

A background image showing a hand holding a pencil and a ruler, suggesting a theme of measurement or study. The image is slightly blurred and has a warm, orange-toned overlay.

GOLDEN RULES 3

Still More Golden Rules

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

Golden Rules III: Still More Golden Rules

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 third 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: *Doubting Thomas*

Poor Thomas. When you are involved with the life of Jesus Christ, every move that you make is subject to endless memory and analysis. In spite of his faith and dedication, he becomes “Doubting Thomas” for the rest of time. Today, a “doubting Thomas” is not only the religious skeptic, but anyone who exhibits unnecessary cynicism.

1. Thomas was not only a disciple of Christ, but was also an apostle (Matthew 10:1-4). What is the difference?

2. As Jesus contemplated going to Bethany to resurrect dead Lazarus, Thomas is anything but a doubter. Consider John 11:1-16, Why were most of the disciples opposed to the trip?

3. What does Jesus hope to accomplish among the disciples by going to Bethany anyway (cf. Verse 42)?

4. The obstacle that prevented the disciples' faith from deepening is often presented in this fear that the Lord would die before accomplishing his goals. How does Thomas, of all people, show his deepening dedication to Jesus?

5. The resurrection of Lazarus puts into motion the final act in Christ's ministry. This miracle was too much for Christ's adversaries, who plotted his murder on its account (John 11:45-57). Why didn't Thomas and the other apostles perish with him (John 18:1-9, Matthew 26:31-35, 55-56)?

6. Jesus topped the feat of raising Lazarus by resurrecting himself from his temporary tomb. Why didn't Thomas replicate the joyful belief of the ten other surviving apostles (John 20:19-24)?

7. What evidence did Thomas demand (John 20:24-25)? Was this anymore than what the other ten apostles had seen?

8. How long was Thomas the doubter? How did he announce his conversion?

9. Explain Jesus's gentle rebuke in verse 29.

10. List some modern causes of doubt about Christ.

Lesson 2: *Cast Your Bread Upon The Waters*

It is not exactly a rhyme of the ancient mariner, but a morsel of wisdom from the Preacher's prolific pen. "Cast your bread upon the waters, for you will find it after many days" (Ecclesiastes 11:1). As the sea merchants of old would deliver their goods upon the water, so God's people are urged to invest themselves in works that will bring spiritual profit.

1. Before we begin analyzing this axiom, what do you think it means?

2. A more literal rendering of the Hebrew of Ecclesiastes 11:1-2 says, "Send your substance [out] over the face of the water [i.e., the sea] that you may find it [again] many days hence. Give a share to seven, or even to eight, for you cannot know what [sort of] disaster may come upon the land." One thing is certain—the preacher is counseling disciples to be diligent and active, rather than passive and slothful. Yet earlier in the book, he seemingly took the opposite view (Ecclesiastes 2:18-23). Can you reconcile the two passages?

3. Perhaps the passage is teaching diligent sharing instead of selfish hoarding. If so, the wisdom of Proverbs 19:17 and Ephesians 4:28 comes into play. What do those two passages add to this discussion?

- Proverbs 19:17:

- Ephesians 4:28:

4. Is it possible to cast our bread on the waters and still displease God (Deuteronomy 15:1-11)? How (First Peter 4:9-10, Second Corinthians 9:5-9)?

5. Actually, sharing with brethren in need is an investment with impressive, historic returns. Consider the following passages and identify what bread the giver finds after casting it upon the waters.

- Matthew 10:40-42:
- Galatians 6:7-10:
- First Timothy 6:17-19:
- Hebrews 6:10-12:

6. Christ's parable of the unjust steward in Luke 16:1-13 seems to be closely related to the Preacher's doctrine in Ecclesiastes 11:1-2. What did the steward do when he was compelled to give an embarrassing accounting to his master? What was Jesus trying to teach with this parable?

7. The Preacher explains "bread upon the waters" as giving a serving to seven or eight people in the interest of a future return. The shrewdness of the steward reminds us that wisdom is required to navigate this life toward a harbor in the next. How does Paul chart that course in Ephesians 5:15-16?

8. Jesus also echoed the Preacher's axiom in the Sermon on the Mount. What is one reason that Christians should be merciful to each other (Matthew 5:7)?

9. After all this study, consider the question again. What does the Preacher mean when he counsels the wise to cast bread upon the waters that they might find it again later?

Lesson 3: *God Moves in Mysterious Ways*

While the expression is quite common, its derivation is somewhat obscure. Perhaps we learned that “God moves in mysterious ways” from the last hymn written by William Cowper in 1774. “God moves in a mysterious way / His wonders to perform; / He plants His footsteps in the sea / And rides upon the storm. / Deep in unfathomable mines / Of never failing skill / He treasures up His bright designs / And works His sovereign will.”

1. As we ponder the ways that God moves, a few guidelines are important to acknowledge. We should never presume that our frail human minds will become capable of grasping all the eternity and enormity of our God. Consider the following passages and cite the warning that each gives about such a study.

- Isaiah 55:8-9:
- Deuteronomy 29:29:
- First Corinthians 1:25:

2. How did God reprove Job when the man attempted to figure out why God was moving so mysteriously in his life (Job 38:1-11)?

3. The most important mysterious way of God is surely the gradual revelation of the gospel plan of salvation. This mystery commenced in Eden and culminated on Mount Calvary. What is God’s mysterious prediction in Genesis 3:15?

4. What two groups unsuccessfully studied this particular mystery before it was revealed to man in the first century (First Peter 1:10-12)?

5. The book of Ephesians is entirely about the revelation of this mystery. Jesus called it “the mystery of the kingdom” (Mark 4:4). What does Paul tell us about this former kingdom mystery?

- Ephesians 1:7-10:
- Ephesians 3:3-4:
- Ephesians 3:8-12:
- Ephesians 5:32:
- Ephesians 6:19:

6. Some conjecture that Paul quoted an early hymn in First Timothy 3:16. What is the great “mystery of godliness”?

7. Most likely, the expression, “God moves in mysterious ways” has to do with the power of God to work either providentially or supernaturally. How does First Corinthians 13:8-13 teach us that modern men are not capable of working miracles on God’s behalf (cf. James 1:27, Jude 3)?

8. Identify how God moved mysteriously in the following events:

- Abraham offering Isaac on the altar:
- Queen Esther saved the Jews:
- Ruth and Naomi saved from hunger:

9. When Paul desired that God should provide him an open door, what did he ask his brethren to do (Colossians 4:2-4)?

10. What kind of prayer accomplishes much (James 5:16-18)?

Lesson 4: *Let Go and Let God*

Evangelicals are so fond of saying, “Let go and let God” that an Internet search turns up more than two million web pages that contain the theme. What does it mean? For some, it is a Calvinistic illusion that erases personal accountability and meditation upon God’s word. Instead, they let go of personal effort and plan to let God guide their steps apart from the word. Letting go and letting God ought to mean something more.

1. The good message that we can take from this expression is a dependence upon God and the abandonment of our resistance of his guidance. How did the following Bible characters prove that level of dedication?

- Peter (John 6:66-69):
- Mary (John 12:1-3):
- Saul (Acts 9:1-18):

2. How would you respond to someone whose decision to “let go and let God” was proven in that they no longer saw the need to study the Bible (Ephesians 3:4, Second Timothy 2:15, First Timothy 4:13, Ephesians 6:17)?

3. How does one exhibit the influence of God? Is it by rolling around on the floor of a church building or by uttering guttural gibberish (Matthew 3:8, 7:20, Galatians 5:16-26)?

4. Does all this talk of effort and labor nullify God’s grace or become an attempt to merit his approval (Luke 17:6-10)? What is our responsibility once we have let God hold sway over our lives (Philippians 2:12, Hebrews 2:1-4)?

5. One event in the life of Jeremiah is often cited as the meaning behind the expression, “Let go and let God.” In chapter 18 of the book that bears his name, Jeremiah is sent to the potter’s house to learn a practical lesson. What did Jeremiah learn that might affect our understanding of this expression (18:1-11)?

6. If we were to make a New Testament application of this concept, it would probably be the matter of regeneration. How does Titus describe God’s ability to reshape the ruined pottery (3:5)? Compare this to what Jesus told Nicodemus (John 3:3-5).

7. Does letting go and letting God eliminate the place of God’s word in the equation (Romans 1:16, 10:17)? Why or why not?

8. Romans 6 describes regeneration just as Jesus and Titus do. Where is the water? Where is the Spirit? How does Paul describe the regeneration?

9. Consider also Ephesians 4:17-24 and Second Corinthians 5:17-20. What are we letting God do with us? How does he do it?

10. Think about the hymn, *None of Self And All of Thee* (*Hymns For Worship Revised* #431). Is letting go and letting God a process (Second Peter 3:17-18)? If so, what is the process? If you answered no to the first question, try again.

Lesson 5: *There But For The Grace of God, Go I*

In the nineties, it was a familiar mantra of the “Tolerate Everything But Intolerance” crowd and in the next decade, it was the title of a popular song. Whenever we feel ourselves becoming too judgmental, we think, “There but for the grace of God, go I.” True? Sometimes.

1. Pride is a terrific problem among almost all people and Christians are not insulated from the issue. Actually, their fellowship with God and superior morality are sometimes the source of their pride. If recognizing that “There but for the grace of God, go I” helps to crucify pride, then we will not object. What do we learn about God’s attitude toward our pride in Proverbs 16:5, 18?

2. List five sources of human pride:

3. Christian pride almost sounds like a good thing until one uncovers its ugly nature. The forerunner of Christian pride was the Jewish attitude about God, fellowship and the heathen in the first century. How did they show this proud attitude?

4. The trouble with “Christian pride” is that it subtly replaces God’s righteousness with self-righteousness. How did the Pharisee of the parable in Luke 18:9-17 express his self-righteousness? How do Christians sometimes imitate his speech?

5. When we see others who are in states of despair, poverty, handicap, or sin, what should be our attitude about them, ourselves and God (James 1:16-18, First Peter 3:18)?

6. What do the following passages teach us about tolerance?

- Romans 14:1-7:
- First Thessalonians 5:14:
- James 2:13:

7. “There but for the grace of God, go I” is sometimes used to excuse sinful, criminal or antisocial behavior. Sometimes it is supported by an appeal to Matthew 7:1-5. Does this passage condemn all judgment making (cf. John 7:24)? Explain your answer.

8. The definition of “grace” should be enough to prevent us from feeling proud about our gifts and achievement, if we accept that they all come from God. What is “grace”? What forbids boasting about such gifts of grace (Romans 3:27)?

9. What does it take to be a good steward of the gifts of God’s grace (First Peter 4:10-11)?

10. “There but for the grace of God, go I” is just words. What is more effective, according to Galatians 5:6 and Philippians 2:3-4,12-14?

Lesson 6: *Out of the Mouths of Babes*

Sometimes we adults cannot figure out the right or straightforward way to say something and “out of the mouths of babes,” the answer seems to come so easily. Whenever a precocious little one conjures up wisdom or understanding beyond his years, we remark about what comes out of such mouths. Few realize, however, that Jesus quoted this phrase from the psalms of David and applied it to a great truth.

1. Read Psalm 8:1-9. What is the theme of this psalm? (Think about it!)
2. Jesus quotes this song during the late stage of his earthly ministry in Matthew 21:12-16. Three things occur that escalate his poor standing among the Jerusalem elite. List them.
3. Explain what Jesus means by quoting Psalm 8:2 in response to the chief priests' and scribes' complaints.
4. What qualities did the children possess that the elders lacked?

5. Explain what Jesus was trying to teach in Matthew 18:1-3.

6. What kept some rulers from confessing Jesus (John 12:37-43)?

7. What step did Nicodemus take to keep people from knowing he had approached Jesus (John 3:1-3)? How was his cover nearly blown later (John 7:47-53)?

8. Out of the mouths of babes often comes honesty and bluntness that would make adults uncomfortable. We have so much social standing to protect that we fear being exposed as religious fanatics or “true believers.” Children harbor no such fears. Describe one occasion in which a child (yours or not) blurted out something profound that adults were thinking but would not say.

9. Babes in Christ are sometimes guilty of saying things or phrasing their comments in ways that reflect a lack of knowledge or experience. What should be our attitude when they call the preacher, “Pastor” or refer to the building as “the church”?

10. What can we learn from “the mouths of babes” (Ephesians 6:19-20)?

Lesson 7: *Handwriting On The Wall*

When the handwriting is on the wall, future events are set in stone and unchangeable. The expression is traced back to the book of Daniel and more than five centuries before the time of Christ. While we easily understand its meaning today, its original use teaches much deeper lessons.

1. You will need to read the fifth chapter of the book of Daniel to answer the following questions:

- Who is the king of Babylon?
- Who was his father?
- Who is Belteshazzar?

2. What did Belshazzar do to bring on the hand that wrote on the wall?

3. How did the king react to the handwriting on the wall? Did he become penitent?

4. Before Daniel interprets the handwriting on the wall, he informs Belshazzar about his father's temporary insanity. What does he say caused God to commence and then later to terminate that experience?

5. How did Daniel interpret the handwriting on the wall?

- MENE:
- TEKEL:
- UPHARSIN (PERES):

6. How long did it take for the handwriting on the wall to come true?
7. The two attitudes in Belshazzar that brought on this handwriting against him were pride and idolatry. What does the Bible say to people in power to keep them from pride (James 1:17, Romans 13:1)?
8. Belshazzar did not fear Jehovah in spite of the experiences of his father. Does Jehovah want us to fear him today (Matthew 10:28, Acts 10:35, Hebrews 12:28-29, Hebrews 4:14-16, First John 4:16-18)? Explain.
9. Today, the handwriting on the wall is actually in the New Testament. What does the handwriting say concerning the fate of planet Earth (Second Peter 3:8-13)? Will it be destroyed by nuclear bombs, global warming or a runaway comet?
10. While the handwriting on the wall signaled Belshazzar's time was up, the handwriting in Second Peter 3 invites every reader to repent. What manner of persons ought we to be in view of that handwriting (Second Peter 3:14, 17-18)?
11. What will happen to us at the judgment seat of Christ (Second Corinthians 5:9-11)?

Lesson 8: *Prodigal Son*

Few parables are known as well as that of the prodigal son. Only the Good Samaritan is as famous as the young man who fled his home, only to realize it was worth humbling himself to return to. The parable of the prodigal son is part of a broader context of “lost and found” parables that illustrates the value of a human soul to our Redeemer.

1. How did the Pharisees and scribes instigate these parables in Luke chapter 15? What are the three things that are lost in the parables?

2. The point of the first two parables is spelled out and is implied to be the meaning of the parable of the prodigal son as well. What are we supposed to learn from these parables (Luke 15:7, 10)?

3. What is prodigal living—the kind that the younger son spent his money on? Give some modern examples of prodigal living to which people are drawn.

4. What causes the prodigal son to come to himself?

5. What caused the Preacher to identify the following as prodigal lifestyles?

- Human accomplishment (Ecclesiastes 1:3-11):
- Wisdom (1:12-18):
- Pleasure (2:1-3):

6. What can make hard work even a waste (Proverbs 23:4, Ecclesiastes 5:9-12, 12:13)?

7. What did the prodigal son do when he came to himself? How did his father react to him?

8. More than its companions, this parable illustrates the redemption of the lost sinner. Jesus is ready to teach the guilty and to buy them back from the tempter. It also illustrates God the Father's role and our own role in our salvation. How does God meet us partway (Romans 8:3-4)? How do we approach him (Acts 22:12-16)?

9. Is a prodigal son capable of departing from his father and family a second time (Hebrews 3:12-19)? What should keep him at home (4:11, 16)?

10. How did the prodigal son's older brother respond to his brother's redemption and his father's celebration?

11. What would cause us to react to a conversion like the older brother did?

Lesson 9: *God Bless You, God Bless America*

For a world in which faith is clearly on the decline, we certainly hear people asking God to bless things an awful lot. Whether it follows a sneeze or occupies the lyrics of an Irving Berlin song or is spoken carelessly, “God bless ...” is a time-honored axiom.

1. Why do people say, “God bless you” to sneezers?
2. List four or five other superstitions.
3. Can you think of some religious superstitions (there are many in Roman Catholicism)? List two or three if you can.
4. How were the Israelites superstitious during their battles with the Philistines (First Samuel 4:1-4, 10-11)? How do we attach superstitious beliefs to objects today?
5. What did they do with the bronze serpent that Moses made (Second Kings 18:4)?

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6. While soothing sneezers with “God bless you” seems harmless, it runs the risk of becoming both superstition and vain use of God’s name. Do you think that many people who say, “God bless you” are actually petitioning God to bless the sneezer (Matthew 12:35-37)?

7. Irving Berlin wrote *God Bless America* in the early twentieth century and the song was made famous by singer Kate Smith in her Armistice Day 1938 national broadcast. It was intended to be an anthem about peace as the dogs of war began to bark again in Europe. How has God indeed blessed America? List five.

8. Does this indicate that God has a relationship with America like the one he formerly had with Old Testament Israel? With whom has he renewed that relationship (Romans 2:28-29, 9:6-8, First Timothy 3:15)? Is it modern Middle Eastern Israel?

9. Consider Proverbs 14:34 and 11:11. List five ways in which America is rebelling against the God we ask to bless us.

10. While sneezing won’t help you obtain God’s blessing and even living in America is not a permanent guarantee of blessing, Jesus does provide some guidelines in the Sermon on the Mount. Consider Matthew 5:3-12. What kind of person is assured of God’s blessing? Where is his ultimate blessing?

Lesson 10: *Turn, Turn, Turn*

Songwriter Pete Seger adapted the beautiful resignation of Ecclesiastes 3 to form the hit song, Turn, Turn, Turn (To Everything There Is A Season). Although it was first recorded by Judy Collins in 1963, the more notable version belongs to the Byrds and their 1965 release. Strangely, some commentators reject both the popular single and the Scripture behind it as excessive over-simplification, but what we really find is bare-bones truth.

1. The first eight verses of Ecclesiastes 3 form the best-known portion of the book, but the theme is found in the first two verses of the book. What is the theme of Ecclesiastes?
2. The last verse of chapter three really punctuates the context of our study. What does the preacher mean to communicate in this chapter (cf. Job 7:7)?
3. Verses 2-8 of Ecclesiastes 3 offer seven sets of couplets, each with opposite actions or attitudes. The message is that there is a season for preparation and a season for consumption and then it's over. This is the inexorable march of time, the process of aging and the cycle of generations. Once we are resigned to this ultimate fact of life we can get serious about the real purpose of life. What is it (Ecclesiastes 12:13-14)? What does Christ add to this fatalistic equation (Hebrews 9:27-28)?
4. What is life (James 4:13-17)? How should this resignation motivate us (Matthew 6:19-21, Ephesians 5:15-16)?

5. Jesus touched on the seasons of man's life in Matthew 24-25. In chapter 24, he warned his disciples and all who would listen that a day of reckoning would come. In chapter 25, he urged his followers to make themselves ready for the occasion by teaching three parables. What are they?

a. Matthew 25:1-13:

b. Matthew 25:14-30:

c. Matthew 25:31-46:

6. What should the virgins have been doing during the season of preparation? What happened to each set during the season of judgment?

7. With what words did the master congratulate those who had made good use of their talents? Why was he not pleased with the one talent servant?

8. What talents do you have? Can you foresee a season in which you won't be able to make use of them anymore? What's the solution?

9. What makes a sheep a sheep? What makes a goat a goat?

10. How will we know when the final season is approaching (First Thessalonians 4:13-5:11)?

11. When is the season to begin remembering God (Ecclesiastes 12:1-8)?

Lesson 11: *Armageddon*

The dictionary gives a primary and secondary meaning for the word “Armageddon,” but the latter is slowly eclipsing the former in our national lexicon. Today, Armageddon is as likely to describe some calamity of human doing than the battle and place depicted in the Bible. The phrase “nuclear Armageddon” is in fact an extreme perversion of what the Bible teaches, both about Armageddon and the end of the world.

1. Is Armageddon properly an event or a place (Revelation 16:16)? In what part of the world is it (Joshua 12:7-24, Judges 1:27-28)?

2. In Hebrew, Armageddon is literally Mount Megiddo. What occurred previously at this place mentioned in the book of Revelation?

- Judges 5:1, 19-23:
- First Kings 9:15:
- Second Kings 9:1-27:
- Second Kings 23:29:

3. To understand what Armageddon should mean to modern readers of the Revelation, it is necessary to know the context of the book. Premillennialists imagine it to be a literal rendering of every major future event, but certain clues point in a different direction. Approximately when was the book written?

4. Consider Revelation 1:1-3. What do the following words contribute to our understanding of this book?

- Things which must shortly come to pass:
- He sent and signified:
- The time is near:

5. That original audience was not concerned about a Cold War between America and the Soviet Union or about Islamic terrorism or even papal excess, for none of these entities existed then. What was their chief concern (Revelation 2:10, 13; Second Timothy 3:12)?

6. Revelation then gave comfort to that original audience that was so threatened by persecution. Their enemy was to be judged by God, punished and removed as a threat to the church. Armageddon literally describes a culminating part of this process. Judging by the context, is the battle in Revelation 16:12-16 the execution of Satan or the end of the Earth?

7. Does the Bible indicate that man is going to destroy the Earth with nuclear weaponry, environmental carelessness or by colliding with a wayward asteroid? How will the Earth be destroyed (Second Peter 3:1-13)?

8. What must happen first (Second Thessalonians 2:1-11)? Has it?

9. How does Paul describe the end of the Earth (First Thessalonians 4:13-18)?

10. Whether it was waiting for God to execute a temporal judgment upon the Earth or to bring about the final day of reckoning, a certain lifestyle was indicated for believers. How does Paul describe it (First Thessalonians 5:1-11)?

Lesson 12: *Hallelujah! Amen!*

We hear both of these words today as exclamations in religious and secular settings. While each has a religious connotation, only one of them is inherently so. Should we use these words in both settings? Are they sacred terms or okay for secular use?

1. When do people tend to use the words, “Hallelujah” and “Amen”?

2. “Hallelujah” is alternately spelled “Alleluia” in other translations. How many times is the word used in the New Testament? Where? The word is also defined in one of these passages.

3. Is “Hallelujah” ever used without reference or thought to Almighty God? How should this fact affect our own use of the word (Exodus 20:7, Matthew 12:36)?

4. The proper use of the word, “Hallelujah” becomes clear upon reading Revelation 19:1-6. What is the speaker trying to express with each usage of the word:
 - 19:1:
 - 19:3:
 - 19:4:
 - 19:6:
5. Beyond just saying, “Hallelujah,” how do we praise God today (Philippians 1:11, Hebrews 13:5)?

6. What is the meaning of the word, “Amen”? How is it most often used?
7. We noted that “Hallelujah” contained God’s name and thus required thought and care when used. Is the same true for “Amen”?
8. What care should we exercise when adding our “Amen” to the prayer or comments of another (First Corinthians 14:13-17)?
9. What is Paul indicating in Second Corinthians 1:20-22 by describing God’s promises as “Amen” (First Peter 1:3-5, Hebrews 6:11-18)?
10. Why is Jesus described as “the Amen” in Revelation 3:14?
11. God’s word is “amen.” How does Peter illustrate this truth (First Peter 1:22-25)?
12. “Amen” is the last word in the entire Bible. What do you think is the message of that final word (Revelation 22:21)?

Lesson 13: *Review*

1. What evidence did Thomas demand (John 20:24-25)? Was this any more than what the other ten apostles had seen? How long was Thomas the doubter? How did he announce his conversion? Explain Jesus's gentle rebuke in verse 29.

2. What does the Preacher mean when he counsels the wise to cast bread upon the waters that they might find it again later?

3. Most likely, the expression, "God moves in mysterious ways" has to do with the power of God to work either providentially or supernaturally. How did God reprove Job when the man attempted to figure out why God was moving so mysteriously in his life (Job 38:1-11)?

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