

A Closer Walk With God

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October 8, 2011

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Heb. 5:12-14

We know or can discern the difference between what is good and evil. Knowing the difference does not come automatically upon conversion. It is an ability that comes with time and “exercise”

Heb. 5:12-14, *“For when for the time ye ought to be teachers, ye have need that one teach you again which be the first principles of the oracles of God; and are become such as have need of milk, and not of strong meat. For every one that useth milk is unskilful in the word of righteousness: for he is a babe. But strong meat belongeth to them that are of full age, even those who by reason of use have their senses exercised to discern both good and evil.”*

This lesson is designed to help us develop this ability to discern, so that we might truly have “A Closer Walk With God”.

Deciding what is right and what is wrong is really very simple. It involves asking a few questions about the matter at hand.

Is it clearly condemned in the Bible?

Many things are specifically mentioned as being wrong.

One list of such things is found in:

Gal. 5:19-21, *“Now the works of the flesh are manifest, which are these; Adultery, fornication, uncleanness, lasciviousness, Idolatry, witchcraft, hatred, variance, emulations, wrath, strife, seditions, heresies, Envyings, murders, drunkenness, revellings, and such like: of the which I tell you before, as I have also told you in time past, that they which do such things shall not inherit the kingdom of God.”*

A similar list is found in:

Eph. 5:3-7, *“But fornication, and all uncleanness, or covetousness, let it not be once named among you, as becometh saints; Neither filthiness, nor foolish talking, nor jesting, which are not convenient: but rather giving of thanks. For this ye know, that no whoremonger, nor unclean person, nor covetous man, who is an idolater, hath any inheritance in the kingdom of Christ and of God. Let no man deceive you with vain words: for because of these things cometh the wrath of God upon the children of disobedience. Be not ye therefore partakers with them.”*

For things so mentioned, that settles the matter. At least as far as Christians are concerned. There is no room for debate when the Scriptures clearly condemn some practice.

But not all sins are mentioned by name, for the Bible would be endless if that were true! So another question needs to be asked.

Is it similar to things condemned in the Bible?

In Gal. 5:19-21, notice the phrase “*and such like*”.

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When we are uncertain about some matter, we should ask whether it is **like** any sins specifically mentioned.

For example, what about smoking marijuana? Is it not like “drunkenness”?

You might even compare it with the good things mentioned.

Notice those things in Gal. 5:22-23, “*But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, longsuffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, Meekness, temperance: against such there is no law.*”

Is the matter in question more like the “fruit of the Spirit” (that which is good) or the “works of the flesh” (that which is evil)?

Another question to consider...

Does it hurt your conscience?

The importance of a good conscience.

In light of the following Scriptures:

- 1 Tim. 1:5, “*Now the end of the commandment is charity out of a pure heart, and of a good conscience, and of faith unfeigned.*”
- 1 Tim. 1:18-19, “*This charge I commit unto thee, son Timothy, according to the prophecies which went before on thee, that thou by them mightest war a good warfare; Holding faith, and a good conscience; which some having put away concerning faith have made shipwreck.*”
- 1 Tim. 3:9, “*Holding the mystery of the faith in a pure conscience.*”

Violating our conscience to the degree it no longer bothers us is a sure sign of falling away!

- 1 Tim. 4:1-2, “*Now the Spirit speaketh expressly, that in the latter times some shall depart from the faith, giving heed to seducing spirits, and doctrines of devils; Speaking lies in hypocrisy; having their conscience seared with a hot iron,*”

This may help us to better appreciate Romans 14:23, “*And he that doubteth is damned if he eat, because he eateth not of faith: for whatsoever is not of faith is sin.*”

Doing something when you doubt its rightfulness is to violate your conscience.

That, declares Paul, is sin!

So an act may be good in of itself, but, if you think it is wrong (because of incorrect knowledge), or have doubts about its rightfulness, then don't do it!

Another help...

What do mature Christians say about it?

This, of course, is not the ultimate determining factor, for mature Christians can be wrong; as they would be the first to admit.

But Heb. 5:14 does say that those who by “reason of use” are in a position to discern.”

Heb. 5:14, “*But strong meat belongeth to them that are of full age, even those who by reason of use have their senses exercised to discern both good and evil.*”

This is why the advice of mature Christians can be helpful

Phil. 3:17, “*Brethren, be followers together of me, and mark them which walk so as ye have us for an ensample.*”

The example of Rehoboam's failure to listen to the advice of older, mature men should teach us something.

1 Kings 12:6-21, “*And king Rehoboam consulted with the old men, that stood before Solomon his father while he yet lived, and said, How do ye advise that I may answer this people? And they spake unto him, saying, If thou wilt be a servant unto this people this day, and wilt serve them, and answer them, and speak good words to them, then they will be thy servants for ever. But he forsook the counsel of the old men, which they had given him, and consulted with the young*

men that were grown up with him, and which stood before him: And he said unto them, What counsel give ye that we may answer this people, who have spoken to me, saying, Make the yoke which thy father did put upon us lighter? And the young men that were grown up with him spake unto him, saying, Thus shalt thou speak unto this people that spake unto thee, saying, Thy father made our yoke heavy, but make thou it lighter unto us; thus shalt thou say unto them, My little finger shall be thicker than my father's loins. And now whereas my father did lade you with a heavy yoke, I will add to your yoke: my father hath chastised you with whips, but I will chastise you with scorpions. So Jeroboam and all the people came to Rehoboam the third day, as the king had appointed, saying, Come to me again the third day. And the king answered the people roughly, and forsook the old men's counsel that they gave him; And spake to them after the counsel of the young men, saying, My father made your yoke heavy, and I will add to your yoke: my father also chastised you with whips, but I will chastise you with scorpions. Wherefore the king hearkened not unto the people; for the cause was from the LORD, that he might perform his saying, which the LORD spake by Ahijah the Shilonite unto Jeroboam the son of Nebat. So when all Israel saw that the king hearkened not unto them, the people answered the king, saying, What portion have we in David? neither have we inheritance in the son of Jesse: to your tents, O Israel: now see to thine own house, David. So Israel departed unto their tents. But as for the children of Israel which dwelt in the cities of Judah, Rehoboam reigned over them. Then king Rehoboam sent Adoram, who was over the tribute; and all Israel stoned him with stones, that he died. Therefore king Rehoboam made speed to get him up to his chariot, to flee to Jerusalem. So Israel rebelled against the house of David unto this day. And it came to pass, when all Israel heard that Jeroboam was come again, that they sent and called him unto the congregation, and made him king over all Israel: there was none that followed the house of David, but the tribe of Judah only."

Paul instructed Titus that the younger should look to those older.

Tit. 2:3-5, "The aged women likewise, that they be in behaviour as becometh holiness, not false accusers, not given to much wine, teachers of good things; That they may teach the young women to be sober, to love their husbands, to love their children, To be discreet, chaste, keepers at home, good, obedient to their own husbands, that the word of God be not blasphemed."

Then a question that is often overlooked...

Does it hinder your influence?

By both example and word. Paul stressed the importance of being concerned about our influence on others.

Notice his concern for how his influence affected the salvation of others.

1 Cor. 9:19-23, *“For though I be free from all men, yet have I made myself servant unto all, that I might gain the more. And unto the Jews I became as a Jew, that I might gain the Jews; to them that are under the law, as under the law, that I might gain them that are under the law; To them that are without law, as without law, (being not without law to God, but under the law to Christ,) that I might gain them that are without law. To the weak became I as weak, that I might gain the weak: I am made all things to all men, that I might by all means save some. And this I do for the gospel’s sake, that I might be partaker thereof with you.”*

He then commands to do likewise, in which we are simply imitating the example of Christ!

1 Cor. 10:31-11:1, *“Whether therefore ye eat, or drink, or whatsoever ye do, do all to the glory of God. Give none offence, neither to the Jews, nor to the Gentiles, nor to the church of God: Even as I please all men in all things, not seeking mine own profit, but the profit of many, that they may be saved. Be ye followers of me, even as I also am of Christ.”*

Peter taught the value of a good example in helping a wife win her husband to the Lord.

1 Pet. 3:1-2, *“Likewise, ye wives, be in subjection to your own husbands; that, if any obey not the word, they also may without the word be won by the conversation of the wives; While they behold your chaste conversation coupled with fear.”*

What is said of a wife’s example would also be true of a Christian’s example.

So we should be concerned as to whether a practice under question helps or hinders our influence for the Lord!

Is it poor stewardship?

That we are “stewards” of our time, money, and bodies is evident from:

The Lord’s parable of The Talents.

Matt. 25:14-30, *“For the kingdom of heaven is as a man travelling into a far country, who called his own servants, and delivered unto*

them his goods. And unto one he gave five talents, to another two, and to another one; to every man according to his several ability; and straightway took his journey. Then he that had received the five talents went and traded with the same, and made them other five talents. And likewise he that had received two, he also gained other two. But he that had received one went and digged in the earth, and hid his lord's money. After a long time the lord of those servants cometh, and reckoneth with them. And so he that had received five talents came and brought other five talents, saying, Lord, thou deliveredst unto me five talents: behold, I have gained beside them five talents more. His lord said unto him, Well done, thou good and faithful servant: thou hast been faithful over a few things, I will make thee ruler over many things: enter thou into the joy of thy lord. He also that had received two talents came and said, Lord, thou deliveredst unto me two talents: behold, I have gained two other talents beside them. His lord said unto him, Well done, good and faithful servant; thou hast been faithful over a few things, I will make thee ruler over many things: enter thou into the joy of thy lord. Then he which had received the one talent came and said, Lord, I knew thee that thou art an hard man, reaping where thou hast not sown, and gathering where thou hast not strawed: And I was afraid, and went and hid thy talent in the earth: lo, there thou hast that is thine. His lord answered and said unto him, Thou wicked and slothful servant, thou knewest that I reap where I sowed not, and gather where I have not strawed: Thou oughtest therefore to have put my money to the exchangers, and then at my coming I should have received mine own with usury. Take therefore the talent from him, and give it unto him which hath ten talents. For unto every one that hath shall be given, and he shall have abundance: but from him that hath not shall be taken away even that which he hath. And cast ye the unprofitable servant into outer darkness: there shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth."

Paul's instruction concerning our bodies.

1 Cor. 6:19-20, "What? know ye not that your body is the temple of the Holy Ghost which is in you, which ye have of God, and ye are not your own? For ye are bought with a price: therefore glorify God in your body, and in your spirit, which are God's."

His directions for those rich in this world.

1 Tim. 6:17-19, "Charge them that are rich in this world, that they be not highminded, nor trust in uncertain riches, but in the living God, who giveth us richly all things to enjoy; That they do good, that they be rich in good works, ready to distribute, willing to communicate; Laying up in store for themselves a good foundation against the time to come, that they may lay hold on eternal life."

Some activities may be harmless in themselves, but require so much time and energy, there is none left for the Lord! This can be true of vocations, hobbies, etc.

We should bear in mind that time is limited and therefore priorities must be set and kept.

- Eph. 5:16, “*Redeeming the time, because the days are evil.*”
 - Matt. 6:33, “*But seek ye first the kingdom of God, and his righteousness; and all these things shall be added unto you.*”
- Finally, we can ask...

Would Jesus do it?

Remember the goal of discipleship...

As found in Luke 6:40, “*The disciple is not above his master: but every one that is perfect shall be as his master.*” To be like Jesus!

“Would Jesus do it?” is therefore an appropriate question.

If you think He would not, it is probably wrong!

This makes the study of Jesus of prime importance in our lives. Studying His life, His examples, His Word, so that we can have the “mind of Christ”.

Phil. 2:5, “*Let this mind be in you, which was also in Christ Jesus.*”

Conclusion.

I hope that these seven questions can help in identifying what is good and what is evil.

The importance of properly discerning between good and evil is seen in such passages like 2 Cor. 6:16-7:1, “*And what agreement hath the temple of God with idols? for ye are the temple of the living God; as God hath said, I will dwell in them, and walk in them; and I will be their God, and they shall be my people. Wherefore come out from among them, and be ye separate, saith the Lord, and touch not the unclean thing; and I will receive you, And will be a Father unto you, and ye shall be my sons and daughters, saith the Lord Almighty. Having therefore these promises, dearly beloved, let us cleanse ourselves from all filthiness of the flesh and spirit, perfecting holiness in the fear of God.*” where we are reminded of how blessed we are to be the people of God; and the responsibility to act accordingly, if we wish to have a closer walk with God!

Some questions to stimulate your thinking:

- Do you have some older Christian to whom you feel free to go to for advice?
- Do you feel that you usually give enough thought to the effect of your actions on other people?
- Are you trying to keep a good conscience in all that you do?
- Will you ask, when in doubt, “What would Jesus do?”

