

Beyond the Golden Rule

It is so important to determine what is the basis, or the foundation of our spiritual life. We need to think about the core of our belief. This begins with the Jewish heritage that we are all so familiar with. Normally, our first thought would be about how we are rooted in the ten commandments that God delivered to His people through Moses.

10 Commandments

(Deuteronomy 5:6-22) "I am the LORD your God, who brought you out of Egypt, out of the land of slavery.

- 1 {7} "You shall have no other gods before me.
- 2 {8} "You shall not make for yourself an idol in the form of anything in heaven above or on the earth beneath or in the waters below. {9} You shall not bow down to them or worship them; for I, the LORD your God, am a jealous God, punishing the children for the sin of the fathers to the third and fourth generation of those who hate me, {10} but showing love to a thousand generations of those who love me and keep my commandments.
- 3 {11} "You shall not misuse the name of the LORD your God, for the LORD will not hold anyone guiltless who misuses his name.
- 4 {12} "Observe the Sabbath day by keeping it holy, as the LORD your God has commanded you. {13} Six days you shall labor and do all your work, {14} but the seventh day is a Sabbath to the LORD your God. On it you shall not do any work, neither you, nor your son or daughter, nor your manservant or maidservant, nor your ox, your donkey or any of your animals, nor the alien within your gates, so that your manservant and maidservant may rest, as you do. {15} Remember that you were slaves in Egypt and that the LORD your God brought you out of there with a mighty hand and an outstretched arm. Therefore the LORD your God has commanded you to observe the Sabbath day.
- 5 {16} "Honor your father and your mother, as the LORD your God has commanded you, so that you may live long and that it may go well with you in the land the LORD your God is giving you.
- 6 {17} "You shall not murder.
- 7 {18} "You shall not commit adultery.
- 8 {19} "You shall not steal.
- 9 {20} "You shall not give false testimony against your neighbor.
- 10 {21} "You shall not covet your neighbor's wife. You shall not set your desire on your neighbor's house or land, his manservant or maidservant, his ox or donkey, or anything that belongs to your neighbor." {22} These are the commandments the LORD proclaimed in a loud voice to your whole assembly there on the mountain from out of the fire, the cloud and the deep darkness; and he added nothing more. Then he wrote them on two stone tablets and gave them to me.

The Israelites obviously revered these statutes, and thought of them as the ultimate set of rules for their behavior. All kinds of people have based their lives on this list as well, whether they were Jews or not. But God gave many other commands His chosen people, but they were not really given much attention. We will see a little later how the 10 commandments were used as a standard when Jesus questioned them about their spirituality.

Another rule that many of the Jews, and many people today, consider as representative of the will of the God of the Old Testament the Pharisees saw as a critical addition concerns justice: that of an eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth. But people use that to exact revenge on those who have slighted them, and this was not God's intent. This idea is referred to several times in the Old Testament.

Eye for Eye

(Exodus 21:23-25) But if there is serious injury, you are to take life for life, {24} eye for eye, tooth for tooth, hand for hand, foot for foot, {25} burn for burn, wound for wound, bruise for bruise.

(Leviticus 24:19-20) If anyone injures his neighbor, whatever he has done must be done to him: {20} fracture for fracture, eye for eye, tooth for tooth. As he has injured the other, so he is to be injured.

(Deuteronomy 19:21) Show no pity: life for life, eye for eye, tooth for tooth, hand for hand, foot for foot.

I see these two basic principles, or groups of principles, as the driving force behind the Jewish interpretation of their religion. There was much more attention paid to rules than principles, and there is a huge difference between them.

One scripture that was a highlight and sacred to many is found a few verses after the 10 commandments, and it is referred to as the Shema from the first word "hear".

Shema

(Deuteronomy 6:4-6) Hear, O Israel: The LORD our God, the LORD is one. {5} Love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength. {6} These commandments that I give you today are to be upon your hearts.

This speaks of loving God with every fiber of our being. If you were very observant, you noticed that there was no mention of love in the ten commandments, which seem rather stern or austere. A careful examination of the Old Testament shows that God wants people to love each other, but this is not really paid attention to. In particular, He makes it very clear that there is a great contrast between Good and Evil, and that there is only one choice for us.

Love Good, Hate Evil

(Psalms 34:14) Turn from evil and do good; seek peace and pursue it.

(Psalms 37:27) Turn from evil and do good; then you will dwell in the land forever.

(Psalms 52:3) You love evil rather than good, falsehood rather than speaking the truth.

(Amos 5:14-15) Seek good, not evil, that you may live. Then the LORD God Almighty will be with you, just as you say he is. {15} Hate evil, love good...

This is echoed in the New Testament as well in Romans 12:9: "Love must be sincere. Hate what is evil; cling to what is good."

It is clear that the concept of love formed a critical part of God's plan for man as revealed in the Old Testament, even though it wasn't embraced by the people.

Jesus confronts this conventional wisdom in the sermon on the mount, when he repeats the phrase, "You have heard that it was said... but I tell you". This type of language is found only in Matthew 5. First there is an introductory passage that emphasizes Christ's commitment to God's plan as expressed in the law and the prophets. But he begins this passage of contrast by claiming that the righteousness of the so-called religious leaders is seriously lacking, and not sufficient to be pleasing to God.

Preface to the Sermon on the Mount

(Mat 5:17-48) "[Do not think that I have come to abolish the Law or the Prophets; I have not come to abolish them but to fulfill them.](#) {18} I tell you the truth, until heaven and earth disappear, not the smallest letter, not the least stroke of a pen, will by any means disappear from the Law until everything is accomplished. {19} Anyone who breaks one of the least of these commandments and teaches others to do the same will be called least in the kingdom of heaven, but whoever practices and teaches these commands will be called great in the kingdom of heaven. {20} For I tell you that unless your righteousness surpasses that of the Pharisees and the teachers of the law, you will certainly not enter the kingdom of heaven.

Jesus works to break the dependence of the people on the old way of thinking; He tries to shift their perspective and shake up their mindset in the following verses. He illustrates his point by contrasting views on several of the ten commandments.

Murder [6]

{21} "**You have heard that it was said** to the people long ago, 'Do not murder, and anyone who murders will be subject to judgment.' {22} But I tell you that anyone who is angry with his brother will be subject to judgment. Again, anyone who says to his brother, 'Raca, ' is answerable to the Sanhedrin. But anyone who says, 'You fool!' will be in danger of the fire of hell. {23} "Therefore, if you are offering your gift at the altar and there remember that your brother has something against you, {24} leave your gift there in front of the altar. First go and be reconciled to your brother; then come and offer your gift. {25} "Settle matters quickly with your adversary who is taking you to court. Do it while you are still with him on the way, or he may hand you over to the judge, and the judge may hand you over to the officer, and you may be thrown into prison. {26} I tell you the truth, you will not get out until you have paid the last penny.

Adultery 1 [7]

{27} "**You have heard that it was said**, 'Do not commit adultery.' {28} But I tell you that anyone who looks at a woman lustfully has already committed adultery with her in his heart. {29} If your right eye causes you to sin, gouge it out and throw it away. It is better for you to lose one part of your body than for your whole body to be thrown into hell. {30} And if your right hand causes you to sin, cut it off and throw it away. It is better for you to lose one part of your body than for your whole body to go into hell.

Adultery 2 [7]

{31} "**It has been said**, 'Anyone who divorces his wife must give her a certificate of divorce.' {32} But I tell you that anyone who divorces his wife, except for marital unfaithfulness, causes her to become an adulteress, and anyone who marries the divorced woman commits adultery.

Oaths [like 9, but more in the additional law]

{33} "Again, **you have heard that it was said** to the people long ago, 'Do not break your oath, but keep the oaths you have made to the Lord.' {34} But I tell you, Do not swear at all: either by heaven, for it is God's throne; {35} or by the earth, for it is his footstool; or by Jerusalem, for it is the city of the Great King. {36} And do not swear by your head, for you cannot make even one hair white or black. {37} Simply let your 'Yes' be 'Yes,' and your 'No,' 'No'; anything beyond this comes from the evil one.

The ten commandments talks about not bearing false witness, but doesn't directly address taking an oath. The basic principle, though, is to be true to your word. The law as stated in Numbers 30:2 is: "When a man makes a vow to the LORD or takes an oath to obligate himself by a pledge, he must not break his word but must do everything he said."

Look in particular at how Jesus deals with the way that the Israelites turned his law of justice into a law of revenge:

Justice [from additional law]

{38} "**You have heard that it was said**, 'Eye for eye, and tooth for tooth.' {39} But I tell you, Do not resist an evil person. If someone strikes you on the right cheek, turn to him the other also. {40} And if someone wants to sue you and take your tunic, let him have your cloak as well. {41} If someone forces you to go one mile, go with him two miles. {42} Give to the one who asks you, and do not turn away from the one who wants to borrow from you.

Paul comments further on this in Romans 12:17-18: "Live in harmony with one another. Do not be proud, but be willing to associate with people of low position. Do not be conceited. Do not repay anyone evil for evil. Be careful to do what is right in the eyes of everybody. If it is possible, as far as it depends on you, live at peace with everyone."

Love and Hate [oral tradition]

{43} "**You have heard that it was said**, 'Love your neighbor and hate your enemy.' {44} But I tell you: Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, {45} that you may be sons of your

Father in heaven. He causes his sun to rise on the evil and the good, and sends rain on the righteous and the unrighteous. {46} If you love those who love you, what reward will you get? Are not even the tax collectors doing that? {47} And if you greet only your brothers, what are you doing more than others? Do not even pagans do that? {48} Be perfect, therefore, as your heavenly Father is perfect."

Jesus emphasizes the idea of loving our neighbor here, but he really nails it in the event that we all know so well. With all of the discussion of the commandments, it was quite natural that someone would ask Jesus which of them was the greatest.

The Greatest Commandment

(Mat 22:35-40) One of them, an expert in the law, tested him with this question: {36} "Teacher, which is the greatest commandment in the Law?" {37} Jesus replied: "'Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind.' {38} This is the first and greatest commandment. {39} And the second is like it: 'Love your neighbor as yourself.' {40} All the Law and the Prophets hang on these two commandments."

(Mark 12:28-34) One of the teachers of the law came and heard them debating. Noticing that Jesus had given them a good answer, he asked him, "Of all the commandments, which is the most important?" {29} "The most important one," answered Jesus, "is this: 'Hear, O Israel, the Lord our God, the Lord is one. {30} Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind and with all your strength.' {31} The second is this: 'Love your neighbor as yourself.' **There is no commandment greater than these.**" {32} "Well said, teacher," the man replied. "You are right in saying that God is one and there is no other but him. {33} To love him with all your heart, with all your understanding and with all your strength, and to love your neighbor as yourself is more important than all burnt offerings and sacrifices." {34} When Jesus saw that he had answered wisely, he said to him, "You are not far from the kingdom of God." And from then on no one dared ask him any more questions.

Notice that the one who asked the question in Mark's version restates the greatest commandments and stresses their importance. We'll see this type of interaction from the questioner's viewpoint in a similar passage in just a minute.

Straightening people out on the real significance of the commandments is what Christ is really after here. They are not commandments for their own sake, but a means of guiding us into what is really important, that is, to love. Comparison to the standard way of approaching the commandments is a particular passion of the apostle John, who keeps referring to a "new command", which was not actually new.

A new command

(John 13:34-35) "A new command I give you: Love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another. {35} By this all men will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another."

He adds to this in his epistles:

(1 John 3:11) This is the message you heard from the beginning: We should love one another.

(1 John 2:7-8) Dear friends, I am not writing you a new command but an old one, which you have had since the beginning. This old command is the message you have heard. {8} Yet I am writing you a new command...

(2 John 1:5) And now, dear lady, I am not writing you a new command but one we have had from the beginning. I ask that we love one another. (similarly in 2 John 1:5-6: And now, dear lady, I am not writing you a new command but one we have had from the beginning. I ask that we love one another. {6} And this is love: that we walk in obedience to his commands. As you have heard from the beginning, his command is that you walk in love.)

This has a somewhat similar pattern to the words, "you have heard it said... but I say...". Except that John is saying that what God wants now is what He wanted from the beginning, and that which we missed along the way.

For now, let's look at what the Bible says about our neighbor, from the Old Testament perspective.

Neighbor – OT Roots

(Lev 19:17-18) "Do not hate your brother in your heart. Rebuke your neighbor frankly so you will not share in his guilt. {18} "Do not seek revenge or bear a grudge against one of your people, but love your neighbor as yourself. I am the LORD.

This is part of the preparation for laying foundation for what Jesus calls the second greatest commandment. Most people don't realize that Jesus was quoting from the Old Testament when he gave his verdict.

Obedience to the 10 Commandments

(Matthew 19:16-19) Now a man came up to Jesus and asked, "Teacher, what good thing must I do to get eternal life?" {17} "Why do you ask me about what is good?" Jesus replied. "There is only One who is good. If you want to enter life, obey the commandments." {18} "Which ones?" the man inquired. Jesus replied, "'Do not murder, do not commit adultery, do not steal, do not give false testimony, {19} honor your father and mother,' and 'love your neighbor as yourself.'"

{20} "All these I have kept," the young man said. "What do I still lack?" {21} Jesus answered, "If you want to be perfect, go, sell your possessions and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven. Then come, follow me." {22} When the young man heard this, he went away sad, because he had great wealth. {23} Then Jesus said to his disciples, "I tell you the truth, it is hard for a rich man to enter the kingdom of heaven. {24} Again I tell you, it is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich man to enter the kingdom of God." {25} When the disciples heard this, they were greatly astonished and asked, "Who then can be saved?" {26} Jesus looked at them and said, "With man this is impossible, but with God all things are possible."

Notice how Jesus talks about the commandments! He lists 5 of the ten, and then includes in the list the command to love our neighbor as ourselves. He did not include the greatest commandment, but you notice that He does emphasize the ultimate Goodness of God. In Luke's presentation of a similar scene, he has the questioner answer. This man has probably heard Jesus' comments on the greatest commandments and answers properly. But it is almost as though he feels bad about it, and questions further about the definition of the word neighbor.

(Luke 10:25-29) On one occasion an expert in the law stood up to test Jesus. "Teacher," he asked, "what must I do to inherit eternal life?" {26} "What is written in the Law?" he replied. "How do you read it?" {27} He answered: "'Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength and with all your mind' ; and, 'Love your neighbor as yourself.'" {28} "You have answered correctly," Jesus replied. "Do this and you will live." {29} But he wanted to justify himself, so he asked Jesus, "And who is my neighbor?"

We are all familiar with Jesus' story of the Good Samaritan, and I won't read it at this time. The critical summary was asked by Jesus in verse 36: "Which of these three do you think was a neighbor to the man who fell into the hands of robbers?" There was obviously only one answer.

Jesus spoke of the two greatest commandments as being the foundation for all Goodness and Law. Paul speaks of it in a similar way:

Summary of the Commandments

(Rom 13:9-10) The commandments, "Do not commit adultery [7]," "Do not murder [6]," "Do not steal [8]," "Do not covet [10]," and whatever other commandment there may be, are summed up

in this one rule: "Love your neighbor as yourself." {10} Love does no harm to its neighbor. Therefore love is the fulfillment of the law.

And,

(Gal 5:14) The entire law is summed up in a single command: "Love your neighbor as yourself."

James echoes this in his own way:

(James 2:8) If you really keep the royal law found in Scripture, "Love your neighbor as yourself," you are doing right.

Many people think that you just have to be a good person to make it into heaven. They look to another sort of summary to express this, what is generally called the "golden rule".

Golden Rule

(Mat 7:12) So in everything, **do to others what you would have them do to you**, for this **sums** up the Law and the Prophets.

(Luke 6:31) Do to others as you would have them do to you.

An especially interesting insight into the real meaning of this is found in Romans 15:2, where Paul says, "Each of us should please his neighbor for his good, to build him up."

This is very practical, but not spiritual. Is this Good enough for God? Does this really address what He really wants? I don't think so. First it is pretty selfish, treating others well so we would be treated well. The second greatest commandment is similar, it connects our love for others to our love for our self. Paul takes it a step higher:

A Step above the Golden Rule: 1 Cor 10:24

(1 Corinthians 10:24) Nobody should seek his own good, but the good of others.

This is an improvement in that it causes us to think about others rather than ourselves. But is this enough to please God? What do we tell people when they say that all you really need to do is to be good and God will accept you?

There is something else to consider that is so profound that it takes our breath away, and that is the cross. And there is no better way to describe it than John 3:16:

The Cross: a relationship with God

(John 3:16) "For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life.

This represents a level so much higher than the Golden Rule. It establishes a relationship with God through the love that He has shown us in this tremendous act of self-sacrifice. It reflects what God established in the Old Testament and Jesus emphasized in the New, that the greatest wish of God (expressed through His commands) is to love Him with all of our heart. This means, similarly, that we must have a relationship with Him. And the other wish is that we should love all mankind. It is only by acting through this love that living by the Golden Rule actually means anything.

The apostle John reveals more:

(1 John 4:7-12) Dear friends, let us love one another, for love comes from God. Everyone who loves has been born of God and knows God. {8} Whoever does not love does not know God, because God is love. {9} This is how God showed his love among us: He sent his one and only Son into the world that we might live through him. {10} This is love: not that we loved God, but that he loved us and sent his Son as an atoning sacrifice for our sins. {11} Dear friends, since

God so loved us, we also ought to love one another. {12} No one has ever seen God; but if we love one another, God lives in us and his love is made complete in us.

Belief in Jesus Christ as the Son of God is not something that we can just ignore. Indeed it is the foundation of the relationship we have with God:

Rock - Foundation

(Matthew 16:13-19) When Jesus came to the region of Caesarea Philippi, he asked his disciples, "Who do people say the Son of Man is?" {14} They replied, "Some say John the Baptist; others say Elijah; and still others, Jeremiah or one of the prophets." {15} "But what about you?" he asked. "Who do you say I am?" {16} Simon Peter answered, "You are the Christ, the Son of the living God." {17} Jesus replied, "Blessed are you, Simon son of Jonah, for this was not revealed to you by man, but by my Father in heaven. {18} And I tell you that you are Peter, and on this rock I will build my church, and the gates of Hades will not overcome it. {19} I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven; whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in heaven."

This is the added critical level that must be added to the Golden Rule. And because it differs from the common (hopeful) understanding of so many people, it means that we must talk about this to others. We must enable them to see the complete picture, helping them to believe that they also must embrace this relationship. That's what it is all about. And the relationship is eternal.

For God so wanted an intimate relationship with His people, that He gave His one and only Son, that whoever was irresistibly drawn to Him would become a son as well.