

Live the Basics and Grow  
August 30, 2015

I know you believe in Jesus. But are you sure you are saved? How many of us doubt our salvation? I did for some years. We commit sins and think to ourselves, "Surely, this must mean I am not really a Christian. How could God forgive someone as sinful as me?" Maybe you doubt your salvation because you commit the same sins over and over again. Maybe you doubt your salvation because of what little you have learned in the Bible. Maybe you doubt your salvation because of how little you pray yet. Maybe you doubt your salvation because it just seems too good to be true. Maybe you doubt your salvation because you are afraid to tell your friend of your faith. Maybe you doubt your salvation because you were expecting some kind of feeling that hasn't happened. Maybe you doubt your salvation because you aren't doing more religious things that you think Christians are supposed to do. Likely there are other reasons you might think you are not saved from your sins. These are just a few.

I hope to make clear this morning that the real reason you doubt has to do with your understanding of the gospel.

We are going to start this morning by reading part of the story of the two people who had the best start with God in history. But they had a fatal flaw. They could not tell good from evil. And because they could not tell good from evil, they were tricked into disobeying God. This is the story of Adam and Eve. We will be reading from Genesis, chapter 3. You may or may not believe this story is literally true. I believe it is literally true, but you may not. That's okay. The story still illustrates the need to know good from evil.

**Genesis 3:1-7 (NIV) Now the serpent was more crafty than any of the wild animals the Lord God had made. He said to the woman, "Did God really say, 'You must not eat from any tree in the garden'?"**

**The woman said to the serpent, "We may eat fruit from the trees in the garden, but God did say, 'You must not eat fruit from the tree that is in the middle of the garden, and you must not touch it, or you will die.' "**

**"You will not surely die," the serpent said to the woman. "For God knows that when you eat of it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil."**

**When the woman saw that the fruit of the tree was good for food and pleasing to the eye, and also desirable for gaining wisdom, she took some and ate it. She also gave some to her husband, who was with her, and he ate it. Then the eyes of both of them were opened, and they realized they were naked; so they sewed fig leaves together and made coverings for themselves.**

As I said, you may or may not believe this story to be literally true. But it still illustrates our need to know good from evil.

Before Adam and Eve ate the forbidden fruit they did not know good from evil, right from wrong. They were created naïve, unknowing in the ways of the world. Today we might say they were not street smart. They were agreeably compliant to God. They obeyed God because that was all they knew to do. They did not mind doing it. It never occurred

to them to doubt God's goodness. It never occurred to them that they might choose not to obey God.

They were like innocent children in this regard. Children who are naïve can often be tricked into doing wrong. They can be fooled into thinking that something is good when it is really bad. They haven't been trained to distinguish between good and bad. The serpent made God's command sound bad. The serpent led Eve to doubt the goodness of God, the truthfulness of God, and the motives of God.

Now, before they sinned, it was natural for them to trust God, to want to please God. God was the natural focus of their lives.

With the temptation came a change of focus. The focus of their life in the Garden of Eden was God. All that they knew to do was centered on God. But one result of their sin was that the focus of their lives changed. Self became the natural focus of their lives. Instead of living the question, "What does God want," they lived the question, "What do I want?" Their natural focus had changed from God to self.

And we inherited from them that same focus. Our natural focus each moment is us. My natural focus is me, not God. I don't have to learn to focus on me. It comes naturally.

In our culture "natural" is supposed to be a good thing. We are told to eat natural foods. We are told to do what comes naturally. But not everything that comes natural to us is good. We are born with a focus on self and this is the reason we sin. My natural focus is me.

I have to learn to focus my life on God. I have to train myself, with God's help, to focus on God. **I have to develop habits of behavior that keep me focused on God.** Prayer and Bible reading are the two key habits that keep us focused on God. That is why we emphasize these two so much.

My natural focus is me, and that is evil. I must learn to focus my life on God. You and I need to learn how to tell good from evil if we are going to serve God faithfully.

**To focus my life on God, I have to understand the basics of the gospel and then build on those.** Let me give you an example from school.

We don't teach first graders to do algebra. They are not ready to learn algebra in the first grade. Before they will be ready to learn algebra, they have to learn addition, subtraction, multiplication, division, fractions, and decimals. First graders are not ready to learn all that in the first grade.

In fact, first graders may not even fully get addition in the first grade. Before they can understand addition, they need to have number sense. Number sense is the ability to use and understand numbers and their relative values. We can start teaching children the math facts like one plus one is two, one plus two is three, one plus three is four. A child can memorize the addition math facts without understanding what the numbers mean. They can memorize the math facts without understanding the value of those numbers. They need to comprehend numbers sense in order to really understand addition and then subtraction and then multiplication and on and on.

What if a person is a slow learner and hasn't yet got number sense? Do you go on to addition? No. Until the child grasps the basic meaning and value of the number involved, he or she will never really understand addition. The child has to develop number sense before moving on to higher concepts of math.

Now back to good and evil. In order to understand the difference between good and evil, you have to understand the basics of the gospel.

Not everyone learns math at the same pace. Some are slower learners than others. And not everyone learns spiritual things at the same pace. Some are slower than others. In the Bible, the writer of Hebrews is writing to slow learners. Look at part of his letter with me.

**Hebrews 5:11-14 (NIV) We have much to say about this, but it is hard to explain because you are slow to learn. In fact, though by this time you ought to be teachers, you need someone to teach you the elementary truths of God's word all over again. You need milk, not solid food! Anyone who lives on milk, being still an infant, is not acquainted with the teaching about righteousness. But solid food is for the mature, who by constant use have trained themselves to distinguish good from evil.**

We need to see three things from this passage in order to learn **to tell good from evil...**

**1) We must fully comprehend the gospel (the good news of salvation).**

He writes that he has a lot to teach them about living for Jesus, but he cannot because they are slow learners. They haven't yet fully grasped all that they have in Jesus. It isn't that they haven't been taught. They have been taught the basic truths of the gospel over and over again. They heard them and understood them to a degree. They were baptized. They have been living for Jesus. But they are lacking something in their understanding. And that lack of understanding has prevented them from developing into mature believers who are able to distinguish between good and evil.

The context of this letter is that these Christians were being threatened. The religious leaders were tired of Jesus being preached in Jerusalem. So they told these Christians that if they did not give up all this Jesus stuff they would no longer be allowed in the Jewish temple in Jerusalem.

Evidently these Jewish Christians were so immature in their faith that they were actually considering turning away from Jesus so they could enter the temple. They did not fully grasp the meaning of the gospel. They did not comprehend that they did not need the temple any longer. So our writer has sent this letter to show the superiority of Jesus to the temple and the sacrifices that take place there.

You have heard of lactose intolerant people? These were righteousness intolerant people. They were not fully digesting the whole truth of the gospel. They had part of it, but not all of it. Just because you teach something doesn't mean the one you teach has learned it. They were missing a key part of the gospel and were failing to mature in Jesus.

Note that in the author's illustration the baby is still feeding on milk. It is years after their initial contact with the gospel and they are still feeding on milk. There is something

wrong with their development. By this time they should be beyond the milk and living on solid food.

How do you know when a baby is ready for solid food? The baby's physical development has to reach the point of being able to chew and swallow solid food. There is no magic age, but it is generally around 6 months. This and other signs in the child's behavior indicate he or she is ready for solid food.

Similarly, there are things to look for that show a new Christian is fully understanding the gospel. Joy is one part of that. Another part is they usually have a hunger to know God's will for them. They start reading the Bible excitedly, learning all that they can. A third thing to look for is our next point.

## **2) The end of doubts concerning personal salvation is the sign of readiness for solid food.**

**Hebrews 5:13 (NIV) Anyone who lives on milk, being still an infant, is not acquainted with the teaching about righteousness.**

What is the teaching about righteousness? It is that you are fully righteous by Jesus' blood. Your doubts about being saved will disappear when you fully grasp the gospel of Jesus Christ. In Jesus, you have full righteousness with God. You have the righteousness of Jesus. The word righteous means that you have a right relationship with God. In your sin you are unrighteous before God. Like Adam and Eve, the relationship with God is broken. Jesus had a perfect relationship with God because Jesus never sinned. Because of Jesus' death for our sins, when we put our faith fully in Jesus, He takes our sin upon Himself and God credits us with the righteousness of Jesus.

These Hebrew Christians had not fully grasped that yet. Why not? Let me suggest several reasons that might be so. They are also the reasons you might still doubt your salvation.

**You expect what is not promised.** You are expecting some kind of physical or emotional feeling upon salvation. These are nice, and some Christians experience such things. But they are not promised to every Christian. Our faith is not supposed to be in a feeling, but in God's promise of forgiveness in Jesus.

**You refuse to believe He died for every sin.** You might be thinking that there is one sin in your life that was especially bad or had results that can't be fixed. Or maybe you just committed so many sins that you think God would not forgive you for such a life filled with sinful rebellion against God.

But God's promise is not that Jesus died for only some of your sins. God's promise is that Jesus died for all of your sins. He died for all your past sins. He died for all your present sins. He died for all your future sins. He died for your every sin.

**You refuse to trust in Jesus' death alone.** You want to trust in Jesus and your prayers, or Jesus and your church attendance, or Jesus and your ceasing of one particular sin. You want to add to Jesus' death and be saved in some way by your own

effort. This is idolatry. There is nothing you can do, or need to do, to add to what Jesus already did for you.

I believe it was this last problem that plagued these Hebrew Christians. They did not understand that Jesus' death on the cross had replaced the animal sacrifices in the temple. All the things that man used to have to do to be righteous with God had been fully met in Jesus' death. There was nothing left to do except believe it fully. If they fully believed it, there was no reason to go back to the temple.

### **3) Through obedience to the will of God (solid food) we will be trained to know good from evil.**

**Hebrews 5:14 (NIV) ... solid food is for the mature, who by constant use have trained themselves to distinguish good from evil.**

The solid food is the Word of God. How do you use it? You live it. You live the will of God. You obey Jesus' commands. And in doing so, you will learn to distinguish between good and evil. You will recognize temptation when it comes. You will know the right choices to make.

So where are you in your spiritual development? Are you still drinking milk? Are you still doubting your salvation? Are you trying to add something to what Jesus did for you on the cross?

Or are you ready to fully believe God's promise that Jesus died for ALL of your sins? Are you ready now, gladly, to live in obedience to Jesus, not to earn salvation, but to celebrate it?

What would you say to Jesus today?

#### **Invitation:**

Do you know the gospel of Jesus Christ? Do you know the good news?  
The bad news is that you are a sinner, which, of course, you know.  
The good news is that God sent you the Savior you need.  
Jesus is that savior, who died on a cross, though He had not sin. He died in our place.  
God proved that by raising Him from the dead and crowning Him Lord of the universe.  
If you will receive Him as your Savior and turn your life over to Him as your Lord, you too will be saved, today, right now. Pray your prayer of belief and commitment to Him.

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#### **Next Steps:**

**Praying God's Message:** Lord Jesus, I believe You died for ALL of my sins. Today I trust fully in You alone for my complete forgiveness. You are my Savior. Teach me Your will. I will live for You.

**Begin regularly reading God's word** to learn how it is He wants you to live.