

A Closer Walk With God

Discerning Between Good and Evil as a Disciple of Christ

INTRODUCTION:

- I. In our series of lessons entitled "A Closer Walk With God," I want us to take a closer look at "Discerning Between Good and Evil as a Disciple of Christ."
 - A. It's important for you and I as disciples – as followers – of Jesus Christ to be able to distinguish between right and wrong
 1. This might seem rather obvious. But sadly, we're living in a world where the lines between right and wrong – between good and evil – are being blurred.
 2. Our world, and the society in which we live, is one where lines of morality are constantly moving – where there is no clear standard of right and wrong.
 - a. It's not that such a standard doesn't exist – it does!
 - b. We call that standard of right and wrong the Bible.
 3. But sometimes even Christians are confused by the logic and reasoning of the world around us, and we begin to have doubts about what is truly right and wrong in some areas.

- B. Therefore, it's important for us to occasionally review some of these principles for determining what is, and what is not, acceptable to God.
1. Knowing the difference doesn't automatically come when we obey the gospel.
 2. It is an ability that comes with time, and with spiritual growth and development.
 3. Unfortunately, not everyone grows and develops spiritually as a disciple of Christ.
 - a. **Hebrews 5:12-14** – *For though by this time you ought to be teachers, you need someone to teach you again the first principles of the oracles of God; and you have come to need milk and not solid food. 13 For everyone who partakes only of milk is unskilled in the word of righteousness, for he is a babe. 14 But solid food belongs to those who are of full age, that is, those who by reason of use have their senses exercised to discern both good and evil.*
 - b. Notice how the ability to discern between good and evil belongs to those "who are of full age" – those who have grown spiritually, and who have exercised their "senses."
 - c. It's not the "five senses" of touch, taste, hearing, seeing and smelling that the Hebrew writer is discussing.

- d. It's our spiritual senses that must be developed as we grow up in Christ that will enable us to truly know the difference between right and wrong.
- C. So, let's spend a little time in this lesson talking about right and wrong, and how we can truly know the difference.
 - 1. And as we go through this study together remember that your soul's salvation is dependent on your ability to truly know the difference.

Body:

- I. One of the first ways we can determine if something is right or wrong is to ask, "Is it condemned in the Bible?"
 - A. There are many things that are specifically condemned in the Bible as wrong.
 - 1. There's a whole list of them in Galatians 5.
 - a. **Galatians 5:19-21** – *Now the works of the flesh are evident, which are: adultery, fornication, uncleanness, lewdness, 20 idolatry, sorcery, hatred, contentions, jealousies, outbursts of wrath, selfish ambitions, dissensions, heresies, 21 envy, murders, drunkenness, revelries, and the like; of which I tell you beforehand, just as I also told you in time past, that those who practice such things will not inherit the kingdom of God.*

2. A similar list is found in Ephesians 5:
 - a. **Ephesians 5:3-7** – *But fornication and all uncleanness or covetousness, let it not even be named among you, as is fitting for saints; 4 neither filthiness, nor foolish talking, nor coarse jesting, which are not fitting, but rather giving of thanks. 5 For this you know, that no fornicator, unclean person, nor covetous man, who is an idolater, has any inheritance in the kingdom of Christ and God. 6 Let no one deceive you with empty words, for because of these things the wrath of God comes upon the sons of disobedience. 7 Therefore do not be partakers with them.*
 3. Simply put, if we're told *"those who practice such things will not inherit the kingdom of God*, and if we're told *"do not be partakers"* with those who do these things, then the reason should be rather obvious – they are wrong.
- B. Our attitude should be, "The Bible says it. I believe it. And that settles it."
1. At least, that's the attitude that true disciples of Jesus Christ should have.
 2. There is simply no room for debate when the Bible clearly condemns a sin or a sinful lifestyle.
- C. But not all sins are specifically mentioned by name in the Bible.

1. So what do we do then?
- II. If we can't find a particular practice mentioned by name in the Bible, we should ask, "Is it similar to those things that are condemned in the Bible?"
- A. In other words, is it like those sins that are specifically condemned?
1. If you recall, the list of sins in Galatians 5:19 ends with the words, "*and the like*" or "*things like these*," depending on the version you use.
 2. Therefore, if there is a particular practice that is even remotely similar to those things condemned in the Bible, we need to put them all in the same category of "wrong."
 3. Of course, to do this we have to be totally honest and truthful with ourselves.
 - a. It's easy to convince ourselves, "this isn't really all that bad."
 - b. But if it is even remotely similar to the things God condemns in the Bible, it's IS really that bad, and we need to avoid it.
- III. Another way of determining if something is right or wrong is to ask, "Does it bother my conscience?"
- A. But there is a catch here. Wrong things will bother our conscience only when we have a "good conscience."

1. Paul wrote rather extensively about the need for a "good conscience."
 - a. **1 Timothy 1:5** – *Now the purpose of the commandment is love from a pure heart, from a good conscience, and from sincere faith. . .*
 - b. **1 Timothy 1:18-19** – *This charge I commit to you, son Timothy, according to the prophecies previously made concerning you, that by them you may wage the good warfare, 19 having faith and a good conscience, which some having rejected, concerning the faith have suffered shipwreck. . .*
 2. Paul also said that violating our conscience to the degree that it no longer bothers us is a sure sign of apostasy.
 - a. **1 Timothy 4:1-2** – *Now the Spirit expressly says that in latter times some will depart from the faith, giving heed to deceiving spirits and doctrines of demons, 2 speaking lies in hypocrisy, having their own conscience seared with a hot iron. . .*
- B. Paul helps us better understand the implications of violating our conscience in Romans chapter 14.
1. If we do something when we aren't sure it's right, then it's wrong.
 2. Why? Because we have violated our conscience by totally ignoring the alarm our conscience was sounding.

3. Concerning the issue that came up in the first century of whether a Christian could eat certain meats that had been formerly condemned in the Old Testament, Paul wrote this:
 - a. **Romans 14:22-23** – *Do you have faith? Have it to yourself before God. Happy is he who does not condemn himself in what he approves. 23 But he who doubts is condemned if he eats, because he does not eat from faith; for whatever is not from faith is sin.*
4. Essentially, Paul is asking, "Do you have faith" – do you have absolute confidence that what you are about to do is right?
5. If you have this confidence, and yet you know others might be offended, then keep the matter between you and God.
 - a. *"Happy is he who does not condemn himself in what he approves"* – meaning if our conscience doesn't condemn us, then great!
6. However, the man who has doubts about eating certain kinds of meats needs to avoid them altogether – whether or not it's right to eat them – because he doesn't have "*faith.*" He doesn't have confidence that it's right.
 - a. If he violates his conscience he sins!
7. So, even though something may be right in, and of, itself – it's wrong if we can't do it with a completely clear conscience.

IV. Here's another question we might want to ask in determining if something is right or wrong; "What does a mature Christians say about it?"

A. But let me add a word of caution here. Simply because someone else may consider something right or wrong doesn't make it so – even if we're talking about that someone being a mature Christian.

1. Even mature, well-grounded, knowledgeable Christians can be wrong about things.

a. And they would be the first to admit it.

2. But there is something to be said about heeding the wisdom of an older, spiritually mature man or woman of God.

3. These are the ones the Hebrew writer spoke about when he wrote about *"those who by reason of use have their senses exercised to discern both good and evil."* (Hebrews 5:14)

B. This is why the advice and spiritual insight of a mature Christian can be helpful.

1. Paul said there are those whose examples are worth following:

a. **Philippians 3:17-18** – *Brethren, join in following my example, and note those who so walk, as you have us for a pattern. 18 For many walk, of whom I have told you often, and now tell you even weeping, that they are the enemies of the cross of Christ:*

- b. Sadly, we have examples of both in the church – those whose examples are worthy of following, and those whose examples we need to avoid completely.
 - c. However, the ones whose examples are worth following are also the ones we can go to for sound spiritual advice and counsel.
2. However, it's up to us to listen to the advice of those who are more spiritually mature than us.
- a. Not everyone is willing to do that.
- B. A classic example of not listening to the advice of older wiser men is found in the Old Testament book of 1st Kings.
1. Rehoboam, the son of Solomon, failed to listen to the advice of the older, wiser counselors who advised him to not continue the exorbitant taxing and spending of his father Solomon.
- a. **1 Kings 12:8** – *But he rejected the advice which the elders had given him, and consulted the young men who had grown up with him, who stood before him.*
2. The young men who had grown up with Rehoboam had grown up in luxury, and weren't about to advise the King to go on an austerity program of cutting taxes and spending.
- a. **1 Kings 12:10-11** – *Then the young men who had grown up with him spoke to him, saying, "Thus you should speak to this*

people who have spoken to you, saying, 'Your father made our yoke heavy, but you make it lighter on us' — thus you shall say to them: 'My little finger shall be thicker than my father's waist! 11 And now, whereas my father put a heavy yoke on you, I will add to your yoke; my father chastised you with whips, but I will chastise you with scourges!'"

3. Unfortunately, Rehoboam listened to the wrong advice, and the end result was civil war among the tribes of Israel which led to the period we know as "The Divided Kingdom."
 4. Weakened and divided by strife and civil war allowed the enemies of the people of Israel to conquer them and lead most of them away into captivity as slaves – all because a King ignored the advice of older, wiser men.
- C. By the way, it's not just the advice of older, wiser men that is worth heeding. The same is true of following the advice and example of older, wiser, godly women.
1. **Titus 2:1-5** – *But as for you, speak the things which are proper for sound doctrine: 2 that the older men be sober, reverent, temperate, sound in faith, in love, in patience; 3 the older women likewise, that they be reverent in behavior, not slanderers, not given to much wine, teachers of good things — 4 that they admonish the young women to love their husbands, to love their children, 5 to be*

discreet, chaste, homemakers, good, obedient to their own husbands, that the word of God may not be blasphemed.

V. And here's another way of knowing if something is right or wrong – by simply asking ourselves, "Is this going to weaken or damage my influence?"

A. Unfortunately, our influence is perhaps the most fragile thing we possess – it can be easily damaged.

1. Therefore, the Scriptures speak a lot about protecting our influence.

a. Paul was especially concerned about how his influence might impact the salvation of others: **1 Corinthians 9:19-23** – *For though I am free from all men, I have made myself a servant to all, that I might win the more; 20 and to the Jews I became as a Jew, that I might win Jews; to those who are under the law, as under the law, that I might win those who are under the law; 21 to those who are without law, as without law (not being without law toward God, but under law toward Christ), that I might win those who are without law; 22 to the weak I became as weak, that I might win the weak.*

I have become all things to all men, that I might by all means save some. 23 Now this I do for the gospel's sake, that I may be partaker of it with you.

- b. And then, in the same letter, Paul went on to say we need to do the same thing: **1 Corinthians 10:31-11:1** – *Therefore, whether you eat or drink, or whatever you do, do all to the glory of God. 32 Give no offense, either to the Jews or to the Greeks or to the church of God, 33 just as I also please all men in all things, not seeking my own profit, but the profit of many, that they may be saved. 11:1 Imitate me, just as I also imitate Christ.*
- 2. The apostle Peter also had some things to say about the power of a good example – especially among wives of unbelievers.
 - a. **1 Peter 3:1-2** – *Wives, likewise, be submissive to your own husbands, that even if some do not obey the word, they, without a word, may be won by the conduct of their wives, 2 when they observe your chaste conduct accompanied by fear.*
 - b. Of course, there is no guarantee that the example of a godly wife will lead to the conversion of her unbelieving husband.
 - c. But a Christian woman with a bad example doesn't stand a chance of converting her husband.
- 3. So, if our example as a Christian is going to be tarnished, or weakened, or even viewed suspiciously by something we do, then what we are doing is wrong – pure and simple.

~~VI. Here's one way of determining right or wrong that we don't often like to consider, and that is to ask ourselves, "Is it poor stewardship?"~~

~~A. By that I mean are we being wise "stewards" or wise "masters" over our time, talents and treasures?~~

~~1. Let me just say this as simply as I know how:~~

~~a. If we spend our time, our talents and abilities, and our treasure (our money) doing things that take us away from faithfully serving God, then those things are wrong.~~

~~b. Even if the things we are doing are not inherently wrong in themselves — they are wrong if they take precedence over serving the Lord.~~

~~2. The Scriptures are literally filled with teachings and examples of those who put everything first in their lives, but the Lord.~~

~~3. And the same thing is true with many in the Lord's church today — sadly.~~

~~a. We can become so preoccupied with work, education, recreation, hobbies and past-time activities, and the like, that we have no time left for the Lord.~~

~~b. We will either miss worship and Bible study by placing those other things first in our lives, or we are so tired and worn out at the end of the day, we don't have any energy left to even sit down and quietly read our Bibles and pray.~~

B. ~~Here's how the Lord expects His disciples to arrange our list of priorities:~~

1. ~~**Matthew 6:25-34** — "Therefore I say to you, do not worry about your life, what you will eat or what you will drink; nor about your body, what you will put on. Is not life more than food and the body more than clothing? 26 Look at the birds of the air, for they neither sow nor reap nor gather into barns; yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not of more value than they? 27 Which of you by worrying can add one cubit to his stature? 28 So why do you worry about clothing? Consider the lilies of the field, how they grow: they neither toil nor spin; 29 and yet I say to you that even Solomon in all his glory was not arrayed like one of these. 30 Now if God so clothes the grass of the field, which today is, and tomorrow is thrown into the oven, will He not much more clothe you, O you of little faith? 31 Therefore do not worry, saying, 'What shall we eat?' or 'What shall we drink?' or 'What shall we wear?' 32 For after all these things the Gentiles seek. For your heavenly Father knows that you need all these things. 33 But seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all these things shall be added to you. 34 Therefore do not worry about tomorrow, for tomorrow will worry about its own things. Sufficient for the day is its own trouble."~~

2. ~~If you're worried about food, clothing, and housing the Lord has one very simple solution . . . *seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all these things shall be added to you.*~~
 - a. ~~This doesn't mean we simply sit back and wait for the Lord to magically give us the things we need.~~
 - b. ~~It means we put the "*kingdom of God*" (the Lord's church) and "*His righteousness*" (His standards of righteous living) first in our lives, and He will take care of all our needs.~~
3. ~~The psalmist David put it this way:~~
 - a. ~~**Psalms 37:23-26** — "*The steps of a good man are ordered by the Lord, and He delights in his way. 24 Though he fall, he shall not be utterly cast down; for the Lord upholds him with His hand. 25 I have been young, and now am old; yet I have not seen the righteous forsaken, nor his descendants begging bread. 26 He is ever merciful, and lends; and his descendants are blessed.*"~~

VII. Although there are other ways we can determine right from wrong, here's one that sort of sums it all up: "Would Jesus do it?"

- A. Remember, the goal of being a true disciple of Jesus Christ is to be like Jesus.

1. Therefore, the question "Would Jesus do it?" or the more popular "What would Jesus do?" are appropriate questions to ask.
 - a. Would Jesus miss worship services for the reasons you do?
 - b. Would Jesus give on the Lord's day like you do?
 - c. Would Jesus go to all the places you go?
 - d. Would Jesus do all the things you do?
 - e. Would Jesus watch all the things on TV you watch, or read all the books you read, or listen to all the music you listen to, or visit all the Internet websites you visit?
 - f. Would Jesus hang out with the people you do?
 2. We could make this list of questions truly endless.
 3. But if you have to honestly say, "I doubt Jesus would do this," then why do you do it?
 4. If you can't see Jesus by your side every moment of the day, doing exactly what you do, for the same reasons you do them, then perhaps you better stop.
- B. As a disciple of Jesus Christ, we not only need to follow His teaching and His example, we need to have the same mind-set as Jesus has.
1. Paul put it this way:
 - a. **Philippians 2:3-8** – *Let nothing be done through selfish ambition or conceit, but in lowliness of mind let each esteem others better than himself. 4 Let each of you look out not only*

for his own interests, but also for the interests of others. 5 Let this mind be in you which was also in Christ Jesus, 6 who, being in the form of God, did not consider it robbery to be equal with God, 7 but made Himself of no reputation, taking the form of a bondservant, and coming in the likeness of men. 8 And being found in appearance as a man, He humbled Himself and became obedient to the point of death, even the death of the cross.

2. If you walk like Jesus walked, and talk like Jesus talked, and think as Jesus thought, then you won't have any problems whatsoever knowing right from wrong.

CONCLUSION:

- I. I hope this lesson has stirred your thinking about the difference between right and wrong.
 - A. Knowing the difference really isn't all that hard.
 1. But knowing right, and doing right is where the problem lies.
 - a. James, the Lord's brother, summed it up this way: **James 4:17** – *Therefore, to him who knows to do good and does not do it, to him it is sin.*
 2. I think our biggest problem is not so much doing wrong, as it is doing what we know is the right thing to do.

- B. What good and right things do you know you should be doing, but aren't?
1. Could it be that you know you need to give your life to Christ in faith and obedience, being baptized for the remission of your sins and be added by the Lord to His church?
 2. Or, could it be that you know you need to be more faithful serving the Lord, and more faithful in putting the "*kingdom of God and His righteousness*" first in your life?
 3. Or, could it be that you're simply carrying some burden that you know can be lifted through the prayers of your faithful and devout brothers and sisters in Christ.
 4. Obviously, there's no better time to do what you know is good and right than now – and it's our prayer that you will.