**Notes for January 16, 2022 Message – *Why Be Good?***

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**Who are you when nobody can see you?**

**Who are you when nobody is looking?**

Why be good or do good – especially if nobody is watching?

Is it to receive a reward or is it to avoid punishment?

Some believers suggest that living as a Christian is the best and happiest way for anyone to live, even if one is not a Christian.

In other words, even you are not concerned about salvation or condemnation, the happiest life will be one that is consistent with Christian morality.

But being good is not just about living a happy or an easy life.

To be good is to be who we were made to be.

It is our purpose.

**The question is not simply what makes us happy.**

**The deeper question is “What are we made for? What are we made to be?”**

Created in the image of God, we have an innate longing and yearning for something eternal and truly fulfilling.

That divine likeness, even though marred and scarred by sin, remains the goal.

It is evident when the Lord issues holiness laws to the Israelites and prefaces the commands with: “Be holy because I, the LORD your God, am holy” ([Lev 19:2](https://tinyurl.com/y79r2vl5)).

This verse is quoted in 1 Peter as the reason for the Christian pursuit of holiness ([1 Pet 1:15–16](https://tinyurl.com/y8zwqd9s)).

When God calls us to become holy, he calls us to become like him.

The end goal, being like God, is the primary motivating factor for ethical living.

We are to “have the same mind” that was also in Christ Jesus ([Phil 2:5](https://tinyurl.com/ycmg4dw3)).

As Paul points out, the life of discipleship is the imitation of Christ ([1 Cor 11:1](https://tinyurl.com/y8tpmkcz)).

This reason for pursuing the good challenges the rationale for being good because living a moral life will make you happy.

As Jesus makes clear, the Christian code of life is not a call to honesty or integrity only when it’s easy.

It is a call to self-sacrificial love for God and others.

It’s a call to suffering and taking up the cross to follow Jesus.

For the believer committed to following the way of Jesus, the way of the cross and resurrection, self-giving love is the best life.

**So, how can followers of the way of Jesus pursue holiness and the goal of becoming more like God?**

How can we reflect the likeness and goodness of our Creator and Heavenly Father in all that we say and do?

What criteria or standards motivate good acts?

What makes an act good?

1. Some focus almost exclusively on the effects or consequences of an action to judge whether it is right or wrong.
2. Others focus more on the action itself.
3. Still others focus on the motivation behind an action to assess whether it is good.

The focus on the motivation behind an action can be seen in many teachings of Jesus.

In the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus points to the motivations of the heart with regard to acts: the act of murder begins with hate; the act of adultery begins with lust ([Matt 5:21–22, 27–28](https://tinyurl.com/y8lbcpwp)).

**The focus here is on the character produced in people.**

The question is not simply about the virtue of particular acts, but about the motivation behind those acts.

My conduct and its consequences can good, but the motives make the act sinful.

E.g., in Romans 14, the Paul addresses the eating of meat.

The very same action can, depending on the understanding and motivation of the meat eater, be either permissible or impermissible; whatever is not of faith, Paul says, is sin ([Rom 14:23](https://tinyurl.com/y8lbcpwp)).

In [Philippians 1:15–18](https://tinyurl.com/y9pdcm5g), Paul says that some people preach the gospel out of evil, selfish motives.

Their actions are good, and so are the consequences: Christ is preached, and people are brought to salvation.

But if their motives are evil, the preachers themselves are not pursuing the good.

**It is necessary to distinguish the good that is done by a Christian from any act that may appear to be good.**

Virtues and motives matter.

E.g., if you fast, give, and pray to be seen by others, Jesus says, then you have received your reward in full ([Matt 6:1–18](https://tinyurl.com/y99jylwb)).

**Christian ethics always comes back to the virtues.**

If a person is truly virtuous and has the mind of Christ, then her deeds will be good, irrespective of the situation at hand.

The goal is character formation, because the real goal is to cultivate the fruit of God’s Spirit, be clothed with Christ and reflect God’s goodness.

**Conclusion**

Being good is not just about conforming to social norms or pleasing the people around you or even about avoiding punishment or bad consequences.

It is about living the best possible life and putting others before self and being the people we were made to be.

Being good is ultimately about the imitation of Christ crucified, being conformed to his image, and becoming like the God who created us in his image and likeness.

Our character and virtues need to be shaped into the image of Christ.

Virtue ethics emphasizes character over rules or consequences.

When we grow in moral excellence and love, then good actions and, almost always, good consequences will follow.

We cannot anticipate all the situations and cases that we will encounter in life that call for moral decision.

But we can cultivate the virtues; we can seek the mind of Christ.