**Notes for January 9, 2022 Message – Pursuing Virtue**

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**Why do you think the way you do about right and wrong?**

Why do you think some actions or behaviors are good and others bad?

Have you ever changed your mind about what is good or bad?

On what basis did you change your belief?

Most people get their ethical beliefs and judgments about right and wrong from popular culture—including television, movies, celebrities, musicians, politicians, news, social media—as well as parents and family, friends, and even where we live.

But, as people who embrace and want to be formed by Christ, how do we approach and think about ethics and moral values?

What should Christians believe and practice – and why – as we seek to love as Jesus Christ loves?

**Ethics Defined**

Ethics might be called a system of moral values, virtues, and duties.

It has to do with our character and our actions and determining what attitudes, behaviour, or qualities should be viewed as good.

This raises a very basic question: Is there such a thing as good and evil, right, and wrong?

More and more it seems that our culture increasingly assumes that objective goodness and objective evil do not exist.

What’s good for you is not necessarily good for me or, what may be right for their culture is not right for ours.

These expressions reflect **moral relativism**, which, in its strictest form, claims that all moral judgment is subjective.

At best, whatever the individual or the culture believes about morality is right.

A thoroughgoing moral relativist is someone who claims that there is no objective truth value to moral statements.

A thoroughgoing moral relativist is unable to take any exclusive stance or say that something is universally wrong.

To the true believer of moral relativism, moral judgment is nothing but an expression of cultural or individual preference.

Whatever the crowd or the majority believes and practices is right; what most people think and do is what people **should** think and do.

**If moral relativism is true, then all moral persuasion is prohibited.**

One cannot convince anyone or be convinced by anyone that any position is wrong.

There is no room for a Desmond Tutu or a Martin Luther King in a thoroughgoing relativistic culture.

These themes of the crowd, politics, and the moral question come together in a heartbreaking scene recorded in the Gospels (e.g., [Mark 15:9–15](https://tinyurl.com/ybxzvcty)).

Though Pilate acknowledges Jesus’ innocence, he submits to the crowd and gives Jesus up to be crucified.

The majority ruled, but that didn’t make it moral.

The highest legal authorities pushed their agenda through, but their might did not make it right.

As followers of Christ, we are committed to following the one whom the crowd and the law vigorously opposed.

“Everyone’s for it” and “everyone’s doing it” do not constitute sufficient reasons for any meaningful choice, and they are terrible reasons for thinking something is good or moral.

The crowd may not always be wrong, but neither is it always right.

**Matthew 7:1 – Do Not Judge**

Biblical passage that is frequently appropriated for the cause of moral relativism is [Matthew 7:1](https://tinyurl.com/y73qaq9l): “Do not judge, so that you may not be judged.”

“Judge not” sounds like all moral judgment is prohibited.

But the context of Jesus’ words reveals that he is not prohibiting moral judgment as such but only harsh hypocritical judgment.

His point is that the same measure of judgment we use will be used on us ([7:2](https://tinyurl.com/y73qaq9l)), so be careful when you make judgments.

Don’t try to take the splinter out of your brother’s eye while you have a log in your own ([7:3–4](https://tinyurl.com/y73qaq9l)).

Jesus says first remove the log from your own eye, and then you will see clearly to remove your brother’s splinter ([7:5](https://tinyurl.com/y73qaq9l)).

The purpose of his instruction is to realize a more objective and accurate evaluation of your brother’s fault and the solution for it.

You do that by recognizing and doing your best to address your own faults before you address your brother’s faults.

**Because humans are made in God’s image, they recognize moral truths even if they do not believe in God.**

*Abolition of Man*, C. S. Lewis lists moral codes across history and civilizations —Greek, Roman, Hebrew, Babylonian, Chinese, and Nordic.

Same types of moral laws show up: don’t steal; don’t lie; don’t murder; honour your parents; keep your promises.

Confirms Paul’s point in [Romans 1:18-20](https://tinyurl.com/y9c9ubm9) where he says that knowledge about God and his moral order is plain to all people, clearly seen since the creation of the world.

Although **natural revelation**, reveals some innate, general truths about justice and duty toward God and toward one another, it is not very specific or clear in every case.

A second means of knowing the good is necessary — **special revelation**.

Special revelation refers to what God has revealed to specific people in specific times and places.

For Christians, knowledge of God and his will comes through Scripture which, like a pair of glasses, focuses and makes clearer our natural knowledge.

And specifically, the Bible points us to see God through Jesus Christ.

We look first and foremost to the teaching of Jesus for guidance in our search to think and do what is good.

So, we value truth and wisdom in our understanding of God’s revealed moral will, and we seek to conform our lives to it.

**Re-Cap**

The version of ethics offered in popular culture today is moral relativism, which claims that there is no such thing as good and evil or, for that matter, truth.

At first, this approach to ethics looks very attractive, especially in a society that values individual freedom above all else.

But, on closer inspection, it is impractical to try to live without the categories of good and evil.

Good and evil cannot be determined by individual or communal preferences.

Goodness transcends my momentary feelings and our culture’s current opinions.

The inescapable truth that there is a right and wrong, a good and evil, points us away from moral relativism and to the source of goodness, who is goodness itself.

“No one is good—except God alone.” ([Mark 10:18](https://tinyurl.com/y9n2wvcp)).

As beloved creatures of this supreme Goodness, our true end or goal is found in God.