

Distinguishing Between Good and Evil

Disclaimer: this is an automatically generated machine transcription - there may be small errors or mistranscriptions. Please refer to the original audio if you are in any doubt.

Date: 20 February 2023

Preacher: Tom Holland

[0 : 00] I think we all know by now that the book of Hebrews is a unique writing of divine inspiration that shows up in the New Testament.

We've been talking about them and we'll continue to do that. That first group is made up of legitimate followers of the Lord Jesus. They've been born again. They left Judaism, been saved, born from above, regenerated.

A lot of words we can put in there. And there's little doubt that these particular believers are young in the faith. That does not refer to their age but their length of time in the faith.

In other words, they were babies in the faith. A lot of them are more formally immature believers. But that in no way means that they were lesser Christians.

They weren't on the second team. And they were not any lesser than someone who had spent decades in the faith.

[1 : 26] They were just as saved as they were. But they were not equal in maturity in the faith. These believers need milk and not yet meat.

The second group of people attending this church made up of Hebrew people are the curious but as yet unconverted. We could say that they are interested in Christ but have not made any commitment to Him as yet.

The challenge in understanding the passages contained in Hebrews is to discern to whom the Holy Spirit is speaking in a particular passage.

He will address believers in one manner and yet unbelievers in another. And if we do not know to whom the Spirit is speaking, it can lead to confusion. And this has actually happened down through the ages.

Not only have individuals been confused on this point, so have entire denominations. And it's happening in our day. It happens in our day.

[2 : 45] Listen to the passage that we'll be studying tonight which discusses babes in the Word and the mature in the Word.

Hebrews chapter 5 starting in verse 11. You're going to hear an interesting word in here, by the way. About this we have much to say and it is hard to explain since you have become dull of hearing.

I offered apologies to Jerry yesterday that I was going to be teaching this. It has nothing to do with your name which I think is Scottish although they're Scottish and German dolls in the world.

For though by this time you ought to be teachers you need someone to teach you again the basic principles of the oracles of God. You need milk not solid food for everyone who lives on milk is unskilled in the word of righteousness since he is a child.

But solid food is for the mature for those who have their powers of discernment trained by constant practice to distinguish good from evil.

[4 : 10] The section of Scripture we're going to be examining in the next few weeks will deal with the topic of spiritual maturity. They straddle actually a couple of chapters of the book of Hebrews.

We can describe these portions of Scripture in this manner. Hebrews 5 verses 11 to 14 which we're looking at tonight deals with unbelievers.

Hebrews 6 verses 1 to 8 deals with unbelievers. Hebrews 6 verses 9 to 12 deals with believers.

And I think we'll see that as we go through this over the next three weeks at least three. Now in order to understand the book of the Bible it is necessary to understand the central meaning the Holy Spirit had when authoring that particular piece.

I will give you a for instance. The Gospel of John contains great truths and are an ever-present help in how we should live our lives as true worshipers.

[5 : 36] That's where we learn how to worship God. John chapter 4 woman at the well. But that's not the central theme. The central theme of the book of John is the deity of the Lord Jesus Christ.

Christ. And in that he is superior to in the new covenant over and against the old covenant.

Christ in John is presented as fully God in human flesh. He took upon himself human flesh. John chapter 1. So the central theme of the book of Hebrews is the superiority of the new covenant over the old covenant.

It wasn't better it was complete. The old covenant was in part the new covenant completed it. In this book the Holy Spirit contrasts Christianity with Judaism.

And he's speaking to a Hebrew audience although many have been converted into Christ. He speaks to us concerning the unsaved Jew and the redeemed Jews that have become Christian and we're here in the 21st century.

[7 : 02] Learned about it. We have seen or we will see during the course of our study related contrasts.

For instance this is not all exclusive we will see the new priesthood compared to the old priesthood and in a few weeks we're really going to be into the priesthood.

We will see the new sacrifice over and against the old sacrifice. we will see the new mediator with a capital M with the old mediator small m.

Now I told you early in our study that the book of Hebrews contains various warnings. The first warning this is kind of a review the first warning we looked at concerned neglecting the gospel.

We find that warning in Hebrews chapter 2. Let me read it to you again. Hebrews chapter 2 verses 1 to 4 For this reason we must pay closer attention to what we have heard so that we do not drift away from it.

[8 : 24] For if the word spoken through angels proved unalterable and every violation and act of disobedience received a just punishment how will we escape if we neglect so great a salvation?

After it was at first spoken through the Lord it was confirmed to us by those who heard God also testifying with them both by signs and wonders and by various miracles and by gifts of the Holy Spirit according to His own will.

And the second warning dealt with hardening one's heart to the gospel. And this is a rather lengthy portion of Hebrews in chapter 3.

But again I think it's important therefore as the Holy Spirit says today if you hear His voice do not harden your hearts as in the rebellion on the day of testing in the wilderness where your fathers put me to the test and saw my works for forty years therefore I was provoked with that generation and said they always go astray in their heart they have not known my ways and I swore in my wrath they shall not enter my rest.

Take care brothers lest there be any of you be in any of you an evil unbelieving heart leading you to fall away from the living God.

[9 : 59] Now remember there's some unbelievers reading this or hearing it preached on. But exhort one another every day as long as it is called today that none of you may be hardened by the deceitfulness of sin for we've come to share in Christ if indeed we hold our original confidence firm to the end as it is said today if you hear his voice do not harden your hearts in the rebellion for who are those who heard and yet rebelled was it not all those who left Egypt led by Moses and with whom was he provoked for forty years was it not with those who sinned whose bodies fell in the wilderness and to whom did he swear that they would not enter his rest but to those who were disobedient so we see that they were unable to enter because of unbelief well tonight we come to a third warning

Hebrews 5 11 about this we have much to say and it is hard to explain since you become dull of hearing and again I'm convinced these passages are the unbelievers in that church and the speaker tells them you become dull of hearing so that third warning has to do with spiritual maturity or the lack thereof there is a danger of staying with the elemental truths and promises that are found in the old covenant the old covenant has been superseded by the new covenant this is a warning to the Jews that are attending this Hebrew church but are not yet Christians they've made no commitment to the Lord Jesus Christ they are merely observers to the Christians in this church that have truly come out of

Judaism and embrace Christianity these unbelieving Jews in the church probably know a great deal about the Lord even about the gospel I mean they're sitting there week after week in this church

hearing it so they've picked up a lot just sitting under some solid Bible teaching but it is crucial for them to go all the way with Christ you cannot claim eternal life and the great blessings that accrue to such without believing the tenets of the new covenant these uncommitted Jewish attendees were close to the Lord but at the same time they were very far away there are references in the Bible to new converts becoming babes in Christ they're babes in Christ as a baby they need to be nourished on milk before they're going to be ready to consume meat parents do not start out with a newborn infant by placing in the crib a book on differential equations and hoping as a result a child will one day become a great mathematician that never happened to me even though

I was in college thank goodness you start with a basic picture book and go from there I do not think that the babies of Hebrews is a reference to this type of baby rather these babies are unsaved and have only been exposed to the pictures of the old covenant that talk about Christ but the old covenant talks about Jesus in shadows and in types and not in full revelation not in full revelation the message of the new covenant is this Christ has come he's come Christ went to the cross he's our propitiation he's the atoning sacrifice it's time to leave behind the baby food of the old testament that merely alluded to some of that and consumed the solid food of the new testament put another way leave judaism and come to christ that's what they're being told to do but attending church in this hebrew church church there there was richness and fullness of jesus and they didn't understand it why well the scriptures tell us they were dull they were dull they were dull in hearing the gospel even if they intellectually received jesus that was not enough they merely made mental assent to the basic tenets concerning christ but that wasn't enough because they would still be natural people they haven't left their natural personhood and that is a grave danger the danger in remaining what the scriptures call a natural person and that's a grave danger and the apostle Paul in his letter to the Corinthian church tells us that in 1st Corinthians 2:14 but a natural person does not accept the things of the spirit of God why not for they are foolishness to him and he cannot understand them because they are spiritually discerned they are spiritually discerned only the spirit of God can lead them into the deep truths concerning christ now this word dull comes from the Greek word nothros made up of two words it contains the word no and the word push like you are going to push someone out a door put them together and you have the English words no push we don't use that very often in our conversations what does that mean they were slow they were sluggish they didn't have the energy to go forward and embrace the true faith they were in there on [17:27] Sunday morning listening if they were paying attention at all the unbelievers attending this Hebrew church were spiritually dull the Holy Spirit wrote those not me so take it up with him I know this though it's certain it's difficult to teach dull people not him it's difficult to teach dull people the unbelievers in the congregation had hard hearts and had been lulled to sleep and that's the very thing the scriptures warned against as the writer gives us warnings they could not appreciate the importance of gospel truth there's a fine point as these verses point out that these unsaved churchgoers had grown dull this seems to indicate that at one time they were at least interested in the gospel it says they had grown dull so like a lot of people that come to a church there's a certain exuberance for a few weeks or months or however long and then it just starts wearing on them and the next thing you know they're really not even paying attention they hardened and they grew dull but there's never reason to believe at one time these guys were kind of energized by the new thrill they'd left

Judaism or they wouldn't be there they'd lost interest these are the ones we'll study in chapter six we should get there next time who had once been enlightened that scripture and had tasted the heavenly gift that scripture and there's more and we'll talk about that next time they'd come up to the edge of salvation they looked in and at least at this point backed away well that may not be for me not sure what I'm going to do now I can't go back to the synagogue because they know I'm here but that may not be for me they backed away they had sunk!

into a spiritual stupor that the Bible calls dullness now whatever else we can learn about dullness we can be certain of this dullness is unproductive dull people in the church aren't going to be producers not spiritual producers we actually read some of this in the next verse Hebrews 12 for though by this time you ought to be teachers you need someone to teach you and listen to this word again the basic principles of the oracles of God again they had been flirting but you need someone to teach you again the basic principles you need milk not solid food that passage

I just read to you is from the ESV I think the new American standard is better I'm going to read that too for though by this time you ought to be teachers you have need again for someone to teach you

the elementary principles of the actual words of God and you've come to need milk and not solid food that's an interesting lesson normally I'm in the ESV I'm going to be in the NASB and I'm actually going to be in the New King James briefly before we get through!
the unbelievers in this congregation had the truth they're sitting there hearing truth week after week they can't make a case before God well I never heard that they had the truth but there was a problem the truth didn't have them big difference isn't there guys truth didn't have them they heard the gospel but had gone just so far being unsaved they did not have the Holy Spirit to instruct them the unbelieving members of this congregation failed to recognize the basics of the faith and that the gospel had been fulfilled in

[22 : 50] Jesus Christ let me say this there are thousands of pastors in America and across the world that are like that you think that's an impossibility in a church that has a cross outside but it's very true and I could give many examples but I'll give one that's more personal when I was an FBI agent working in Tulsa for five or more years I got a letter one day saying you're being transferred to New York City go home and tell your wife with two little preschool kids we're going to go to New York City for 15 years I left my vehicle when the day came I left my FBI vehicle at the office in Tulsa and one of my fellow agents drove me to the Tulsa Washington County line now he didn't boot me out my father met us there and then he took me home that agent's name was

Pete he's still in Tulsa retired and I took it as an opportunity on the way and discussed with him as deeply as I could salvation and the gospel of Christ and when I finished and we pulled up and my dad was sitting there Pete looked at me and he said Tommy said I grew up in a minister's home my father was a Presbyterian minister and of course Presbyterians are a lot like Baptists you can get all kinds of persuasions found out later that his dad was in the liberal wing of that denomination Pete said I went to church from birth until I left for college at age 18 listening to my father preach it was required I had to go and never once did

I hear him talk about Christ and salvation in the blood of Christ or the sacrifice of Christ not one time did I hear that that's that's phenomenal I mean that's just amazing to guys like us in 1980 I attended the Kansas City Festival of Evangelism I went up there with Mike Stark most people don't know who he is some of us do he was our associate pastor and good friend the keynote speaker on the last day there was a three day conference but the keynote speaker on the last day of the gathering was Dr.

Billy Graham and in his message Dr. Graham said he had never held a major crusade that did not see a minister of the gospel come forward to be saved he said there was always one truth the truth is there are entire congregations that are dull in their approach to truth they just are the author of Hebrews points out that the unbelievers in this church needed someone to teach them specifically it says they needed someone to teach them again the basic that's the word elementary principles of the oracles of God they really did need to start over they'd been exposed they got dull they need to be brought back and the author makes mention two times that they were not totally familiar with he speaks of basic and elementary principles and he speaks of the oracles of

God elementary principles to that which comes first when we were learning to read the first thing we had to grasp was the alphabet you know we didn't start out with Charles Dickens or thank goodness John Owen I've been trying to read him oh my gosh I'll be glad to loan you some books I think I have 16 of his in this example the alphabet was the basic or elementary parts of the words the writer also refers to the oracles of God to the readers of this book the oracles of God was not the gospel Jews are being addressed both those now saved and those still lost in their sins to them the oracles of God would encompass the laws of God they would understand that because it's in the Old Testament the laws of

[28 : 03] God found primarily in the Pentateuch that's the first five books of the Bible written by Moses it would also include the mind of God which to them was that revealed in the Old Testament Jews had been entrusted with the oracles of God and they saw this as a great advantage over Gentiles and you know it was they had the word of course it put them at a higher responsibility but as the author points out these unbelieving Jews were not ready for the meat even of the Old Testament much less the New they hadn't grasped the meat of the Old Testament they needed to go back to the ABCs they needed to go back to the pictures in the

Old Testament which spoke of ordinances and ceremonies sacrifices holy days various washings those were essentially found in the book of Leviticus why was it important for them to grasp the pictures because these were portraits of Christ he wouldn't come for another 1600 years but they

were pictures of Christ if they did not understand the meaning of the pictures how are they going to understand the words the truth of the words concerning the Messiah who had come in our example the Old Testament is the alphabet and the New Testament is the mature message

Paul was familiar with this and makes mention of it in Galatians chapter 3 verse 23 and 24 now before faith came we were held captive under the law imprisoned until the coming of faith would be revealed so then the law was our guardian until Christ came in order that we might be justified by faith the word guardian there is better translated tutor tutor a tutor was a child trainer the tutor taught the child the basic truths concerning life and that became their education they homeschooled them they really did the law is described in scripture as a tutor the law taught was a trainer teaching the basic truths about

God but when the new covenant came we no longer had a need for a tutor now we have matured or grown up put another way when Christ arrived the shadows were replaced with the substance now we had we had the substance and we no longer had to look at picture books we can now read the substance we do not have practice have to practice the ABCs any longer we can go and read with full comprehension if we have the spirit of God we're going to close our chapter five tonight and thus our lesson but with two important verses of scripture now these are gateway passages into our next study on the important passages that opens

Hebrews chapter six a portion of scripture I am convinced is also written to unbelievers just as this was Hebrews 5 13 says this for everyone this is the gateway for everyone who partakes only of milk is unskilled in the word of righteousness for he is a babe we're not using the word babe here as a newborn infant it is a reference to spiritual infants regardless of age put simply spiritual infants are not accustomed to the deep truths of scripture he cannot digest the deeper truths any more than an infant is going to digest a ribeye not going to happen just as people grow physically we must grow spiritually in order to understand and feed on the deeper truths of

[33 : 37] God's word only then can we move forward into the word of righteousness which is the gospel of Christ and then in Hebrews 5 14 but solid food is for the mature who because of practice have their senses trained to distinguish between good and evil mature believers can tell the difference between what is good and what is evil unbelievers can't here's a basic truth to students of the Bible if we are going to only feed on the elementary revelations of God we will not grow spiritually if we have not grown then we are in danger of being exposed to that which Paul warns us about in

Ephesians chapter 4 listen to this warning from Paul as a result we are no longer to be children tossed here and there by waves and carried about by every wind of doctrine by the trickery of people by craftiness and deceitful scheming that's strong that's strong we can we can be the wind can blow us over that's not true of the mature believer as Dr.

MacArthur has said the spiritually mature adult has discernment about what is right and wrong about what is true and false about what is helpful and harmful and about what is righteous and unrighteous now why is all this talk about babies and mature important it's important guys because only now can we move into Hebrews chapter 6 for many these verses contain what they describe as the most difficult passages in all the Bible whole denominations have gotten lost in the first eight verses not that they're not going to heaven that type of loss but they can't get beyond it it's difficult and babies can't digest it but I'll tell you something it's not difficult if you're mature it's not difficult if you're mature and I'm excited about moving into that

I'm even excited about telling you about some of the vigorous discussions I've had with people that reject it and it has been vigorous let's close with a word of prayer thank you brothers you