

Doctrinal Mastery: Isaiah 5:20

“Woe unto Them That Call Evil Good, and Good Evil”

Through the prophet Isaiah, the Lord condemned those who call evil good and good evil. We can discern between good and evil by relying upon the teachings of the Savior, the Holy Ghost, living prophets, and other divinely appointed sources.

Possible Learning Activities

Know the doctrine

Elder David A. Bednar of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles shared an experience he and his wife, Susan, had while observing two cheetahs in Africa.

You may want to watch the video “[Watchful unto Prayer Continually](#)” from time code 2:04 to 6:07, or read the following statement.

Susan and I spent almost two hours watching two cheetahs stalking a large group of topis, Africa’s most common and widespread antelopes. ...

While one cheetah sat upright in the grass and did not move, the other cheetah crouched low to the ground and slowly crept closer to the unsuspecting topis. Then the cheetah that had been sitting upright disappeared in the grass at exactly the same moment that the other cheetah sat upright. ...

Patiently and steadily, the two cheetahs worked as a team to secure their next meal. ...

Then suddenly, as the cheetahs appeared to be within striking distance, the entire group of topis turned and ran away. ...

And what did the cheetahs do next? Without any delay, the two cheetahs resumed their alternating pattern of one cheetah crouching low and creeping forward while the other cheetah sat upright in the grass. The pattern of pursuit continued. They did not stop. They did not rest or take a break. ...

To me, cheetahs are sleek, alluring, and captivating creatures. A cheetah’s yellowish-tan to greyish-white coat with black spots acts as a beautiful disguise that makes these animals almost invisible as they stalk their prey in the African grasslands.

In a similar way, spiritually dangerous ideas and actions frequently can appear to be attractive, desirable, or pleasurable. Thus, in our contemporary world, each of us needs to be aware of beguiling bad that pretends to be good. (David A. Bednar, “Watchful unto Prayer Continually,” *Ensign* or *Liahona*, Nov. 2019, 32–33)

- How would you summarize Elder Bednar’s teachings in one or two sentences?
- What are some current examples of “spiritually dangerous ideas and actions” that “can appear to be attractive, desirable, or pleasurable”?

Consider listing students’ responses on the board. They may need help identifying examples, such as alcohol and drug abuse, same-sex marriage, abortion, and cultural traditions that are contrary to the teachings of Jesus Christ. Consider inviting students to discuss the following question in pairs or small groups before reporting to the class.

- How does the world make these ideas and actions seem attractive, desirable, or pleasurable?

Read Isaiah 5:20, looking for similarities between what Isaiah and Elder Bednar taught.

From your examples above and Isaiah 5:20, we know that we live in a time when many “call evil good, and good evil.”

Because Heavenly Father loves us and wants us to be able to discern between good and evil, He has prepared and provided many reliable sources of truth for us.

Read paragraphs 11 and 12 of the “Acquiring Spiritual Knowledge” section in the *Doctrinal Mastery Core Document*, looking for some of those sources of truth. Consider marking the truth just mentioned as it appears in paragraph 12.

- What did you learn from these paragraphs that can help you discern good from evil in your search for truth?

Practice application

Seeking further understanding through divinely appointed sources is one of the principles of acquiring spiritual knowledge. Briefly review the other two principles for acquiring spiritual knowledge: “Act in faith” and “Examine concepts and questions with an eternal perspective.” If you need help remembering what these principles mean, review paragraphs 4–10 in the “Acquiring Spiritual Knowledge” section of the *Doctrinal Mastery Core Document*.

The following scenario involves the topic of abortion, but it could be modified or adapted to address another topic, as needed. For an example, see the alternate practice application activity in the “Supplemental Learning Activities” section of this lesson.

Share the following scenario or invite a student to read it aloud to the class.

Imagine the following scenario:

In one of Raquel’s classes at school, the topic of abortion was discussed. Raquel had always felt that abortion was wrong, so she was surprised to hear how many of her classmates seemed to be in favor of it. Raquel decided to do more research on the topic after school. She felt sad when she learned that tens of millions of people around the world choose to end their pregnancies with an abortion each year. As she continued her research, she read many perspectives that made it seem that abortion was something to be celebrated, while those who opposed it were labeled as closed-minded or out of touch. After her research, Raquel wondered, “Am I wrong to be opposed to abortion?”

- What initial thoughts do you have about Raquel’s question?

Seek further understanding through divinely appointed sources

Raquel feels unsettled about some of what she learned about abortion. She feels the Spirit directing her to study what Church leaders have said about this topic rather than relying on worldly viewpoints.

- How can Raquel find teachings about abortion in her scriptures or the Gospel Library app?

Consider giving students an opportunity to search their scriptures or the Gospel Library app to find a scripture or statement related to abortion. It may be helpful to invite a few students to share what they found.

After students have finished, share the following statement. It might be useful to display this statement or help students find it in the Gospel Library app.

As part of Raquel’s search for divinely appointed sources, she finds the following statement from the *General Handbook* of the Church:

The Lord commanded, “Thou shalt not . . . kill, nor do anything like unto it” (Doctrine and Covenants 59:6). The Church opposes elective abortion for personal or social convenience. Members must not submit to, perform, arrange for, pay for, consent to, or encourage an abortion. The only possible exceptions are when:

- Pregnancy resulted from forcible rape or incest.
- A competent physician determines that the life or health of the mother is in serious jeopardy.
- A competent physician determines that the fetus has severe defects that will not allow the baby to survive beyond birth.

Even these exceptions do not automatically justify abortion. Abortion is a most serious matter and should be considered only after the persons responsible have consulted with their bishops and received divine confirmation through prayer. (“Abortion,” *General Handbook: Serving in The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints*, 38.6.1, ChurchofJesusChrist.org)

- What did you learn from this statement that could help answer Raquel’s question?

Examine concepts and questions with an eternal perspective

Consider inviting students to discuss the following questions with a partner or a small group.

Help Raquel think about her question with an eternal perspective by answering the following questions.

- Why would it be helpful to keep an eternal perspective as you consider whether abortion is right or wrong?
- What do you know about Heavenly Father's plan of salvation that could influence your thoughts and opinions about abortion?

Act in faith

Raquel is grateful for the time she took to study some divinely appointed sources and think about her question with an eternal perspective. She now feels confident in her opinion about abortion, even though others may not agree with it. She recognizes that there may be opportunities in the near future for her to explain and defend her beliefs about abortion.

As part of the discussion for the following questions, consider sharing some or all of the statements found in the "Commentary and Background Information" section at the end of the lesson.

- What are some ways Raquel could act in faith when others question her beliefs about abortion or other topics?
- How can you know when acting in faith means speaking up for your beliefs or when acting in faith means remaining silent?

Consider asking the students if they have remaining questions. Testify of the Lord's love for them and all of His children. Consider also testifying of the blessings that come from seeking truth and guidance from divinely appointed sources.

Memorize the key scripture phrase

Write the following scripture reference and key scripture phrase on the board:
Isaiah 5:20: "Woe unto them that call evil good, and good evil."

After repeating the key scripture phrase and scripture reference several times as a class, erase several words from the board to allow students to try to recite them from memory. Continue erasing words until students can recite the scripture reference and key scripture phrase without aid.

Review the passage

Use the following activity to review the reference and key scripture phrase in another lesson in the near future.

Display the reference and key scripture phrase for Isaiah 5:20 with some words missing. Consider writing several versions, with different words missing for students to fill in. After students practice this a few times, invite them to try to write or recite the entire scripture reference and key scripture phrase from memory.

Commentary and Background Information

Defending our beliefs

Elder Jeffrey R. Holland of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles taught about how we can react when our beliefs are challenged.

With admiration and encouragement for everyone who will need to remain steadfast in these latter days, I say to all and especially the youth of the Church that if you haven't already, you will one day find yourself called upon to defend your faith or perhaps even endure some personal abuse simply because you are a member of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. Such moments will require both courage and courtesy on your part. ...

Be strong. Live the gospel faithfully even if others around you don't live it at all. Defend your beliefs with courtesy and with compassion, but defend them. (Jeffrey R. Holland, "The Cost—and Blessings—of Discipleship," *Ensign* or *Liahona*, May 2014, 6, 9)

The Lord's teachings about abortion

President Russell M. Nelson shared teachings that can help us better understand the Lord's opposition to elective abortion.

As sons and daughters of God, we cherish life as a gift from Him. His eternal plan provides opportunities for His children to obtain physical bodies, to gain earthly experiences, and to realize their divine destinies as heirs of eternal life. ...

... Abortion is a war on the defenseless and the voiceless. It is a war on the unborn. This war is being waged globally. Ironically, civilized societies that have generally placed safeguards on human life have now passed laws that sanction this practice.

This matters greatly to us because the Lord has repeatedly declared this divine imperative: "Thou shalt not kill" [Exodus 20:13]. Then He added, "Nor do anything like unto it [Doctrine and Covenants 59:6]. ...

Man-made rules have now legalized that which has been forbidden by God from the dawn of time! Human reasoning has twisted and transformed absolute truth into sound-bite slogans that promote a practice that is consummately wrong. (Russell M. Nelson, "Abortion: An Assault on the Defenseless," *Ensign*, Oct. 2008, 32–34)

What should I do when a topic is brought up at school that goes against gospel teachings, such as abortion?

The following segment from a *New Era* article offers helpful guidelines about when we should defend our beliefs and when we should remain silent.

There are many ways to respond—or not—depending on the situation. First, think about what might happen if you do or don't say something. If your silence would cause others to think you agree with something you know to be wrong, you may want to find a simple way to make your disagreement known. If you think your comments would only cause contention, then you could find another occasion to comment. However, if your class is respectful to one another and the teacher is asking for participation, you could pray for inspiration and then explain your beliefs. ("Questions and Answers: What should I do when a topic is brought up at school that goes against gospel teachings, such as abortion?," *New Era*, Apr. 2014, 42)

Supplemental Learning Activities

Alternative practice application activity

Refer the students to the list of spiritually dangerous ideas or practices that was made on the board.

Choose one of the spiritually dangerous ideas or practices discussed previously, and imagine that you have a friend who questions why the Church is opposed to that idea or practice.

Help students use the principles of acquiring spiritual knowledge to address their friend's concern. To do this, consider using some or all of the following ideas and questions.

Seek further understanding through divinely appointed sources

Using your scriptures or the Gospel Library app, find a scripture or statement that helps bring understanding about the issue you chose.

Allow students time and resources to search for clarifying information, but do not spend too much class time on this activity.
Ask a few students to share what they found and how it clarifies the issue.

- What did you find that clarifies the issue you chose?

Examine concepts and questions with an eternal perspective

- Why would it be helpful to keep an eternal perspective as you consider this issue?
- What do you know about Heavenly Father's plan of salvation that could influence your thoughts and opinions about the issue you chose?

Act in faith

- What are some ways you could act in faith when others question your beliefs about this or other topics?
- How could you encourage others to act in faith when they question your beliefs or the Church's stance on certain issues?

