



GOLDEN RULES 6

The Lost 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 sixth 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: *Scapegoat*

Once upon a time, Michael Brown was the practically unknown head of the United States Federal Emergency Management Agency. Then Hurricane Katrina struck an unprepared city of New Orleans and everyone from the mayor to the President began to look for political cover and Brown became a suddenly famous scapegoat. What is a scapegoat and what does it have to do with the Bible?

QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION

1. Scapegoating gets its start in Leviticus 16. What earlier event is referenced in the context of this chapter? What does a goat have to do with that?
2. Literally, one of the goats was for the Lord and the other for Azazel, but no one knows exactly what that means. What is clear about the goat that was not for the Lord (16:8-10, 20-22)?
3. What is the connection between the scapegoat's origin and our use of the word today?
4. What might move me to seek a scapegoat for my own wrongs or omissions?

5. Was Achan a scapegoat for Israel's defeat in the first battle of Ai (Joshua 7:1-26)? Explain.

6. Identify the scapegoat and who made them a scapegoat in the following events:

EVENT	PASSAGE	SCAPEGOAT MADE BY
a. Adam's sin	Genesis 3:1-12	
b. Aaron's idolatry	Exodus 34:1-24	
c. Saul as Priest	First Samuel 15:7b-12	
d. Saul and Amalek	First Samuel 15:1-15	
e. Mount Carmel	First Kings 18:17	

7. In what sense is Jesus like a scapegoat (First Peter 1:17-21, 2:21-24)?

8. Will modern scapegoating—unjustly imposing all blame upon a weak and obvious target—reconcile the real sinner with God (Hebrews 4:11-13)? What will (Hebrews 4:14-16, First John 1:5-10)?

9. How did the Corinthians resolve their many shortcomings (Second Corinthians 7:8-12)?

5. Was Elkanah such a husband to Hannah (First Samuel 1:1-8)?

6. We find a variation on the “under my wing” expression again the words of Christ in Luke 13:31-35. Who did he desire to take under his own wing? What stopped him?

7. What was the result when this brood refused to go under his wing?

8. Those paternal instincts are on display in this passage as the Lord grieves over the fact that this brood has rejected him. What parental duties are described in Ephesians 6:1-3? What is the duty of children?

9. What warning is given in Ephesians 6:4 and Colossians 3:21? Explain.

4. Why did it prove vain to seek purpose in life through wealth (Ecclesiastes 5:9-17)? What did Paul warn about the desire to be rich (First Timothy 6:6-10)?

5. Psychologists tell us that we are all searching for meaning in life—a purpose beyond its mundane details and obvious necessities. What advice has the Preacher in Ecclesiastes 2:24-26 (cf. James 1:17)?

6. What does the Preacher identify as the purpose of life (Ecclesiastes 12:13-14)?

7. Jesus commented on a similar question during his ministry. What did he describe as the first and second commandments of life, which would bring one nigh to his kingdom (Mark 12:28-34)?

8. Faith, then, is the only thing that lifts man out of this futility and gives his life meaningful and enduring purpose. Even faith, however, can be marred to the point of futility. What is it in each of these passages that does damage to faith?

- Matthew 15:1-9:
- First Corinthians 15:1-2:
- First Corinthians 15:17:
- Galatians 4:1-11, 5:4:
- First Thessalonians 3:5:

Lesson 4: *Nothing New Under the Sun*

You can sense the Preacher's frustration and resignation in his oft-quoted words: "That which has been is what will be, That which is done is what will be done, And there is nothing new under the sun" (Ecclesiastes 1:9). We hear the latter part of this expression today when we find ourselves disappointed that things have neither improved nor progressed the way we had hoped. Instead, there is nothing new under the sun—just the same old thing.

QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION

1. Consider Ecclesiastes 1:9-11 and really think about the writer's frustration and disappointment. What had he been expecting to find? Why is he so upset instead?
2. To what did he compare "all the works done under the sun" in verses 12-18? What was his own great, central accomplishment?
3. By contrast, what did Solomon write in Proverbs 2:10-12 about wisdom?
4. How is it possible that wisdom can bring both grief and pleasure?
5. Describe the injustice that the Preacher witnessed "under the sun" (Ecclesiastes 3:14-17). What would be done about it?

6. In his first letter, the apostle John suggests that there are three essential carnal appetites. These three carnal appetites have not changed in all the course of human history, so while technology advances and new media of temptation are invented, the same passions are at play. List them (First John 2:15-17).

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7. Explain how Satan used each of these carnal appetites against Eve in the Garden of Eden (Genesis 3:1-6).

- a.
- b.
- c.

8. Explain how Satan used some of these carnal appetites against Jesus in the wilderness (Matthew 4:1-11).

- a.
- b.
- c.

9. The Preacher believes that his enhanced wisdom has cursed him in some ways. When and how are wisdom and knowledge made negative?

- Wisdom (First Corinthians 1:18-24, James 3:13-18):

- Knowledge (First Corinthians 8:1-2):

Lesson 5: *The Quick and the Dead*

“The quick and the dead” sounds like a rather uncompetitive sprint, but in reality, the expression has nothing at all to do with speed or liveliness. Rather it is a contrast between the living and the deceased. Apparently, people of old believed that an unborn baby’s first noticeable movement in the womb was his quickening—or coming to life. Newer Bible translations have updated the language to reflect its actual meaning more clearly for modern ears. Unless you are consulting an old King James Version of the New Testament, you are unlikely to see “the quick and the dead” anywhere.

QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION

1. The first usage of the expression, now translated “the living and the dead” is in Acts 10:34-43. What did God ordain Christ to do for “the quick and the dead?”

2. Beyond judging them, what does Peter say that Jesus would accomplish for certain among the quick and the dead?

3. Back in John 12:42-43, the writer identified some people who seem to fit into this redeemed category, but what is it that prevents them (cf. Matthew 10:32-39, Romans 10:9-10, James 2:14-26)?

4. Concerning his judgment, what did Jesus identify as the standard (John 12:44-50, Hebrews 9:27-28)?

5. Back to “the quick and the dead” in Acts 10:34-43. What does Peter associate with God’s acceptance (34-35)?
6. Paul discusses this judgment in more detail in First Thessalonians 4:13-18. What will be the sequence of that day?
7. What happens to both the quick and the dead among the righteous on that last day (First Corinthians 15:50-54)?
8. In light of the coming day of judgment, what does Paul instruct Timothy to do (Second Timothy 4:1-5)? Does he tell him to conduct financial workshops, show movies and hold concerts, build gymnasiums and banquet halls, run a daycare or give away coffee and doughnuts (First Timothy 4:8, Romans 14:17, First Corinthians 11:34)?
9. Why would some have to give an account to Christ when he comes “to judge the quick and the dead” (First Peter 4:1-5)?
10. How can those who died before Christ be saved (First Peter 3:18-19, 4:6; Hebrews 9:15)?

Lesson 6: *Land of Milk and Honey*

America is sometimes called “a land of milk and honey” around the world, especially among those who hope to leave behind poverty and find prosperity in the United States. The USA, however, is not the original land of milk and honey—but why all this attention on the produce of cows and bees anyway?

QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION

1. What do people mean when they refer to America or some other nation as “a land of milk and honey?”

2. What land did God have in mind when he first employed the expression “land of milk and honey” (Exodus 3:1-10)? What was wrong with the land Moses’s people were living in then?

3. Israel left on the Passover night for this land of milk and honey, but did not arrive there overnight or even very quickly at all. It wasn’t milk and honey, but slowed them down, but something else. What was it (Exodus 16:1-3, Numbers 11:4-6)?

4. Ezekiel explains further why the original generation of Hebrew pilgrims fell short of their land of milk and honey. What does he describe as their failure (Ezekiel 20:10-16; cf. Joshua 5:4-6)?

5. If one place could be described as the Christian's land of milk and honey, would it be the USA, a vacation to the Middle Eastern Holy Lands or Vatican City? Where might it be?

6. How did Paul describe this final pilgrimage of life (Philippians 3:12-14)? What did he find to be necessary regarding things of the past?

7. In First Corinthians 10:1-13, Paul lists the snares that kept so many from reaching their land of milk and honey. What did he list and how might those same snares keep us from Heaven?

- verse 6:
- verse 7:
- verse 8:
- verse 9:
- verse 10:

8. Describe the mindset of those who press on toward Heaven, as illustrated in Hebrews 11:13-16 (cf. Philippians 3:20, First Peter 2:11-12).

9. The apostle John was permitted to see a vision of Heaven, but he describes it with some other edible thing—not milk and honey. What does he see and what is the meaning of it (Revelation 22:1-5)?

Lesson 7: *Inherit The Wind*

Just as the winds blow across all the Earth, so the wind displays its force across the pages of the Bible. In 1960, Spencer Tracy starred in the motion picture, *Inherit the Wind*, a dramatization of the famous Scopes Monkey Trial 35 years earlier. Here again, the devil uses a verse of Scripture against the cause of God to ridicule biblical fact and deify human hypothesis.

QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION

1. The expression “inherit the wind” originates in Proverbs 11:29. Who will inherit the wind according to this verse? Think about the expression—what does it really mean?

2. What can each of these do to trouble their own houses? Be specific.
 - a. Husbands/Fathers (Proverbs 9:9):

 - b. Wives/Mothers (Proverbs 14:1, 21:9):

 - c. Children (Proverbs 13:1):

3. Paul warns fathers in Ephesians 6:4 and Colossians 3:21 against provoking their children to wrath. How is that accomplished and how might it contribute to inheriting the wind?

4. The Preacher and writer of Ecclesiastes compare most of life's pursuits to "grasping for the wind." With what did he find fault and why were these things all just grasping for wind (Ecclesiastes 1:14, 17; 2:11, 17; 4:4, 6)?

5. What could be worse than inhering the wind (Hosea 8:1-7)? Explain.

6. The motion picture, *Inherit the Wind*, served to trivialize further the popular credibility of divine creation, so terribly damaged in the trial of Tennessee school teacher John Scopes in 1925. What claims does the Bible make about the origin of the universe?

- a. Genesis 1:1:
- b. Psalm 19:1-4:
- c. John 1:1-5:
- d. Romans 1:18-23:
- e. Colossians 1:15-18:

7. With that in mind, what is true of the one who rejects the reality of a creator God (Psalm 14:1)?

8. Why did Esau "inherit the wind" (Hebrews 12:14-17)?

9. How does this lesson apply to men today?

Lesson 8: *Your Sin Will Find You Out*

The word “sin” probably alerts most astute readers that this particular expression is biblical in nature, but its precise location remains a mystery nonetheless. Perhaps it sounds like the words of Christ or Paul or Peter, but in fact, the words belong to Moses, and one specific sin is under consideration.

QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION

1. Consider Numbers 32:1-5. Who were Reuben and Gad?
2. What did the tribes of Reuben and Gad request?
3. What was Moses’s concern (Numbers 32:6-15)?
4. How did the Reubenites and Gadites appease Moses and obtain their inheritance on the eastern side of the Jordan, along with half of the tribe of Manasseh (Numbers 32:16-24)? What did Moses warn them about?
5. Did these tribes keep their word (Joshua 4:11-13, Judges 5:15-17)?

6. Moses is concerned about the sin and consequences then of doing nothing. What kinds of sins does James describe (4:13-17)?

7. In the parable of the two stewards (Luke 12:41-48), what became of the idle servant and why?

8. Read Proverbs 24:11-12. What is the rejected excuse for this sin of omission?

9. To what depth is God capable of finding out our sins (Hebrews 4:11-13; cf. Psalm 90:7-8)? What is our solution (Ecclesiastes 12:13-14)?

10. What should be our attitude concerning “works of darkness” (Ephesians 5:8-16)?

Lesson 9: *Straining at Gnats*

Perhaps today it would be called “majoring in minors”—that absurd ability of certain people to obsess over tiny little things and completely ignore the truly important issues before them. The Pharisees were deeply committed to straining out almost microscopic impurities from their foods but care nothing at all about consuming massive indignities against the law.

QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION

1. Why would the Jews be interested in straining out gnats from their food or drink anyway (Leviticus 11:23)?

2. Consider Matthew 23:1-33. Were the Pharisees motivated by sincere devotion to the law or by something else? If something else, what?

3. Focus on Matthew 23:23-27. What is the gnat they were straining out in these verses? What is the camel they were willing to swallow?

4. Some will then take this passage as evidence that there are always certain parts of God’s law about which he does not care. What does Jesus say about their tithing habits compared to the weightier matters?

5. In fact, it was always a matter of interpretation whether one should tithe herbs according to Deuteronomy 14:22. Jesus did not fault their preciseness or unwillingness to take a chance by not tithing. Their preciseness was not the problem. What was their problem?

6. What did Jesus say about those who were faithful in little things (Luke 16:10-12)?

7. What is the danger in considering certain inconvenient or impractical parts of God's law to be beneath submission (James 2:8-12)?

8. How might the Pharisees have neglected the three weightier matters of the law?

a. Justice (Matthew 23:16-22):

b. Mercy (Matthew 23:14):

c. Faith (Matthew 23:29-35):

9. How can we make certain that we are straining at gnats and swallowing camels in the following areas?

a. Caring for widows and orphans:

b. Assisting the poor unbeliever:

c. Foreign and local evangelism:

Lesson 10: *The Race is Not to the Swift*

Google reports back 49,000 web pages that quote a great Bible expression from the ninth chapter of the book of Ecclesiastes. Actually, it is only the first part that anybody ever quotes, and one wonders if even that is referenced correctly on most occasions. One site applies “the race is not to the swift” to the sport of horse racing, but it is hard to imagine that this what the Preacher was contemplating.

QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION

1. Consider first the immediate context of the expression in the verses that precede it—Ecclesiastes 9:1-10. How would you characterize the attitude and conclusions of the Preacher?

2. Does the Preacher consider physical death to be about receiving a crown of life and enjoying eternal reward? Explain (cf. Second Timothy 1:10).

3. Verse 10 of Ecclesiastes chapter nine drips with pessimism and fatalism, but there is some value to its teaching anyway. What can we gain from rightly dividing the verse (Hebrews 9:27-28, Second Corinthians 5:10, James 4:13-17)?

4. Verse 11 should not imply that fast people never win races. Men from Jesse Owens to Lance Armstrong prove the opposite well enough. What is the Preacher’s point?

5. Identify a couple of occasions in the Bible when a weaker fighter or army ended up winning the battle.

6. What proves to be problematic about worldly wisdom (First Corinthians 1:18-31, James 3:13-18)?

7. The lesson usually drawn from this expression is one of perseverance. Do you believe that this is the lesson the Preacher had in mind? Explain.

8. The racing metaphor is a favorite of the apostle Paul and the author of the book of Hebrews. Did they imagine life more as a sprint or a marathon (Hebrews 12:1-2)? What is the practical difference in the way that you choose to live your life?

Lesson 11: *Evil Eye*

Everyone has had the experience of “feeling” that someone was looking at him, turning around and finding it to be true. That sensation is part of a centuries-old superstition surrounding what is called “the evil eye,” a subject that the Bible addresses in more logical terms. The myth holds that an envious person can cast a bitter gaze upon one more fortunate and bring his prosperity to ruin, either by a jinx or divine assistance. Of course, the Bible approaches the evil eye from a much different perspective, in which the evil eye is evidence of indefensible covetousness, envy and jealousy.

QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION

1. Consider Matthew 6:19-24. What here makes for an evil eye?

2. To what did Paul compare covetousness (Ephesians 5:5, Colossians 3:5, Mark 4:19)?

3. Jesus addressed the “evil eye” in Mark 7:1-23. Whose materialism was he judging in this passage?

4. Some physical blemishes are merely cosmetic, having no serious connection with anything internal or giving any cause for grave concern. Some moles are perfectly normal and harmless; others are misshapen and suggest a looming cancer just beneath the surface. Which is the evil eye (Mark 7:20-23)?

5. What occasioned the evil eye in Deuteronomy 15:1-9?

6. Proverbs 28:22 says, “A man with an evil eye hastens after riches, And does not consider that poverty will come upon him.” What further warning is given in these passages?

- Proverbs 23:4:
- Proverbs 30:7-9:
- Matthew 19:23:
- First Timothy 6:9:

7. Read the parable of Christ found in Matthew 20:1-16. What made for evil eyes here?

8. Can you think of a modern equivalent of this situation? Explain.

9. While there is no excuse for possessing an evil eye of envy, covetousness or jealousy against a neighbor, sometimes there is a reason for it. What provocation is specifically noted in Galatians 5:26?

10. What expression of love is meant to prevent that (First Corinthians 13:4; cf. First Timothy 2:8-10)?

Lesson 12: *Heathens, Barbarians and Cretans*

The Bible is, to varying degrees, responsible for making at least three terms modern expressions of derision. Which you would prefer to be called—a heathen, a barbarian or a Cretan? Essentially, there is nothing negative about any of them, but their Bible usage has been magnified to the point that only the pejorative sense remains.

QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION

1. What is meant when someone calls another person a heathen, barbarian or Cretan? List, if you can, some similar, non-biblical, modern terms.
2. The word “heathen” appears prominently in the old King James Version of the Bible, but less so in more modern translations. Compare the King James Version of Leviticus 25:44 and Deuteronomy 4:27 with a more modern translation (especially the New American Standard if possible). Precisely what does heathen mean?
3. Why did the “heathen” take on such a low reputation among God’s people (Leviticus 20:23, Joshua 23:7, First Kings 11:2)? What was God’s intention regarding the heathen even during the Mosaic era (Galatians 3:8-14, Ephesians 2:11-19)?
4. “Heathen” appears twice in the New Testament. What was one criticism Jesus had about them and their influence among his disciples (Matthew 6:5-8)?

5. What kind of brother or sister is to be considered like a heathen, according to Matthew 18:15-17?

6. We tend to think of a barbarian as being someone completely uncivilized—almost animal in his behavior and limited thinking. Romans 1:14 provides a contrast, however, that clarifies the original meaning. Who were the original barbarians?

7. Compare First Corinthians 14:1-11 in the New King James to the old King James or even the New American Standard Bible. What did Paul say would make people like “barbarians” to one another?

8. Why should barbarianism be no impediment to the gospel and fellowship among believers today (Colossians 3:9-11, Galatians 3:26-29)?

9. What do we learn about the Cretans (Titus 1:12)?

10. What did Paul recommend regarding such people (Titus 1:10-16)?

Lesson 13: *Review*

1. In what sense is Jesus like a scapegoat (First Peter 1:17-21, 2:21-24)?
2. We find a variation on the “under my wing” expression again the words of Christ in Luke 13:31-35. Who did he desire to take under his own wing? What stopped him? What was the result?
3. What is the Preacher trying to say in Ecclesiastes 1:3-8 when he acknowledges that, “The sun also rises?”
4. Consider Ecclesiastes 1:9-11 and really think about the writer’s frustration and disappointment. What had he been expecting to find? Why is he so upset instead?
5. How can those who died before Christ be saved (First Peter 3:18-19, 4:6; Hebrews 9:15)?
6. If one place could be described as the Christian’s land of milk and honey, would it be the USA, a vacation to the Middle Eastern Holy Lands or Vatican City? Where might it be?

7. The expression “inherit the wind” originates in Proverbs 11:29. Who will inherit the wind according to this verse? Think about the expression—what does it really mean?

8. To what depth is God capable of finding out our sins (Hebrews 4:11-13; cf. Psalm 90:7-8)? What is our solution (Ecclesiastes 12:13-14)?

9. Focus on Matthew 23:23-27. What is the gnat they were straining out in these verses? What is the camel they were willing to swallow?

10. Ecclesiastes 9:11 should not imply that fast people never win races. Men from Jesse Owens to Lance Armstrong prove the opposite well enough. What is the Preacher’s point?

11. What three sinful attitudes indicate an “evil eye?”

12. What was the original meaning of each of these words: heathen, barbarian, cretan?

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