Discerning Good and Evil

Hebrews 5:14

Our study this evening begins with Hebrews, the 5th chapter, and the 14th verse. May I say, dear friends, for somebody here tonight, this may well be the most important meeting that you have ever attended in this chapel. I didn’t say for everybody; I don’t know about that. But for somebody here tonight, this can well be the most important meeting. You listen: it might be you.

We tend to take many things for granted that are not to be taken for granted. You will see that more clearly as we study.

“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” Hebrews 5:14.

Strong meat means heavy food. He contrasts it with milk in the 13th verse. Milk is for the infants. Strong meat is for grownups, for adults, for mature minds. There are things in the Bible and in the Spirit of Prophecy that, as Peter said about some of Paul’s writings, they are hard to be understood, and those that are unstable wrest them to their own destruction. (See 2 Peter 3:15-16.) There are some things so simple that anybody that has one ear half open can get the message, but there are other things more difficult.

But Paul says here that strong meat belongs to, it is appropriate to, those who are of what? Full age.

“...Even those who by reason of use have their senses exercised to discern both good and evil” Ibid.

Now some of the other translations put it this way. Instead of that word ‘discern,’ they use ‘distinguish’ or ‘discriminate’, ‘to tell one from the other.’

Can you tell sweet milk from sour milk? How long does it take you? Do you have to drink a gallon and then decide whether it is sweet or sour, or can you tell with the first little taste or maybe even smell it? Is it possible sometimes? Yes.

If there ever was an age when we need to be wise to discern, to distinguish, to discriminate, that time is now. And as we shall see, this pertains to experiences within the church as well as when we meet the world.
Now, on that expression ‘even those who by reason of use have their senses exercised to discern both good and evil,’ some of the other translations say ‘their faculties trained by practice.’ How does my muscle develop? By use, by practice. How does my mind develop? By practice. I can develop the memory by using the memory. I develop reason by taking problems, where reason is necessary. And this matter of learning to distinguish between good and evil, between the safe and the unsafe, the wise and the unwise, that experience comes by experience. And God intends, my dear fellow workers, that every Christian shall have that experience.

“…Even those who by reason of use have their senses exercised to discern both good and evil” Ibid.

Developed by experience. Another translation says, ‘their perceptions trained by long use.’ Now, this is so important that God deliberately, premeditatedly, allowed a serpent to come into the Garden of Eden and broadcast something that was a mixture of good and evil, didn’t He? Why did He? In order that Adam and Eve might have the experience of choosing to come and eat of that tree? Was that what the purpose of it was? No. What was it that God intended them to do? Choose not to. Is that right? Yes.

But day by day, every day that they choose not to go there – instead to go to the tree of life and the other trees – they were doing what? Developing character. Now some people when they get in the remnant church, they suppose that they are already in heaven. Well, they are not even in the Garden of Eden! But in heaven will there be any tree of knowledge of good and evil? Will there be any tempter serpent there? No. But there was in the Garden of Eden.

Some people think when they get to Wildwood that it ought to be, if not heaven, almost heaven. Well, there are some heavenly things here, thank the Lord! The Bible is here, and it’s heavenly. The Holy Spirit is here, and He’s from heaven. But the Bible and the Holy Spirit are other places too, aren’t they? Yes. Right here at Wildwood, God intends that you and I shall have plenty of experience in developing our senses to do what? To discern. You can’t choose until you discern.

Which will you have, sweet milk or sour milk?

“Well, either one. Either one. Or mix them all together and I will take the whole thing.”

It might work with milk, folks, but it doesn’t work with doctrine. It doesn’t work with standards. It doesn’t work with practical Christian living. I repeat: before we can choose what to do, we must discern what is truth.

Now, let me say frankly, this study tonight is a follow up of what I gave to our audience that comes from a distance and off campus last Friday night. It is preliminary to what I’m going to give next Friday night from this pulpit. But I wanted to share some things with you as teachers and students right here on this campus of a very practical
nature. I want you, my dear friends, to have your senses exercised to discern both good and evil. There are times when you can't take all year to find out. No. No. There are times when, as the plate is passed around the table, you have to discern almost instantly, "Is this something God wants me to eat and put on my plate, or is this something He wants me to let pass along?"

And it isn't always some food that is going to come in through the mouth. It may be something that is going to come in through the eye or the ear. You know, you can get a stomach pump (I suppose we have a stomach pump over here at the sanitarium), and if a person eats the wrong thing and it's dangerous, if we can get him over there fast enough, we can pump his stomach out. But how do you pump out the brain? How do you flush out those billions of brain cells once they have become affected, infected?

Oh, my friends, nothing but the sanctifying influence of the Spirit of God can purge our conscience from dead works! And listen, just because we have been to the altar and been converted, just because we have been baptized, just because we have our names on the church books, does not mean that immediately and automatically we begin to know every situation right from wrong. Not a bit of it, friends!

What does our text say?

"...Even those who by reason of use have their senses exercised to discern both good and evil" *Ibid.*

Did you ever eat something that you thought looked good, and after you got it in your mouth, you wished you hadn't? Did you ever choose something and eat it, and it tasted good, and later, you began to have discomfort in the abdomen? Did you? It happens in the mind as well as in the abdomen.

Oh friends, God wants every one of us to do by reason, sanctified reason, what some animals do by instinct. They smell food before they eat it. Haven't you watched them? Let's at least do that much before we read a book, before we look at a movie. Let me ask you in simple English: does a Hollywood movie get sanctified by being shown in a Seventh-day Adventist church? Does it? Does that sprinkle holy water on it so that that which is wicked and worldly in a movie theater down on Main Street becomes holy and blessed if it's shown in a Seventh-day Adventist institution?

Suppose we would show it on this screen right here, some Hollywood movie with all these actors and actresses? "Well," somebody says, "Brother Frazee, that depends on what they're acting." Did you hear my study last Friday night? Do you think Hollywood can represent the Lord of glory? Do you think any actor in this world can represent the Son of God? Do you think any movie set can properly portray the transfiguration, or the crucifixion, or the resurrection, or the ascension?

The better it is, the worse it is, my friends. It's amazing how easy it is for human minds to be gullible and to suppose that that which is done in the name of religion must
somehow be okay. By reason of use, we are to have our senses exercised to discern both good and evil. What does ‘discern mean,’ I ask again? To discriminate, to distinguish, to tell the difference between, to say ‘this is okay; this isn’t okay.’

Now, let me point out, dear friends, that there are situations, plenty of them, when we have to make those decisions for ourselves and for our families, and not for other people. The prophet to the remnant says, speaking to our colporteurs when they are out working with the people that when they are sitting at a table where meat is provided, they are not to make a raid on those that use it, but they are to let it alone themselves. (See Counsels on Diet and Foods, page 462.) So if I go into a situation where the pictures on the screen, or the music on the platform, or the preaching from the pulpit, is not in harmony with what I know the Bible and the Spirit of Prophecy teach, it is not necessarily my duty to rise up and protest. But friends, I don’t have to eat it myself, do I? No.

Now, let me make very clear that what I am giving you tonight is not gathered from some offshoot ‘shootings off.’ No. I hope you will notice the editorial in the Review and Herald of December 25, 1975. That’s just a few weeks ago. Here on page 2, the inside cover page, our dear editor heads his editorial a quote from a letter he received saying “I have been disturbed.” I know that everybody doesn’t have time to read every page of every journal that comes, and that’s why occasionally I call attention to something that is of special importance. This is one.

The editor quotes a letter here that he received from a retired minister, and this minister rather reproves the editor of the Review for talking about the sins of the Seventh-day Adventist church, and says after all this is God’s church, and if we ever get to heaven it will be in this church, and that we should be careful not to discourage people and so forth. The editor’s comments:

“Without doubt, many within the church share fully the sentiments of this letter. They deplore the serious note of repentance found in the messages issued by the 1973 and 1974 annual councils. They feel uncomfortable when a suggestion is made that we might now be in the kingdom if church leaders had been more faithful. They feel satisfied with the church’s evangelistic progress and spiritual condition. We respect these people. We wish we could agree with them, but we cannot” Review and Herald, December 25, 1975.

Further down, he says that he believes the Review “...should fill the same kind of role that the church pastor should – comfort the afflicted and afflict the comfortable. The church paper must not cry, ‘Peace and safety’ in time of danger” Ibid.

Well, then he quotes this from the Spirit of Prophecy:
"So men have argued, till policy has taken the place of faithfulness. Sin is allowed to go unrebuked. When will be heard once more in the church the voice of faithful rebuke...?" *Gospel Workers*, page 150.

You will remember that in Ezekiel, the 9th chapter, the angel of God is commissioned by the Lord to go through the church and set a what? A mark. Where? In the foreheads. Of who? Those that sigh and cry for the abominations that are done in Jerusalem. And Jerusalem is where? The church. Read the chapter in Volume 5 of the *Testimonies*, "The Seal of God," starting on page 207. Read the earnest, tearful appeals of the Spirit of Prophecy applying this chapter to our people at this time. The only ones that receive this seal will be those who sigh and cry over the abominations that are done where? In Jerusalem, in the church.

But tell me, friends, in the name of common sense, how can I weep about something that I don't even discern is an abomination? How can I? If I can sit in a meeting and watch a group of young people come on a platform and engage in music that belongs in Hollywood or someplace like that instead of in the remnant church, and I can either clap for it, literally or mentally, or at least sit there and think, "Well, I don't know. If that's what they like, all right."

Unless there comes in my soul a discernment and a reaction that causes me to cry to God and say, "Oh, God, cleanse the camp!" will I get the seal? And if I have to wait until somebody – some pastor, some teacher, some administrator – somebody comes along and says to me, "Brother Frazee, that's an abomination."

And I say, "Oh, is that an abomination? Well, if it's an abomination and you say so, perhaps I ought to be sighing and crying about it." By reason of use, I'm to have my what? 'Senses exercised to discern both good and evil.'

Listen while I read this trumpet tone from *Testimonies to Ministers*, page 409:

"Many will stand in our pulpits with the torch of false prophecy in their hands, kindled from the hellish torch of Satan"
*Testimonies to Ministers and Gospel Workers*, page 409.

Many will stand where? In our pulpits. With what? The torch of false prophecy in their hands, kindled from the hellish torch of Satan. Would you know the difference? It's one thing, friends, to know that this Pentecostal charismatic movement out in the popular churches is from the enemy, and some of God's people are so blind they even have an open mind toward that, or perhaps a closed mind in favor of it. But this is not talking about that. This is talking about something right in the remnant church.

Let me read it again:
“Many will stand in our pulpits with the torch of false prophecy in their hands, kindled from the hellish torch of Satan” *Ibid.*

“Well,” somebody says, “Brother Frazee, how are we going to know?” That’s what our text says. By reason of use we are to have our ‘senses exercised to discern both good and evil.’ We are to know the Bible and the Spirit of Prophecy, not merely in the minutia of details, but in the great principles.

“…No lie is of the truth” 1 John 2:21.

Truth is not lies. Truth is not falsehood. Truth is not error. Truth is not fiction. Truth is not pretense. Truth is not make-believe and show-off. No, it isn’t. And remember, as I say, the opposite of truth does not become better when it becomes religious. It becomes more deceptive, more dangerous. I would a whole lot rather a child of mine would believe that the world is flat than to believe some of the things that are being preached and taught even among the remnant today in matters of Christian experience.

This permissive idea that all we need to do is talk about love, and that love means not doctrine and not standards and not law, but a permissive, just patting one another on the back. This, my dear friends, is like white bread and white rice: demineralized and devitalized. The germ has been removed. (And they tell me that before they started enriching white flour that some experimental animals would die faster on a white flour diet than they would on just nothing at all. That’s right.)

Now let me give you another example. I am not trying to give you all the illustrations tonight. My purpose is not to stand up here and tell you all the sour milk so that you don’t drink it. Far from it, friends. In the first place, I couldn’t get over the list. There are literally hundreds of things current and popular among us today that are contrary to the Bible and the Spirit of Prophecy. And if you don’t know that, then you need to get down and study the Bible and the Spirit of Prophecy.

But now I want to give you another sample of what I mean. This is Volume 5, page 516. This was written to a man who was a leading minister among us. In fact, for a while he was a member of the General Conference committee. His name was Canright. Did you ever hear of Canright? You think of him now as an apostate, but he wasn’t an apostate when this was written; he was a leading minister among us. He was a writer for the *Review and Herald*.

Now listen to what the prophet of God wrote him from way over in Europe. She had received a copy of the *Review and Herald*, and she read the *Review*, but she read it with her sieve glasses on. In other words, when she read the *Review*, she didn’t just accept everything she read. And you and I shouldn’t either. You’ll see what I mean when I read this:
“Dear Brother E: I have just read the *Review and Herald* and have seen your article giving a list of good books for our youth. I was much surprised to read your recommendation of *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, *Robinson Crusoe*, and such books. You are in danger of becoming somewhat careless in your writing. ...I am really alarmed to see that your spiritual eyesight is not more clear in the matter of selecting and recommending reading for our youth. I know that the recommendation in our papers of such infatuating books as *Uncle Tom's Cabin* will in many minds justify the reading of other books which are nothing but fiction...” *Testimonies for the Church*, Vol. 5, page 516.

What was the matter with *Uncle Tom's Cabin*? Fiction. What was the matter with *Robinson Crusoe*? Fiction. “Oh,” but somebody says, “there are some things true to life in there.” Well, sure. It would be awfully hard for anybody to write something which was a tissue of lies from beginning to end and had not one true syllable in it. It would be very difficult. Neither would the devil want that. He wants just enough error, just enough fiction, just enough pretense, to begin to excite and fever the imagination and then lead on to more and more and more.

Now suppose all I get out of this page that I've read is that I don't read *Uncle Tom's Cabin*. I don't read *Robinson Crusoe*. And if somebody gives me a list of books that they think are very good story books, I look through the list, and if there is no *Robinson Crusoe* and no *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, I say, “Well, perhaps that’s okay.”

Did you notice it says “and such books”? What is the “such” in this setting? Fiction. Novels. Yes. And the prophet in another setting says:

> “Suffer not yourselves to open the lids of a book that is questionable” *Fundamentals of Christian Education*, page 93.

My dear friends, there are people whose experience with alcoholic liquors is such that if they dare take one spoonful of wine or beer or whiskey, they're off – they're going to take another and another and another. We call them what? Alcoholics. There are other people who have never had one single ounce of alcohol in their bloodstream in their whole lives who have a similar experience when it comes to reading. And if they allow themselves to begin to read a page of fiction, storybooks, do you know what they have to do when they come to the bottom of the first page? Turn over. Why? They want to see what? What's going to happen next. But usually there are more than two pages. And then what? Keep reading and turning, and reading and turning.

Any of you here ever have that experience? I haven't taken a census, but I want to tell you something, friends: in the people that come on this campus, for every one that has had a battle with alcohol, ethyl alcohol, to fight, there are at least 10 that have had, and do have, the battle with reading. And I wish I could tell you that every book
you see published by a church publishing house and recommended in our papers is something that will be in harmony with these counsels. But where was the prophet writing? Who was she writing to? A minister, a leading minister. Where had she read what he recommended? In the *Review and Herald*. Her senses were exercised to discern both good and evil.

Are yours? Or will you have to wait until somebody comes to you and says, “Did you notice that advertisement?”, or “Did you notice that musical program?”, or “Did you notice this or the other?”. Then you will say, “Why, you know, I hadn’t even thought about it.”

Oh, friends! Soon we shall be facing issues within the movement far more subtle and far more strife about it than anything we have now. And those who know know that that’s what’s ahead.

“It is not enough to have good intentions; it is not enough to do what a man thinks is right or what the minister tells him is right” *Great Controversy*, page 598.

Then can we depend upon our ministers to do all this milk tasting for us, tell us what is sweet and what is sour?

“...it is not enough to do what a man thinks is right or what the minister tells him is right. His soul’s salvation is at stake, and he should search the Scriptures for himself” *Ibid*.

My dear friends, it isn’t my business to censure everything you read or your music or your entertainment, either on campus or off campus. No. No. That’s not my business. In the first place, I’m not wise enough. But God hasn’t given me that job, and He hasn’t given anybody else that job. He wants you, my dear brother, my dear sister, for yourself and your households, to know what is true and what is false, to know what is truth and what is error, to know what is from heaven and what isn’t. And right here on this campus, some of you, if you stand for right, will have to be different from some other people in the way you train your children, in the books you read, in the type of entertainment or recreation you enter into, and many other subjects.

There’s a song about daring to be different. There’s another one about daring to be a Daniel. It’s a lot easier to sing those songs than it is to live those lives. Oh, I would hate to think that this campus, of all campuses in the world, should become a place where people were regimented! What difference does it make, friends, if we’ve got to have 12 grades to graduate, if we freeze everything at the 7th grade or if we freeze it at the 3rd? Nobody is going to graduate anyway. And the fact that you think you’re a little farther up the ladder, a little farther away from the world, than where you came from, that isn’t going to be any blessing to you. It can be a curse if it causes you to rest in safety and security at that point.
Your senses must be exercised by reason of use to do what? To discern both good and evil.

“Howver strong may be his convictions, however confident he may be that the minister knows what is truth, this is not his foundation...With divine help we are to form our opinions for ourselves as we are to answer for ourselves before God” *Ibid.*

Somebody says, “Brother Frazee, aren’t you afraid to present these things for fear that somebody will get extreme or fanatical?” Yes, I am, dear friends. And God knows there may be people here tonight that are in great danger of that. But listen: it’s dangerous to eat because a lot of people overeat, but the remedy is not to teach people to quit eating. The things that I’m studying with you tonight are dangerous if they’re not balanced, if we go to extremes with them. But God knows, friends, we’re not advocating any extremes.

What we’re talking about tonight is the duty, the responsibility, the solemn responsibility incumbent upon every Christian to be alert and not take things for granted, whether they come from the pulpit or the press or on the screen or whatever. Constantly be awake and alert and not have to wait until somebody else comes and says, “Look, Brother, you shouldn’t be doing that. You shouldn’t be listening to that. You shouldn’t be reading that.”

Your senses must be exercised by reason of use to discern both good and evil. And remember, the alternatives are not either to go along with the popular movement, or else to get up and condemn it. There is a middle road, friends, that God wants many people to travel in, in which they do not partake of the forbidden foods, but neither do they make a raid against those who use them.

It takes a lot of the grace of God to just nicely, politely say, “No, thank you.” “No, thank you. I don’t eat between meals.” “No, thank you. I don’t eat at 10 or 11 o’clock at night.” “No, thank you. I don’t care to look at that TV program.” “No, thank you. I don’t care to read that book.”

“Why not?”

Well, if it seems to be an honest question, and the time is right, you can humbly give some reason that God gives you. One of the best reasons why we don’t do a lot of things is that we have something better to do, dear friends.

“‘Something better’ is the watchword of education, the law of all true living” *Education*, page 296.

“It is Satan’s work to present to our youth newspaper stories and storybooks that fascinate the senses and thus destroy
their relish for the word of God” Testimonies for the Church, Vol. 5, page 517.

I wonder what the prophet would say today when these Bible stories are dramatized, put on the screen or on films or on records — all manner of things exciting. “Well,” somebody says, “that’s the way to learn the Bible.” It sure is: it’s the way to learn it flavored with the excitement of fiction and drama.

Is this a new thought to somebody? It shouldn’t be. Your senses should be exercised by reason of use. No matter what minister comes to this pulpit, whether it’s the man that’s talking tonight or somebody else, and wherever you hear the word of God, remember: take the gospel sieve with you. I want no one to take Brother Frazee’s word for anything. I’m not flattered if somebody says, “Well, this must be right. Brother Frazee said it.” Nothing of the kind, my friends.

I appeal to you to test everything by the law and the testimony. And I appeal to you to do it with me and with every other preacher, here or anywhere else. Don’t forget what I read there about many coming to our pulpits with what? The torch of false prophecy in their hands, kindled from the hellish torch of Satan.

“It has ever been the design of Satan to draw the minds of the people from Jesus to man, and to destroy individual accountability” Early Writings, page 213.

What is Satan trying to destroy? Individual accountability. So he gets the people to turn from Jesus to what? Man. Not necessarily bad men, even good men. How often, as you read the Bible, you find the record of where people followed this leader and that leader and went off into apostasy.

Oh, friends, God is looking for 144,000 who will follow the Lamb whithersoever He goeth. And if we follow Him in the hereafter, from world to world and star to star, we shall first follow Him here through all these experiences.

In the compilation called Guidelines to Mental Health, page 398, occurs this significant sentence:

“There are those who have the misfortune to be always on the wrong side, when the Lord would have them faithful men who can distinguish good from evil” Guidelines to Mental Health, page 398. (See also Mind, Character, and Personality, Vol. 2, pages 688.)

Wouldn’t it be too bad, friends, that every time an issue came up in the church that you and I were on the wrong side? I could tell you about a man prominent in our work in Battle Creek in the 1860s and the 1870s and the 1880s and the 1890s, and he was on the wrong side in every one of those decades in crisis after crisis, yet he was a
man that God used mightily in this work. But somehow or another, he was influenced by his wife and influenced by his children and by his own Aaron-like disposition, and he was on the wrong side in one crisis after the other. The first 100 pages of Volume 5 of the Testimonies are concerned with one of those crises in which this man, who was a General Conference officer and a prominent writer among us, took the wrong position again and again.

“There are those who have the misfortune to be always on the wrong side, when the Lord would have them faithful men who can distinguish good from evil” Ibid.

So I make this appeal to every teacher, every student, every father and mother, and all children who are old enough to understand what I’m saying. Oh friends, I thank God that He is able to communicate even to children and help them if they mean business, if they play fair with God, to take positions that there are some things that their young companions do that they just won’t do, whether it’s in diet or dress or reading or music or recreational amusements, whatever.

Boys and girls, search the Bible and the Testimonies for yourself. And when you find something that God says, do it. When I was just a boy, I was at a camp meeting and the preacher in the big tent was making an appeal. He didn’t know me; I didn’t know him. I was way at the back of the tent. He was making a call. While he was talking to that audience, and I couldn’t tell you a text he used or a word he said, but I know what the Spirit of God was talking to me about. Do you know what it was? It was a book I had at home. I’m sorry to say that there are a lot of good members of the church that would say, “Why sure, that’s a wonderful book. That’s all right.” But it had the alcohol of fiction in it, friends, and I was a fiction alcoholic when I read that book.

And while that man was talking, and he wasn’t saying a word about reading or fiction, but as he was making an appeal, the Spirit of God was talking to my heart about that book back at home. Thank God, He helped me that Sabbath morning to give up that book. The minister never knew it. Nobody but God and I knew it.

Oh, friends, I covet the visits of the Spirit of God! I want the Holy Spirit to have access to my heart. And when some music is imported from the world or the Pentecostal movement onto the platforms of the remnant church, I want to have discernment to recognize this is not for this man. When the popular methods of the world’s soul-winning are brought in, I want to have discernment enough to say, “This is not for this man.”

When fiction books are advertised and lauded to the skies, when drama is used as a vehicle to portray the doctrines of the message or the life of Christ, I long for grace and discernment to be able to say, “This is not for this man.” If others choose that diet, that must be their responsibility, but I pray that God may help every man and woman, every boy and girl here tonight, to sense that instead of finding out what everybody else is doing and moving along, if we are with the right crowd it must be the right thing, we
sense the vital importance, each individual for himself, of studying and praying and by reason of use, have our senses exercised to discern both good and evil. What do you say?

Heavenly Father, I pray that no soul may misunderstand the message tonight. But oh, I pray that all of us will understand it. I pray that no soul may make an extreme fanatical application of these things, that no soul will become a troubler, a fault-finder, a self-appointed critic, but oh God, I do pray that we shall be wise virgins and not foolish virgins. I pray that we shall be awake and alive and alert, and that we shall have oil in our vessels and in our lamps.

And in this time when Thou art moving upon our leaders in the General Conference to call for repentance, help us to know there is something to repent about. Help us to seek God for revival and reformation. Help us, Lord, not to just come out of Babylon, but to get Babylon out of us. Help us to love the truth, to buy it and sell it not. Oh, I pray Lord, move upon this audience! God bless the parents and the boys and girls. Save us in this age when every demon in hell is intent on gathering the lambs of the flock.

Teach us how, as parents, to make the upward way bright and attractive, but to be sure that it is the upward way, Lord. God forbid that we should beautify the way to hell. God forbid that we should make exciting and entertaining the downward road. Oh, teach us how that every step we take shall be farther from Hollywood and Babylon and Sodom and closer to the pearly gates and the glorious sanctuary on high. Do it for the sake of the Savior who gave His life that we might be redeemed. In His name we pray, Amen.