

**SEEING THE GOOD**  
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Text: Matt: 5: 17; 20-24; 43-44; Matt 6: 1

**Intro:** In the past year or two we were exposed to numerous news stories about the head of the Alabama Supreme Court, Judge Roy Moore, who was eventually removed from his position for placing a stone replica containing the 10 Commandments in the lobby of the state courthouse. Last November a tv news story told of a pick-up truck whose owners were driving around the country (mainly the south) displaying a stone monument in the back showing the 10 Commandments. Shortly thereafter another story told of another Alabama judge who wore a robe with 10 Commandments embroidered in gold on his robe. It seems as though we are constantly being told about well-meaning Christians who want to place the 10 Commandments in public buildings or on public property.

Personally, I like the 10 Commandments. They reflect an ethical option that is certainly higher than those followed by most people. At the same time when I read the New Testament, when I examine the teachings of Jesus and of many of his followers, especially Paul, and when I consider if there are better ways, then I believe that we would do well to avoid encouraging the type of activities that I have just mentioned.

**I. Issue:** How can we be ethical people in today's world?

A. One approach is that of legalism - rules - laws, as reflected in the fervor over the public display of the 10 Commandments.

1. Such an approach is based upon a response to rules that are "out there," to which we respond in order to be good, or correct, or religious, or ethical.

2. Such an approach places our rules, laws above people. And they can be manipulated.

3. Such an approach leads us to see the bad in people, their mistakes, their flaws, their shortcomings. And, this allows us to overlook our own weaknesses.

B. Another approach is that of the laws of liberty and love, as expounded by Jesus. It is based upon faith, not rules. It results in principles rather than focusing on specific practices. The origin of ethical decisions are internal, not external - based upon attitudes, motives, and sound principles that guide us to proper decisions (Whatever you do . . .)

Where in the world do I find such an approach? The best place to look is in the Sermon on the Mount (Matt. 5-7). Jesus has a thorough discussion of the law. He begins by pointing to those who were considered the most righteous and religious people of his day - the scribes and the Pharisees. They kept the law to the most minute detail. They also twisted and interpreted it to their advantage.

What did Jesus say to his followers? He told them that their righteousness had to exceed that of the scribes and the Pharisees! Jesus did not mean to say that we need to be more legalistic than these religious leaders. He also said that every minor detail of the law would be fulfilled. If we stop here then one might conclude that Jesus was the most legal of all legalists. But we must examine His teachings further.

C. How in the world could He say that our righteousness should exceed that of the scribes

and the Pharisees? We need to look further at His teachings in the Sermon on the Mount. He gave several examples from the law. “You have heard that it was said ... but I say unto you. You have heard that it was said that you should not kill.” That’s a pretty good rule. And I am 100 per cent orthodox on that one! I really feel good about myself. On the other hand Jesus said that the real problem was our attitude of anger or hatred that led to our actions. Control these and you control the practices. If you are taking an offering to God and have a conflict with your brother, Jesus says that you should go and get right with our brother, then take your offering to God. Example of my older brother.

If we focus on whom we are within, then our actions exceed the demands of the law. Our real problems are within - anger, hatred, jealousy, lust, deceitfulness, etc. Jesus taught that our attitudes would lead to constructive principles. The law says don’t lie. Jesus goes far beyond this and says “Let your ‘yes’ be ‘yes’, and you ‘no’ be ‘no.’” Let your word be truthful, let it be good, and the issue of lying will not be a problem. Example of student excuses Have you studied your assignment - Have I studied my assignment?; I looked at part of it. I looked over it.

Jesus challenged the law of retaliation, which said “an eye for an eye, and a tooth for a tooth.” He compared this legalistic approach with His approach by using several examples. I’ll cite a few. He reminded his followers that a Roman soldier could require you to carry his pack for a mile. Jesus said to take it two miles. That would make a difference in how he looked at you. The law said “Love your neighbor.” Jesus said “Love you enemy.”

A second issue that Jesus addressed in the Sermon on the Mount was one’s motive in what we do. He used the examples of giving, fasting, and praying to make his point. These were all actions of religious people during the day of Jesus. The legalists considered these practices as evidence of their high religiosity. But Jesus asked what is the motive for doing such things. For the scribes and Pharisees it was to be noticed by men. They gave their gifts with great pomp and circumstance. They disfigured themselves when they fasted to be sure that others would see them. And when they prayed they did so loudly and in public. Jesus basically said that one should do such things without fanfare, in secret, to be seen of God and not of man. **Did he seem to be saying “Don’t drive around in your pickup truck with the 10 Commandments in the back or with them embroidered in gold on your clothing?”**

D. In Luke there is a story that is a good example of Jesus’ concern about both our attitudes and motives. It tells of a lawyer who asked Jesus which was the greatest commandment. Jesus responded by asking him what the law said. The lawyer replied that we should love God with all of our heart, soul, strength, and mind, and our neighbor as ourselves. In Luke 10: 25-37, the lawyer wanted to justify himself and asked “Who is my neighbor?” Jesus then told the story of the good Samaritan. It told of a man who on the treacherous road from Jerusalem to Jericho was beaten, robbed and left for dead by a group of bandits. Two very religious people, a priest and a Levite (in the modern version a Baptist preacher and a deacon), came along but walked to the other side. **Why?** I think it was because they didn’t want to become **religiously defiled.** In the day of Jesus if you touched a dead body, you would have to go through a ceremonial cleansing in order to be able to worship in the Temple in Jerusalem. This poor guy might be dead and then they would really be inconvenienced.

A third individual came along, a *Samaritan (in the modern version a professor of religion at a denominational university).* He treated the beaten man with oil used for medicinal purposes, took him to a nearby inn. He left him in the care of the owner, paying the expenses incurred, and promising to pay any additional costs that might arise.

The lawyer had asked “Who is my neighbor.” Jesus rephrased the question and asked

**“Who is the neighbor?”** The answer was **“The one who showed mercy.”** Again, Jesus caused the lawyer to look within. The real question is not related to someone or something out there. It is a question that comes from within. **“Who am I?”** If we can answer that correctly, we will exceed the righteousness of the scribes and the Pharisees.

***E. In the end, if we have the right attitude and the right motive we will do the right things and without trying our righteousness will far exceed that of the scribes and the Pharisees. Furthermore, we will far exceed what the law demands.***

II. There is **one other aspect in the teachings and the practice of Jesus himself** that I believe is **very, very important.** This approach results in our ***looking for the good in people, not the negatives.*** This is not to say that Jesus was never critical of others. He caustically condemned those who abused the power given to them for their own benefit and to the detriment of people. For example, he referred to Herod Antipas as “That fox!” And he had no use for the religious hypocrites, such as the scribes, Pharisees, and Sadducees. He called them “vipers,” “dead bones in white-washed tombs,” and “murderers of the prophets.”

But he looked upon so many and saw not their weaknesses, not their short-comings, not their failures, ***but the good that was potentially in them.*** He chose as his ***closest followers*** rough-on-the edges, common, ordinary folk; fishermen, tax-collectors, persons with perhaps less than stellar reputations. He **saw the good** in these people. For example, **Simon Peter,** a fisherman who was known for his bragging and his short-sighted understanding, who would be told that he would deny Jesus three times before the next sunrise, was also told by Jesus “When you have turned, strengthen the brethren.” **Zacchaeus** was a despised tax-collector, but Jesus saw the good in him. **Mary Magdalene** was a woman of suspect by many but Jesus saw the good in her.

**In the early church Barnabas** was the **perfect example of this attitude.** When there were **widows and orphans and the poor in need** in the early Jerusalem church, he did not criticize them for not working and carrying their load, he sold a piece of land to provide for them. When others were **suspicious of Paul** who had vehemently persecuted Christians, Barnabas vouched for him. When Paul rejected **John Mark** from going on the second missionary journey because he had gone home before the first journey was completed, Barnabas stood up for his nephew. Mark later would serve with Peter and wrote what most consider to be the earliest Gospel.

It’s **easy to see the faults and flaws in people.** But the **better way is to see the good that is present in them.** Legalists will point out one’s mistakes. Those who recognize their own short-comings will discover and encourage the good in those about them.

**A. What does all of this mean?**

1. ***First, we need to examine ourselves.*** We need to **look at our actions and determine what is that is in us that causes us to act as we do.** We need to **realize that we can change in terms of our attitudes, our motives, and our principles. If we change for the good, then this will result in changes for the good in our practices.**

2. **Second, we need to work really hard at seeing the good in others.** We can ***do so without compromising our own convictions.*** But we can ***see the qualities that others display in their lives (see Beatitudes) and can make a constant effort to affirm the good in others, to encourage them to continue the practice of the good qualities in their lives.***

**Conclusion** - FBC in terms of our meeting place is located in the most strategic locations in all of Boulder. We are a few blocks from the County courthouse, the center of governmental and political life for the community and the area.

We are in the heart of the cultural community for Boulder. Music, art, theater are a vibrant part of our community where people with unusual gifts and talents seek to interpret the world and society for us in unique ways.

Sports centering around CU occupies not only the lives of many of the people in Boulder, but many of us as well, and conveys the major role of sports in our society.

And we are in the heart of a revitalized downtown that bodes well for the future. The Pearl Street Mall bustles with activity of all kinds of people from all walks of life. Walk down it and you rub shoulders with the filthy rich and the filthy poor. You see people from so many different cultures and different backgrounds. You see people dressed in suits and dressed casually. You see the clean shaven and the tattooed. You see it all!

And, you also see in the immediate area so many different expressions of religion. You see Baptist churches, Catholic churches, Episcopalian churches, Congregationalist, Methodist and Presbyterian. But you also can find expressions of non-Christian religions as well - Jewish, Islamic, and a variety of faiths often related to cultural backgrounds. Our society is multi-cultured and multi-religious.

**It is here in this place, in this culture, that we find ourselves as a community of believers.** Does any church have a better or important location in our city? Does any congregation have a greater task to understand and define the place of religion and faith in a complex environment of the 21<sup>st</sup> century in Boulder, Colorado?

***How do we respond to the challenge before us?*** I suggest that as we leave this sanctuary, **we need to look to the people that we encounter.** We need to **see the good, the potential of those people outside our fellowship.** *Anyone can see the shortcomings and the weaknesses of these people.* We need to **affirm the good, not condemn.** We need to **encourage, not denigrate,** we need **to learn from them, not just try to criticize.**

And ***if we succeed,*** we will ***grow in our ability to demonstrate a worthy ethic.*** We need to ***see the good. It's out there. But we can't see it if we are looking for the bad.***

***If we look for the bad, those that we encounter will in turn see the bad in us. And if we look for the good, they just may see the good in us.***

So, as we go forth, **let us go forth looking for the good. Anyone can see the bad.**

## SERMON OUTLINE

### SEEING THE GOOD

**Text:** Matt: 5: 17; 20-24; 43-44; Matt 6: 1

**Intro:** Judge Roy Moore/10 Commandments in pickup/AL judge gold embroidered robe w/10 Commandments

**Issue:** **How can we be ethical people in today's world?**

**1. Legalism** - rules - laws, reflected in fervor over the public display of the 10 Comm.

A. Source of ethics - external, out there

B. One can manipulate for personal advantage

C. Legalists see the flaws, weaknesses, shortcomings in others

**2. Liberty and love through grace and faith** - Sermon on the Mount - Matt. 5-7

**A. Exceeding the righteousness** of the scribes and Pharisees

**B. Attitudes behind actions** - examples

1) You shall not kill

2) You shall not lie/Let your yes be yes and your no be no

3) Law of retaliation/Go the second mile; love your neighbor/Good Samaritan

**C. Motives** - giving/prayer/fasting

**D. Actions** from attitudes and motives - exceeding legalism

**3. Seeing the Good** in the teaching and example of Jesus

**A. Critical attitudes of Jesus** - Herod Antipas (that fox); religious hypocrites

**B. Seeing the good** - Peter/Zachaeus/Mary Magdalene/Barnabas

**Results: What does all of this mean?**

**1. First, examine ourselves** - attitudes/motives/actions

**2. Second, work really hard at seeing the good in others** - without compromising our own convictions

**Conclusion** - **FBC -the most strategic location in all of Boulder** - government/culture/sports/economy/people (eclectic)/religion

**1. Does any church have a more prominent or more important location in our city?**

Does any congregation have a greater task to understand and define the place of religion and faith in a complex environment of the 21<sup>st</sup> century?

2. **How do we respond** to the challenge before us? - We need to **see the good**, the **potential** of those people outside our fellowship. Anyone can see the shortcomings and the weaknesses of these people. We need to **affirm the good, not condemn**. We need to **encourage, not denigrate**, we need to **learn** from them, not just try to criticize.

**And if we succeed, we will grow in our ability to demonstrate a worthy ethic.** We need to see the good. It's out there. But we can't see it if we are looking for the bad.