

# Getting God's Certificate, Not Man's

by Zac Poonen

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*To get God's certificate, not man's, we must seek to be free from sin and do everything righteously, following God's standard.*

**Duration:** 55:54

**Scripture:** Isaiah 5:20

**Topics:** "Spiritual Growth", "Discerning Good"

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## Description

This sermon emphasizes the importance of discerning between good and evil, highlighting how human understanding can be corrupt and lead to calling evil good and good evil. It stresses the need to grow spiritually to discern what is truly good and avoid what is evil, drawing parallels to a child's development in understanding. The speaker uses biblical examples to illustrate how Jesus demonstrated what is truly good and how believers should strive to align with God's standards of goodness.

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## Transcript

We were looking this afternoon at Amos chapter 5 and verse 14. See good and not evil, that you may live and thus may the Lord God of hosts be with you just as you have said. Then it says hate evil and love good.

So, before I can hate evil and love good, I must discern what is good and what is evil. Because our human understanding is so corrupt. See one verse in Isaiah 5 verse 20.

Isaiah was speaking to certain people in Israel. And he was saying there, Isaiah 5 verse 20, that you people call evil good and good evil. He says, woe unto you if you call evil good and good evil.

So, why do some people call evil good? Why do they call good evil? There are lots of people like that even among Christians today. Even among believers. I don't think they are doing it deliberately.

Because they don't have discernment what is good and what is evil. Now, if I were to ask you a question, is putting mud into your mouth good or evil? Have you seen your one year old child putting it inside the mouth? Because he thinks it's good. He will even play with a snake, thinking a snake is good.

You will not play with a cobra. But a one year old child will play with a Taj Mahal. Why is that? Because he cannot discern what is good and what is evil.

As he grows up, he understands, oh, putting mud in the mouth is not good. Little children will even go and play in the toilet commode with the water. They think that's good, playing with the water.

Because they are babies, they don't understand. So, spiritually also, when you don't grow up spiritually, you will not be able to discern what is good and what is evil. You tell a one year old child, putting your hand inside that toilet commode is bad.

Playing with a knife is bad, dangerous. But tomorrow it will do it again. So, any amount of instruction cannot change that child's attitude.

It has to grow up. So, if you just come to the meeting and listen to a lot of messages, this is good, this is bad, that is not going to change you. You can get a lot of information, but it won't help you.

You have to grow up spiritually. See, even a 5-6 year old child knows that playing with a knife is dangerous. Not because somebody taught it, it sees, it has grown up to realize some things are dangerous.

So, the way to discern good from evil is to grow up. So, these people in Israel in Isaiah's time, they had not grown up. And I find the same thing with many believers.

Why do so many believers watch dirty cinemas? They are like little babies playing with snakes. That thing is spoiling their mind, but they don't realize it. Why do believers watch TV serials that pollute their mind? They are just like that baby who can drink a bottle of poison thinking it is some juice.

The only way is by growing up, then we know that's bad, that's good. There are so many young people who have a computer who watch all types of filthy pictures on the internet. Not only young people, even some married people.

Why do they do it? They think it is good. It's like drinking poison for the mind and thinking it's good. A little child does not know the difference between juice and poison.

And when you can feast your eyes on filthy pictures, you also don't know the difference between juice and poison. Or, if you don't forgive somebody because they did some harm to you, you don't forgive them. You think that's good.

No, that is another poison. Because when you don't forgive somebody, you are destroying your own soul. You know, once one very upright young man came to Jesus.

We read in Mark 10, 17. He wanted to know how to get eternal life. So, he came to Jesus and said, how can I get eternal life? Mark 10, 17.

And Jesus said, why do you call me good? No one is good except God. Only God is good. Jesus was not saying, I am not good.

He could have been asking him, do you really believe I am God? And when you call me good, if only God is good, then everything outside of God is not good. There is a lot of things that we think are good or not good. And in the Old Testament, they had a law.

But the law was like a kindergarten lesson. This is good, this is bad. But that was like kindergarten studying 2 plus 2, 2 is 4, that level of arithmetic.

But there is a lot more in arithmetic than just addition. So, the law was like giving an education, kindergarten education to those who have no education. But then Jesus came.

And when Jesus came, He showed by His life, what is really good and what is evil. For example, you know the Pharisees had a question about, is it right to heal somebody on the Sabbath day? You know, there was a man with a withered hand, paralyzed hand in the synagogue. And it was a Sabbath day and Jesus wanted to heal him.

And the Pharisees' attitude was, no. So, now it is a question of what is good and what is evil. So, Jesus asked them a question.

Mark chapter 3 verse 4. Is it lawful on the Sabbath day to do good? Their understanding of good was, you must not do any work on the Sabbath day. You can't even heal a man who has got a paralyzed hand. And Jesus another time asked them, supposing your sheep falls into the ditch on a Sabbath day, will you pull it out or wait till next day? So, they had all types of wrong ideas about what is good and what is bad.

And Jesus came to take them out of the kindergarten to teach them what is really good. So, Jesus was so angry, it says in Mark 3 verse 5. Because their hearts were so hard. And he healed that man.

So, how shall we understand what is good? Let me show you another verse. In Romans 7, The Apostle Paul says, Romans 7 and verse 18. I know that in my flesh there is nothing good.

Now, we may think there are so many good things in our flesh. We help other people. We are very clever.

We read the Bible. But Jesus said, the Bible says there is nothing good in our flesh. So, here are two statements.

One, there is nothing good in man's flesh. And only God is good. Jesus said that.

Jesus said, only God is good. Now, you know, we look at our flesh. We have our own dividing of what is good and what is bad in our life.

Each of us have a different standard. Some people may say, drinking a little bit alcohol is not bad. Some others may say, even a cigarette is not bad.

Or some say, cinema is not bad. And some people say, no, that is bad. So, we all have different standards of what is good and what is bad.

And according to our own standard, we try to separate good and bad. This started from the Garden of Eden. You know, in the Garden of Eden, there was a tree.

That says, that will teach you what is good and what is evil. And the devil said, You know, we are talking about good and evil. See what God said.

God said to them, there is a tree of knowledge of good and evil. Genesis 2 verse 9. You read about two trees. Tree of life and tree of knowledge of good and evil.

And God told them, verse 16. From any tree, you can eat freely. Tree of life, you can go and have it.

But, verse 17. Tree of knowledge of good and evil, you must not eat. Because you will die.

Have you ever thought of the reason for that? Doing evil, you will die. That we can understand. But how can knowledge of good and evil bring death? Isn't it good to know good and evil? Don't we teach our children good and evil? But the Lord said, if you eat from that tree of knowledge of good and evil, you will die.

What is the meaning of that? But if you eat the tree of life, you will have life. You have to relate that to what Jesus said. Only God is good.

The tree of life is a picture of life in the Holy Spirit. The tree of knowledge of good and evil is where I get this information in my own mind and I decide myself what is good and evil. Just like Adam had that choice, all of us are facing that choice today.

Like all the people in the world, we can use our mind and decide this is good, this is evil. There are a lot of people who feel telling a few lies is not bad. Getting angry, that's not bad.

But when you come to the life of God, the tree of life and the fullness of the Holy Spirit then you say, telling lies is bad. Getting angry is bad. Seeing all these filthy movies is bad.

So, if I use my own mind, I will die. Because I can be deceived as to what is good and what is bad. So, the Bible warns us about this in many ways.

Let me show you a verse in Proverbs 3. In Proverbs 3 also you see about this tree of knowledge and tree of life. Proverbs 3 verse 5 Trust in the Lord with all your heart. That is the tree of life.

Don't lean on your own understanding. That's the tree of knowledge of good and evil. So, in verse 5 you have these two trees.

If you lean on your own understanding you will die. You trust in the Lord to guide you you will live. So, here is the tree of life.

In all your ways acknowledge Him. Accept His authority and He will direct your path. He will show you what is good and what is evil.

So, there are two ways in which I can find out what is good and what is evil. One is to use my own human understanding and the other is like I said in the last session to listen like Mary to God. You know that story we read about Martha as soon as Jesus came went into the kitchen and started cooking food.

She was not watching cinemas in the kitchen No! She was cooking food for Jesus and His twelve disciples. Now you tell me If Jesus comes to your house with twelve disciples and one of your sisters rushes to the kitchen to make food for them Is that a good thing or a bad thing? Tell me. Your human understanding is a very good thing.

Then why did Jesus rebuke Martha saying you are worried about so many things? Because when Jesus is speaking that is not the time to go and cook food. And that's why Jesus said what Mary has chosen is better than what you are doing. So, even though that looked like good to cook food for Jesus it was not good.

Because there was something better than that and she was missing that. And Jesus rebuked her. Imagine rebuking her for working so hard in the kitchen making food for her.

I once went for some meeting and one family invited me for dinner after the meeting. After the meeting I went there So I asked the sister did you come for the meeting? She said no. Why? I was cooking food for you.

I said I will never come to this house again if you are not going to come for a meeting. I don't want your food. I mean that day I ate because she took the trouble.

I said I want to give you some wisdom next time come to the meeting and it's alright you come home and eat some bananas or something that's enough for me. Food is not important. God's word is more important.

So what she did was a good thing but compared to listening to God's word it was not a good thing. So you also must realize that there are some things which you think are good but because of that you are missing something better than that. There is a proverb in English it's not in the Bible it's true that the good thing can be the enemy of the best thing.

See, what Martha did was a good thing and what Mary did was the best thing. See, what Martha did was a good thing and what Mary did was the best thing. Sometimes you can do a good thing and miss the best thing.

So that's why we need to discern between what is good according to God's standard. So that is the difference between these two trees. One is a human understanding yeah I think this is good God is telling you something else then that is no longer good.

Let me give you an example. Jesus was walking down the sea of Galilee and told Peter and John give up your nets and fish and come to me. Jesus was walking down the sea of Galilee and told Peter and John give up your nets and come to me.

Now the question is this is fishing in order to earn your living a good thing? Yes or no? You are not stealing you are fishing in order to earn your living and take care of your family. It is a good thing. But when Jesus calls you to follow him and you still stay there then that becomes a bad thing.

I used to work in the Navy before I was converted. When I was 24 years old 1964 the Lord called me to leave my job. I was a Christian working in the Navy I never did anything wrong I was earning my living It was a good thing but once I heard the call of God then if I stay in the Navy it is a bad thing.

If God had not called me I could have stayed till the age of 60 and retired and done a good thing all along. Very often we think something is good but it is not good because God is calling us to do something better The other way round is also right If God has not called you to full time work that is also wrong. Some mothers will take their one son and say I dedicate this son for your work now you can have him for your work I have four sons I never dedicated any of them for God's work I dedicated them to do God's will whatever it is I said I am not God how can I call my sons to do God's work If God calls them it is ok I am a man I can't call them for God's work So the important thing is not doing full time work but doing the will of God Many of you have the idea that a full time worker is God's servant That is nowhere in the New Testament I will show you in the New Testament who is God's servant Romans chapter 6 Romans chapter 6 and verse 22 Here it says when you are freed from sin you become a servant of God So when do you become a servant of God When you are freed from sin not when you are freed from your earthly job Now you tell me this answer this question Is it easier to give up your job or to give up sin Is it easier to give up

your job or to give up sin Oh it is very easy to give up our job I am going to serve God That is not how you become a servant of God The Bible says you must be free from sin In fact when I was trying to understand this matter of serving God it became clear to me A servant of God is not a full time worker but anyone who does the will of God to serve God is a servant of God If you do not join the army you cannot serve in the army If you do not join the army If you put on a military uniform and go to Kashmir and say I am also going to fight in Kashmir they will throw you out saying we did not recruit you They will throw you out saying we did not recruit you Similarly, even if the Lord does not call you you cannot serve God I have seen hundreds of people in India who are serving God but they do not feel as if they are serving God They do not feel as if If God calls you, he'll back up your ministry.

So this is how we can have an idea of what is good and what is not good. So if you look at the life of Jesus, you'll really see what is good. For example, you know when he was 30 years old, at his baptism, the voice from heaven said, this is my son with whom I am well pleased.

That means God was saying everything he has done so far is perfect. See, that is God Almighty giving a certificate about Jesus, watching his life for 30 years. And what was Jesus doing those 30 years? He was not a full time worker.

He did not heal the sick. He never cast out a demon. He never preached one sermon.

He never traveled anywhere outside Nazareth. How can God be pleased with somebody who is not a full time worker? You know what Jesus was doing? The Bible says in Mark 6 that he had four younger brothers and two sisters, and a mother Mary at home. I think Joseph had died.

So there were seven people at home, including Jesus, eight. So Jesus was the eldest son of Mary. And he had the responsibility, because Joseph had died, to feed the whole family.

So he took Joseph's job and he did the carpentry work up to the age of 30. So maybe for half of those 30 years he was just going to school and all of that. But the rest of the 15 years he was a carpenter.

So is this the best thing to do, to make stools and benches and be a carpenter? If that is God's will, that is the best thing to do. God was very happy with him, not because he was a full time worker, but because he did the will of God. That means in his business he never cheated anybody.

He never told anybody any lies, this is some special type of wood, when it was not special type of wood. He never covered up the cracks in the wood with putty and tried to fool people. He was absolutely honest.

He did not become the richest carpenter in Nazareth. But he was the most honest carpenter in Nazareth. You ask anybody who does business, it is very easy to tell lies, very easy to cheat people.

Very easy to say some product is good when it is not good. Jesus never did it. Let me see what it means to be good.

You don't have to be a full time worker. Seek to be free from sin. And do everything righteously.

So that God who is watching you all the time can say, I am pleased. That is the certificate we must get. Now turn to Genesis chapter 1. In the beginning, verse 1, God created heaven and earth and it was perfect.

Because the Bible says, everything that comes from heaven is perfect. God never does anything imperfect. He created this universe with one word.

And it was perfect from the first day. But, and then he made all the angels. Then one of the head of the angels rebelled against God.

And gathered one third of the angels with him. And God cast them out and they became Satan and the demons from that. And just like when Adam sinned, the earth got cursed.

When the angels fell, the earth became corrupt. That's what you read in verse 2. The earth became formless, empty and dark. That's not the way God created it.

God never creates anything formless, empty and dark. The perfect earth became like that because of sin, the sin of the angels. The perfect earth became like that because of sin, the sin of the angels.

Then we see in verse 2, the spirit of God is moving there. In verse 3, the word of God is like light. And God began to work on this spoiled earth.

That perfect earth is a picture of the way God created Adam also perfectly. And just like the devil spoiled that earth, he spoiled Adam. And immediately the Holy Spirit and the word of God began to work on it.

And God did not change the earth in one day. Day by day by day by day over a period of six days. With the Holy Spirit and the word of God, God could have changed it all in one second.

Why did he do it day by day by day by day? It's a lesson for us. That when we are spoiled, and the Holy Spirit and the word of God begin to work on us, God can change us in a second, but he does not. He changes us day by day by day by day.

And then finally, at the end of the chapter, it says God saw everything he had made, verse 31, and it was very good. So one day when Jesus comes back, God's work with you and me will be completed and it will be very good. How did he change that earth? Verse 2 and 3, the spirit of God and the word of God.

Not only the word of God, not only the spirit of God. There are two ways, two means by which God changed the earth. And two means by which God changes us.

That's why we must receive the word of God and be open to the Holy Spirit. One alone is not enough. We need both.

It's just like a train. If it has to go from one station to another, it needs the rails and the engine needs power. That's why the engine needs either electric power or diesel power.

Which is more important? The rails or the power? To go from one place to another. If you have power but no rails, you can't go. If you have rails and no power, you still can't go.

You need both. Supposing the engine says, I'm not bothered about the rails, I'm going to go off by myself. You can get stuck in the ground.

So it's not enough to have the Holy Spirit. You must follow those exact rails of the word of God. Otherwise like the engine, you'll just blow the whistle and make a lot of noise.

That's how it is in some churches, they just make a lot of noise. You're not following the word of God. We need both.

We need the word of God and the power of the Holy Spirit. That is what we see right at the beginning of the Bible. And then I want you to see this.

At the end of the first day, God said, He saw the light, verse 4, that it was good. And then again, it says in verse 10, He separated the earth and the seas and He saw it was good. And verse 12, The earth brought forth trees and fruit and God saw it was good.

And then He put the sun and the moon, verse 18, He saw that that was good. And then verse 21, He made all the fish and the others in the waters and He saw it was good. And then He made the animals, verse 25, and He saw that was good.

So every day, God examined the work He did and He said it's good. He didn't check it up once a year, He checked up every day. Our children have examinations maybe once in three months or once in six months.

God was examining every day. And every day He said, 100%. Good.

What do we learn from that? That God is examining our life also every day. To see whether we are discerning between good and evil. And if we have chosen the good, God gives a certificate.

Good. That's in the first chapter of the Bible. Every day.

Not once a year. Do you seek to live like that? Do you seek to live like that? Every day, you want God to look at your life and say, it's good. You know, that's how the Apostle Paul lived.

Paul was about maybe 57 or 58 years old when he wrote 2 Corinthians. And he had already been a believer for more than 25 years. He was born again when he was around 30.

This is written about 27 years after that. 2 Corinthians chapter 4. See what he says here. Verse 16.

We don't get discouraged. Why? Because even though my outer man is decaying, my inner man is being renewed every day. You know, Paul was 57, was not as strong as he was when he was 30.

We can't help that. As we get older, I am 73 now, my body becomes weaker. But the inner man, Paul's inner man was getting renewed every day.

Not every year. Every day. Just like Genesis 1. You ask Paul, Paul, how often are you becoming a better Christian? Every day.

Every day. That means he was saying, today, I am a better Christian than I was yesterday. And tomorrow, I will be a better Christian than I am today.

Wow, that is a really high standard. I mean, most of us, at least if we become a better Christian after one year, that itself is good. But many Christians are not even becoming better after one year.

Can God look at your life and say, good? It's not what men say. So many believers are waiting for men to say, good. But God, men can only see the outside of your life.

Jesus once told the Pharisees, Your cup is clean on the outside, but the inside is all filthy. Now, supposing somebody is giving you a cup of tea, Are you more keen that the outside should be clean or the inside should be clean? Outside, even if it's dirty, it doesn't matter, if the inside is clean. If I get a glass of water, I don't care if the outside of the glass is dirty, if the inside is clean, it's enough.

That's what Jesus told the Pharisees. You are only worried about the outside. So, when people give you a certificate, good.

Maybe your elder brother says, your life is good. What is he looking at? The outside of your life or the inside of your life? Outside. But when God says it is good, What is he looking at? Inside.

See, you can look at my preaching and say, oh, good. But, I'm not interested in that. I want God to look at my heart and say, good.

So, if you have not been worried about that from today onwards, you must be concerned about that. That will help you to grow spiritually more than anything else. Otherwise, like Isaiah said, we will call good evil and evil good.

And what did he read in Amos? If you seek good and avoid evil, then God will be with you. But which good? Not man certifying that I'm good. I want to tell you something.

Don't care for the opinion of men. They can't see your inside. Even your husband who has lived with you for 40 years cannot see your inside.

Your wife who has lived with you for 40 years can't see what's going on in your mind. You can look so nice on the outside and your mind may be filthy. And everybody in the church can think you're a wonderful person.

But God may say, you're not good, you're filthy. Just like he told the Pharisees. See, the people in the synagogue saw the Pharisees on the outside and said, oh, what Bible knowledge, they're all very good.

But Jesus looked at the inside and said, not good, evil. So, seek the approval of God. Let me ask you a question.

If 10,000 people say you're a prophet, will you become a prophet? If 10,000 people say you're a devil, will you become a devil? Then why are you worried about what people say? Whatever people say, you throw it in the garbage bin. Oh, you call me a prophet? Garbage. You call me the devil? Garbage.

Lord, what do you say about me? That's the only thing that matters. And God looks at me every day. And looks at you, just like Genesis 1. And he wants to say, good.

So, let's seek that from today onwards. Say, Lord, I really want to be good in your eyes, not in the eyes of man. Like we read in Amos, I want to seek after the good.

The good according to God's standard, not man's standard. Let's pray. Heavenly Father.

Help us to always seek your approval. So that we can really be changed day by day. Pray in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ.

Amen.

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