versions of some biblical names of infamy and ignominy. Consider Judas and Jezebel—there is a reason that these names are not competing with Jacob and Emily for popularity among new parents.

QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION

1. In Bible times, Judas was a common name. Identify the Judases in the following passages:

- Matthew 13:55:
- Acts 1:13:
- Acts 5:34-37:
- Acts 15:22, 30-35:

2. The notorious Judas who ruined the name altogether is different from each of these men. What do we learn about Judas Iscariot in these passages:

- John 6:66-71:
- John 12:1-6:
- Luke 22:1-6, 47-48:
- Matthew 27:1-10:
- Acts 1:15-20:

3. While Jesus can still be betrayed by an apostate's denial of belief, it is far more likely today that one betrays the Lord by subtler means. What was Paul's warning to Titus about this potential (1:10-16)?

4. What must we do to reign with him (Second Timothy 2:7-13)? What could Judas not endure? How might the same stumbling block keep us from enduring?

5. Jesus identified something else that tempts people to betray him. What is it (Matthew 10:32-39)? How might this occur?

6. What do people mean when they call some woman "a Jezebel"? Who was Jezebel (First Kings 16:29-31)? List a few of her infamous deeds (First Kings 18:4, 19; 19:1-2; 21:1-16).

7. How did nasty Jezebel meet her end (Second Kings 9:1-10, 30-37)?

8. How did Jesus use her character in his letter to the church at Thyatira (Revelation 2:20-23)?

Lesson 11: *Holier Than Thou*

Nobody likes a “holier-than-thou attitude,” including God, who really is holier than thou, whoever thou art.

QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION

1. Consider Isaiah 65:1-5. How did the people of Israel betray their claim to be holier than others? What was God’s solution?
2. Think for a moment, though. What if they really were holier than others? Why wouldn’t that validate their disdain for the rest (Luke 17:7-10)?
3. Why did Jesus preach the parable of the Pharisee and publican (Luke 18:9-14)? How did the former express his holier-than-thou attitude? How did the latter express the opposite attitude?
4. A thorough reflection on Christ’s condemnation of these Pharisees in Matthew chapter twenty-three reveals that a “holier-than-thou attitude” often conceals something sinister. In your own words, what were the Pharisees concealing beneath their pious garments?
5. The “holier-than-thou attitude” is usually the hallmark of the fault-finder—a person adept at identifying the failures of those around him, but woefully blind to his own. What is the Lord’s counsel to such a one (Matthew 7:1-5)? What does James add (2:12-13)?

6. If we cast off a “holier-than-thou attitude,” must it follow that we cease to reprove, correct and expose wickedness (John 7:24, James 5:19-20)? If not, how do we practice the latter without becoming guilty of the former (Galatians 6:1-2, First Corinthians 10:12, Ephesians 4:15)?

7. The “holier-than-thou attitude” is rarely silent for very long. What sins result from this attitude that disprove its claim (First Timothy 5:13, Second Corinthians 12:20)? What is wiser (Proverbs 17:9)?

8. What made the Jewish Christians in Rome feel holier than others, including their Gentile brethren (Romans 2:17-24)? What makes some Christians behave with the same kind of attitude today? Why isn't the believer justified in such an attitude (Romans 3:21-27)?

9. Is it even possible to be holy (First Peter 1:13-19)? What is the difference between being holy and acting holier-than-thou?

Lesson 12: *The Devil Made Me Do It*

If you are old enough to appreciate a Flip Wilson reference, his character, Geraldine, is credited with popularizing the expression, “The Devil made me do it!” on television in the 1960s. How much truth is there in that ultimate convenient excuse?

QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION

1. In what form do we find the devil in Genesis 3? Who is it that first argues that the devil made him or her do it? To whom else does the first family attempt to pass the buck?
2. The operative question, then, is this: Did he *make* her do it? How did he achieve his goal (First John 2:15-17, First Timothy 2:14)?
3. If Adam was not deceived by Satan or Eve, what is his excuse for sinning?
4. Consider another early Bible character—Job. Was Satan permitted to *make* Job do his will? What tactics did Satan employ (Job 1:6-12)? Did they succeed (Job 1:22)?
5. Did Satan make Judas betray Jesus (Luke 22:1-5)? How did Satan appeal to this disciple (John 12:1-6)?

6. James lays out the process of temptation and sin (1:12-15). How does it work? What is the starting place?

7. Satan succeeds then by means of deception and the exploitation of human desires. What happens to us, according to the following passages?

- Romans 13:11-14:
- Second Corinthians 2:10-11:
- Ephesians 4:26-27:

8. Read Hebrews 3:12-13. What is deceptive about sin?

9. What is deceptive about riches (Matthew 13:22, Proverbs 23:5, Proverbs 23:4)?

10. What promises does God make concerning Satan's ability to *make* us do anything (First Corinthians 10:1-13, Ephesians 6:10-17)?

Lesson 13: *Review*

1. Consider the origin of this expression in Job 19:7-22. What is Job trying to tell his friends in this passage and with this phrase? Some are hoping to avoid Hell by the skin of their teeth. What might this reveal about them and their preparations and whether their hope is realistic (Second Corinthians 5:2)?
2. Read Jeremiah 13:20-23. What are the answers to the two rhetorical questions found in verse 23? What is God trying to communicate here?
3. Consider Isaiah 40:12-31. What would you identify as the theme of the passage? What then is the impact of “a drop in a bucket”?
4. How does sour grapes harmonize with the Christian’s attitude in Romans 12:14-16?
5. What six sins does Paul identify as works of darkness from which we must awaken out of the Land of Nod in Romans 13:11-14?
6. Why is the effect of the mob’s proclamation about blood on their hands before Pilate still such a plague today (Second Corinthians 3:12-16, Romans 10:1-4)?

7. Consider Isaiah 57:14-21. God is here concerned with healing the guilty conscience of the backslider. What kind of spirit does he need to develop in order to be healed? Define your terms.

8. What value did Peter find in preaching to the converted (Second Peter 1:12-15, 3:1-4)?

9. Think about the idea of calling God as witness? How would God testify about someone's truthfulness anyway (Romans 8:12-17, cf. Galatians 5:16-26)?

10. What does it mean when someone is called a Judas or Jezebel today?

11. What is the difference between being holy and acting holier-than-thou?

12. What promises does God make concerning Satan's ability to *make* us do anything (First Corinthians 10:1-13, Ephesians 6:10-17)?

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