



## **“Three Great Rules of Life”**

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We’ve all heard of the Golden Rule. In fact, it could very well be the most familiar of all the commandments in the Bible. Some variation of it has permeated nearly every culture and religion in the world. It is found in the Sermon on the Mount.

**Matthew 7:12 “Therefore all things whatsoever ye would that men should do to you, do ye even so to them: for this is the law and the prophets.”**

This has long been coined the Golden Rule. It is a maxim in civilized human relations. Variations of it have existed throughout the varied histories of religion, ethics, and philosophy. The rule, as stated by Christ, is quite unique and is an incredibly powerful and successful rule for living. However, not all live by the golden rule. There are three major philosophies by which people are living their lives today. Jesus not only enforces the Golden Rule, but He also illustrates what happens when people follow the other two.

All our actions are governed by rules. Some people don’t believe they are confined to any rules, at least when it comes to morality and ethics, yet they really are. Like it or not, any society functions according to rules of some kind and you wouldn’t want the alternative. All of us possess a world view; we view the world and our place in it through a particular lens or framework, and that world view not only determines our philosophy about life and our relationship to the world around us based on where we came from, where we are, and where we’re going, but it also determines our relationship to God and ultimately determines how we live our lives and interact with others, including God.

Many claim to live by the Golden Rule as Jesus taught it. Some go so far as to believe that if they live by the maxim *‘do unto others as you would have them do unto you’* that that is sufficient in the sight of God, regardless of what else may be within their lives. That is simply not true, but one WILL solve a lot of problems and avoid a great many sins if he/she does live by this rule.

The second commandment of all those given to the Jews by Moses was to *love one's neighbor as himself (Matthew 22:39)*. That contains the essence of the Golden Rule right there. We are to love and treat our neighbor in the way that we would love or treat ourselves. Jesus said the entire law hinged upon this principle and the one commandment greater than it, which is to supremely love God **(Matthew 22:40)**. To love God doesn't merely mean to have affectionate feelings toward or about God. We should understand that it is a love that is demonstrated by commitment and obedience to Him. Likewise, to love one's neighbor as oneself doesn't mean to have fond thoughts about them, but to behave toward them as we would want them to behave toward us.

It's no wonder that Jesus made that a fundamental teaching of His kingdom. It's not that *as long as we have good thoughts and feelings about people, nothing else really matters*; that's not the point. Rather, it is that *I will behave toward and treat others as I would have them behave toward and treat me*. That rules out a lot of problems spiritually and otherwise in life.

There are three rules that generally govern human behavior. Essentially all of us are living our lives by one of these rules: The Iron Rule, The Silver Rule, or The Golden Rule. Let's look at examples of each.

Examples of the Iron Rule are etched throughout history by despots and tyrants. *Might makes right* is the motto of those who live by this rule. *Whatever I'm big enough to do, I can do*. The Iron Rule, without any regard for others, is what we see in the thief, the liar, the murderer, and the tyrant. People who have no respect or regard for life and property. Cain was the first person to live by this rule, I suppose. Enraged by his jealousy and spite, he took the life of his own brother, Abel, because he was strong enough to do it. Much later, Alexander the Great conquered the nations of the world until there were no more nations to conquer. Julius Caesar's conquests are summarized by the inscription that was given to him: *I came, I saw, and I conquered*. You see, he lived by the Iron Rule. I suppose that most world leaders do, when it gets down to it.

In the 1850's, Charles Darwin came along and taught that this was the rule of nature, that species survive and thrive by overcoming and destroying other species that compete with them. Later, in the 1870's in his book *The Descent of Man*, he even went so far as to say that trying to preserve the mentally and physically weak and sick, as we do, does harm to the human race as a whole. Nearly sixty years later, a man named Adolf Hitler came along and implemented this Iron Rule philosophy. You recall that he tried to create a "master race" by exterminating more than six million Jews and others that he thought of as weak, handicapped, or inferior.

Since 1973, millions of unborn babies have been legally killed in their mother's womb in the interest of the mother. According to the CDC, nearly 700,000 legal abortions were performed in the United States in 2014 alone. Every jail, prison, police station, courtroom, and locked door testifies to how our supposedly civilized and advanced society really lives by the Iron Rule. Relatively speaking, in modern times, we are seeing a great lack of respect for life and property. The Iron Rule is seen in the killer, robber, burglar, rapist, molester, business cheat, and swindler, as well as the gangs and the thugs who blight our times. It feeds on selfishness, greed, and lust. It says *what's yours will become mine if I'm strong enough to get it*.

You see, people who live by the Iron Rule are concerned only about their own interests: self-preservation, protecting what they see as theirs, and even taking what is yours. This rule not only governs how people treat money and property, but even livelihoods, reputations—anything that gets in

their own way. Few will admit to living by the Iron Rule, but the fact is multitudes of everyday people do so.

Then, there is another rule, perhaps most famously stated by the Chinese philosopher, Confucius, about five hundred years before Jesus Christ. Confucius said that there is one word that will keep humans on the right path in life, and that is the word *reciprocity: what you do not wish yourself, do not unto others*. This is sometimes mistaken for the Golden Rule as stated by Jesus. In fact, some say Jesus was not the author of the Golden Rule, claiming it was spoken by many others before Jesus ever lived on this earth, Confucius being one. It is true that the ancient Jews had a saying similar to Confucius that said *what you yourself hate, do to no man*.

But, there is a big difference between what the Jewish Apocryphal Book of Tobit said and what Jesus later said. There is a marked difference between what Confucius was saying and what Jesus commanded. What Confucius, the Book of Tobit, and other cultures down through time have said basically amount to the Silver Rule, which is stated in the negative. What Jesus said is unique, standing apart. He didn't just imply that one should NOT do to someone what he would NOT want done to himself; what He said goes much farther. He stated it in the positive: DO unto others what you would have them DO unto you.

You see, the Silver Rule, while true enough, doesn't go far enough. But it is the rule by which many attempt to live their lives. It is far better than the Iron Rule, at least showing consideration for other people, to some extent. But it is altogether negative in its application. You could live by the Silver Rule and still be guilty of some pretty terrible things, when you think about it.

In July 2017, there were five teenagers in Florida who videotaped and mocked a 32-year old disabled man as he drowned in a Florida retention pond. The teens were on the bank smoking marijuana when they saw the man wade into the pond. When he began to struggle and scream for help, instead of jumping in to save him, they grabbed their phones and began taking video, laughing at the man as he went under, never to resurface. Police found the man's body three days later, then the video of him dying while the teens laughed surfaced on social media. Police said it appeared the teens did not break any laws. Therefore, they were unable to charge them with a crime.

A perhaps more famous case from all the way back in the 1960's was that of a New York City woman by the name of Kitty Genovese, who was stabbed to death outside her apartment while at least thirty-seven people watched. Not one of them called police until after she was dead, and then only one bothered to call the cops. They didn't kill the woman, nor did they have any connection to the person who did. They simply did nothing. They were living by the Silver Rule, not the Golden Rule. There were those who sought to later justify all those witnesses because they were not participating in the crime.

Those may sound like extreme examples, but these people were living by the same rule that many respectable people try to live by. *As long as I'm not hurting anybody, nothing else really matters. Mind your own business. Just watch out for Number One. It's not MY problem to deal with...* and on and on it goes. We're a very selfish society. While we don't go so far one way as to adopt the Iron Rule in our lives, we will only go so far the other way as the Silver Rule.

Well, Jesus taught the Golden Rule. Look at it again.

**Matthew 7:12** “Therefore all things whatsoever ye would that men should do to you, do ye even so to them: for this is the law and the prophets.”

You see, the Golden Rule demands positive action and often requires some things the Silver Rule doesn't: giving, sacrifice, self-abasement, maybe even deprivation. Certainly devotion, compassion, concern and love. Living by the Golden Rule doesn't just mean good deeds; it means turning the other cheek.

**Matthew 5:39** “But I say unto you, That ye resist not evil: but whosoever shall smite thee on thy right cheek, turn to him the other also.”

The Golden Rule demands going the extra mile.

**Matthew 5:41** “And whosoever shall compel thee to go a mile, go with him twain.”

The Golden Rule even requires giving and lending to those who ask.

**Matthew 5:42** “Give to him that asketh thee, and from him that would borrow of thee turn not thou away.”

It means forgiving when people ask for our forgiveness.

**Mark 11:26** “But if ye do not forgive, neither will your Father which is in heaven forgive your trespasses.”

Jesus well illustrated these three rules of life in the parable of the good Samaritan.

**Luke 10:25-29** “And, behold, a certain lawyer stood up, and tempted him, saying, Master, what shall I do to inherit eternal life? He said unto him, What is written in the law? how readest thou? And he answering said, Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy strength, and with all thy mind; and thy neighbour as thyself. And he said unto him, Thou hast answered right: this do, and thou shalt live. But he, willing to justify himself, said unto Jesus, And who is my neighbour?”

That last question is often the sticking point, isn't it? It was with the Jews of Jesus' day and it is with many of us as well. Remember what Jesus said in the Sermon on the Mount about neighbors?

**Matthew 5:43** “Ye have heard that it hath been said, Thou shalt love thy neighbour, and hate thine enemy.”

That's the rule most people live by. But He didn't stop there.

**Matthew 5:44** “But I say unto you, Love your enemies, bless them that curse you, do good to them that hate you, and pray for them which despitefully use you, and persecute you;”

That takes it to a different level, doesn't it? It's easy to love those who love us, but what about those who don't? I'm ashamed to tell you, but it's true nonetheless: there are many who profess Christianity

who aren't any farther along than this lawyer who asked Jesus the question, "*Who is my neighbor?*" Well, how did Jesus answer that lawyer's question?

**Luke 10:30-37 "And Jesus answering said, A certain man went down from Jerusalem to Jericho, and fell among thieves, which stripped him of his raiment, and wounded him, and departed, leaving him half dead. And by chance there came down a certain priest that way: and when he saw him, he passed by on the other side. And likewise a Levite, when he was at the place, came and looked on him, and passed by on the other side. But a certain Samaritan, as he journeyed, came where he was: and when he saw him, he had compassion on him, And went to him, and bound up his wounds, pouring in oil and wine, and set him on his own beast, and brought him to an inn, and took care of him. And on the morrow when he departed, he took out two pence, and gave them to the host, and said unto him, Take care of him; and whatsoever thou spendest more, when I come again, I will repay thee. Which now of these three, thinkest thou, was neighbour unto him that fell among the thieves? And he said, He that shewed mercy on him. Then said Jesus unto him, Go, and do thou likewise."**

The road that Jesus talked about that takes one from Jerusalem down to Jericho still exists, I am told. It passes through desolate, forbidding territory. Back then, thieves preyed upon travelers passing through the narrow gorges and passes. They coveted the wealth of others and forcibly took it from them, often at the cost of innocent lives. These thieves were living by the Iron Rule of life. They robbed this man, beat him to a bloody pulp, and left him for dead, laying in a pool of blood alongside the road. Their attitude was *thine is mine and I'll take it because I can do it*. These men loved no one but themselves and they cared only about their own lives. They were willing to injure and even kill to get what they wanted or felt entitled to.

Friend, you don't have to be a coldblooded murderer to live by the same rule these thieves lived their lives by. If you will lie, cheat, malign, step on others, injure or hurt others to satisfy or justify yourself, the fact is that you live by the Iron Rule. Whether it's on the job, in the marketplace, at school, home—any relationship in your life—if you treat others with contempt and don't value their life or wellbeing because of your own selfish pursuits and desires, then you are no better than these thieves of long ago who lived by the Iron Rule.

The Lord goes on to say that a priest and a Levite came passing by after this man had been beaten and left for dead. These men lived by the Silver Rule. The sad thing is, these were the ones purported to be the most religious and pious people on earth. In reality, they were far from it. The priest saw the man from afar and, not wanting to be bothered, he passed by on the other side. The Levite, another one of the priestly tribe of the Jews, at least came over and looked on him, but then passed on the other side as well. They were living by the Silver Rule: *what you hate, don't do to another*. They didn't injure the man; it wasn't their problem. So, they didn't want to be involved. You see, the Silver Rule tells you that yes, it is wrong to steal someone's wallet with its \$200 inside; but if you find that same wallet in a parking lot, that's a different matter. These men in Jesus' story lived by the seemingly respectable rule of life, *what is mine belongs to me alone; I'll keep it*. But John later says this:

**I John 3:17 "But whoso hath this world's good, and seeth his brother have need, and shutteth up his bowels of compassion from him, how dwelleth the love of God in him?"**

The Silver Rule does NOT suffice in the eyes of God. It falls far short, and one cannot claim to be a Christian living by this rule alone.

Well, the third man who came by was a Samaritan. The Jews didn't think very highly of them. I would imagine that when Jesus said the very word 'Samaritan,' this lawyer was filled with indignation. The people who were listening probably flared their nostrils in righteous indignation. But Jesus said this Samaritan not only saw the wounded man, but he stopped and treated his wounds. He picked him up and carried him down the road, purchasing him a place to stay while he recovered. He took care of him, then went his way.

It wasn't a matter of NOT DOING what you wouldn't want others to do to you; for this man, it was DOING unto others what you'd have them do to you. The lesson was obvious to this lawyer who had asked the question. Jesus is teaching that we are to rise far above the thieves and the Iron Rule by which they live. AND that we're to go well beyond the Silver Rule by which the religious hypocrites of His own day and many in our own day live. To follow Jesus, we must live with the ultimate kind of love, and that is the love that comes from applying the Golden Rule. Until we're willing and able to do that, we really don't know what being a Christian is all about. Remember that Jesus was teaching about the Golden Rule to disciples; not those who have no moral compass. Those who seek to live like Jesus, who are seeking to be His disciples, will apply the Golden Rule to every relationship and every circumstance they encounter with other people. It makes all the difference. It really is what makes the Christian life unique and sets us apart from the world. It's not good enough to say that you would never kill anybody or steal or defraud; that you just mind your own business, do your own thing and that's that. Jesus did not merely teach us not to do harm to others; He taught us to do good unto others. Jesus Himself is the perfect exemplification of the Golden Rule. When He was persecuted, lied about, reviled, and mistreated, what did Jesus do? He turned the other cheek.

**I Peter 2:23 "Who, when he was reviled, reviled not again; when he suffered, he threatened not; but committed himself to him that judgeth righteously:"**

What did Jesus do when He was falsely accused? He remained silent. What did He do in the face of those who sought to torture Him and, ultimately, end His life? He willingly laid down His life on our behalf. If we would be like Him, we must follow in His steps. We must be willing to suffer wrong, to go the extra mile, to turn the other cheek.

**I Peter 2:21 "For even hereunto were ye called: because Christ also suffered for us, leaving us an example, that ye should follow his steps:"**

We must be willing to forgive those who sin and trespass against us. What a wonderful, rich and sublime life that truly is when we seek to live by the Golden Rule. Jesus calls us out of a life of the Iron Rule. He calls us far above and beyond a life lived by the Silver Rule. If we would follow Jesus, we, like Him, must make this third and highest rule, the Golden Rule, the rule of our lives.

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