

Bible Student's Notebook The Herald of His Grace

Presenting every man perfect in Christ Jesus. Colossians 1:28

Volume XVII Issue 413

"Gray's" Anatomy

ome believe that we live in a black and white world. I used to be one of those. Early in my journey I sought to place everything in an "approved" or "disapproved" category. For a decade or more I gauged my spiritual life and growth by how many more things I had managed to funnel into one of these two categories.

BLACK OR WHITE

Let's think about these black and white categories. Under the "white" column is everything that is viewed as "approved" or "sanctioned" by God. Under the "black" one is everything deemed "disapproved," "prohibited" or "condemned."

I was taught that everything was either "black" or "white," and that any supposed middle ground of "gray" was nothing short of "compromise." For anything that I could not see to be in either the "black" or "white" columns, I would seek to apply any possible scriptural "principle" to force it into one of the two categories.

Identifying and living in line with a "black" or "white" world was the essence of what I viewed spiritual life to be. For me, spirituality was a progressively purer, holier, godlier life that honored God and separated itself from the slightest hint of worldliness in accordance with doing or not doing what was in those two columns.

ADOPTED STANDARDS

During this period I devoted myself to reading and listening to "good," "godly" men with the goal of applying new and clearer "principles" to apply in an effort to assign everything to one of these two categories. I was sure that this was assisting me in perfecting my walk with God. Little did I realize that I had fallen into the same trap as the Galatians - having begun in spirit I was seeking to perfect myself in flesh (3:3).

During this time, when I could not seem to determine on my own into which column some things fit, I adopted and applied the "standards" of some of these "good," "godly" men as my own. This process led me down a path deeply rooted in legalism.

Here are some examples of adopted "standards" from those whom I respected.

- No pants on women
- No dresses above the knee on women
- No hair cutting for women
- No hair touching the ears or collar on men
- No holiday decorations
- No jewelry
- No movies
- No newspaper
- No non-Christian music
- No playing cards
- No public education
- No shopping on Sundays
- No swimming
- No TV
- No distance closer than six inches between men and women (except for husbands and wives)

NOT EVERYTHING IS BLACK OR WHITE

It took me years to realize that not everything in life is "black" or "white," and that in fact most things aren't. We actually live the majority of the daily details of life in what might be termed a neutral or "gray" area.

What I would have viewed as the "compromise" area of "gray" is actually where most of life is lived and where spiritual life is grown and developed. However, before we consider the neutral or "gray" area, let's revisit the "black" and "white" areas for a moment.



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This free weekly electronic publication (52 times a year) is dedicated to:

- the proclamation of the riches of God's abundant, exceeding grace (Romans 5:20; 11:6; Ephesians 1:7);
- the affirmation of God's purpose to save all mankind through the death, burial, and resurrection of Christ (I Timothy 2:3, 4; 4:10; Titus 2:11);
- the "preaching of Jesus Christ, according to the revelation of the mystery, which was kept secret since the world began" (Romans 16:25):
- true freedom and liberty apart from law (Galatians
- the organic nature of the church, the Body of Christ (I Corinthians 12);
- the distinct message and ministry of Paul, the apostle to the nations (Romans 11:13):
- the importance of receiving all whom Christ has received (Romans 14-15);
- the recovery of rich Biblical truth that has too long remained hidden under the veils of traditionalism, prejudice, misunderstanding, and fear (Mark 7:7, 13);
- the completeness of the believer in Christ (Colossians 2:10), with:
 - total freedom from sins (Colossians 1:14);
 - identity in His death, burial, and resurrection (Romans 6);
 - adult sonship position (Galatians 4).

This publication is a joint effort of a few members of the body of Christ. It is a product of our individual lives and ministries together. We do not claim infallibility for its contents. Our readers are asked to be as the Bereans and search the Scriptures (Acts 17:10-11; I Thessalonians 5:21).

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GRAY (continued from front page)

It should be a given that the believer wants God to be glorified with their lives. It seems inconceivable that members of the Body of Christ would *deliberately* want to bring dishonor to God, or His Son.

The question for us is what actually brings glory or dishonor to Him. The *only* source for this answer is the Scriptures. However, the answers are not as easily obtained as many would think. What lies behind this difficulty is the mistranslation, misunderstanding, misappropriation and misapplication of Scripture. Therefore, it is important that, if the seeker is going to have "black" and "white" columns, they start with a clean slate.

"WHITE" AREA

Take the "white" area. Look at it as an empty column. Then begin to add things that you *know* God has definitely authorized. Don't trust your instinct, or your past knowledge and training. Reinvestigate each item in detail prior to placing it in the category.

Make sure that the things in this section are *clearly* commanded, commended, confirmed, exhorted, instructed, permitted, sanctioned or appointed. Make sure that these are things that are unmistakably acceptable, proper and good as a specific part of God's revelation. This is the column of things that are *unquestionably* "right."

"BLACK" AREA

Go through the same procedure for the "black" area. Again, don't rely on your instinct, or what you think you know, or what you have been taught in the past. Reexamine everything prior to entering it in this category. Be sure that the things in the "black" section are *unmistakably* prohibited, condemned, restricted, denounced or disapproved.

Remember, this is a list of those things that are *unquestionably* unacceptable as an explicit part of God's revelation. This is the column of things that are "wrong."

"GRAY" AREA

As you place certain actions under the 'black" and "white" columns you will encounter many more items that simply will not fit under either. Place these items in a center column.

As stated earlier, most of the details of life are taken up with things that are in this center, "gray" column. It is

here where we grow spiritually, as it necessitates the acquisition and utilization of spiritual and scriptural wisdom, prudence, discretion and discernment – all under the auspices of God's spirit.

Anyone can attempt to follow a list of dos and don'ts – and pride themselves in the accomplishment, just as the Pharisees did; or condemn themselves for their failure if they don't. It takes spiritual growth and maturity to honor God in every aspect of life.

THE GOAL: SPIRITUAL MATURITY

Since the "gray" area occupies the majority of our lives, and requires trust and dependence on God, it is this area that affords the greatest place for spiritual growth.

Maturity was a thrust of Paul's ministry for the Body of Christ. Beyond what is clearly revealed to be in the "black" or "white" areas, Paul desired the believer's walk of faith to be intensely personal. Even in his function as our Apostle he did not seek to lord over the life and affairs of the believer.

Not that we are lords over your faith, but we are workers together with your joy, for by the faith you stand (II Corinthians 1:24, Young's)

"GRAY" IS THE COLOR OF FREEDOM

The so-called "gray" area is actually where God teaches us about our freedom in Christ. It is also where we begin to see the uniqueness of who God is making us to be.

It is in the freedom of "gray" where God directs our individual steps. In the "black" or "white" areas the need for direction is diminished, as everything is already spelled out explicitly. There is no need for growth, for maturity, for individuality, or even for God's spirit.

"Gray" is the color of freedom, and each individual believer will find there a palette of colors from which God designs their lives. Where we live, what we do for a living, if, when, and whom we marry, what our interests, pastimes and passions are, all are, for the most part, drawn from the expansive column of "gray."

"Gray" Is Where God Introduces Color

All supposed columns (back, white and gray) belong to God. "Black" and "white" surely belong to Him, for He has been specific in His revelation regarding what is categorically "right" and "wrong."

The "gray" equally belongs to Him as well. This is the pool from which He draws the colors to paint our world.

It is in the supposed "gray" area where God introduces the rich and unique colors of our lives. Gray is the soil where seeds of spiritual life blossom into vibrant experiences that honor God.

This "neutral" area is where God truly teaches us to trust Him, to live in freedom, to practice grace, to express ourselves, and to exercise love.

"Where Should I Live?"

An example of something that is big in the "gray" column would be where one should live.

Is it "right" or "wrong" to live in the US, or in Canada? Neither: it's just not an issue of "right" or "wrong." It is "neutral."

If it is "neutral" to live in the US, would it be "right" or "wrong" to live in NY, or in LA? Again, neither: it's all neutral. A believer can be led by God to live in *any* place. To set up an artificial "standard" of where one should live would be a travesty.

The US or Canada, NY or LA, Albany or Baton Rouge, are but a small fragment from the palette of colors from which God designs our lives.

Make no mistake about it: where one lives has a large im-

pacts on one's life. In fact, it is so significant that it affects nearly every other detail of life. There is nothing "black" or "white" about it. Yet where we live is as much a result of the direction of God as is everything in the "black" and "white."

God directs the steps of man (Psalms 27:23). If God directs the steps of a man to live in Baton Rouge, then for him it is "good" and "acceptable." It would be the "right" place for him; but for the man whose steps are ordered in Albany, Baton Rouge would obviously be the "wrong" place, for him.

IMPOSING "RIGHT" OR "WRONG" ON "GREY"

Let's continue with our thoughts along these lines. One may truly love where they live, so much so that they become quite the advocate for its climate, terrain, culture, activities and other features. They may even promote its benefits and advantages to others, encouraging them to move there. This is all well and good, but one would be out of order to suggest or insist that where they live should be the *standard* for all other believers. This simply would be wrong.

It is not God's design that everyone should live in the same place, nor could they. God made so many beautiful, unique places on the earth to be inhabited by His equally unique creation.

Most things in life need to be left to the unique direction of God for the individual. Some of these things are huge,



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life-changing issues – such as where one will live while carrying out the details of life – but you can relax, since God is up for the "challenge."

"GRAY" ADVICE

This does not mean that there's no place for advice in the "gray" area. Quite the contrary: "gray" is the column *tailored* for advice.

Iran, Iraq, Afghanistan and Egypt are all among the residential choices of "gray." While I support the freedom for these countries to remain in the "gray," I never would counsel anyone to move there. It surely would seem *unwise* to me.

If someone was planning on moving to one of these countries (as well as others), I may be somewhat "shocked" by what, to me, is such an apparent "bad" choice. Such a decision would be one that would make absolutely no sense to me personally, and I may offer counsel to the contrary. However, the fact remains that these countries still remain in the "gray" area.

There are, however, always rare, unique, extenuating circumstances that could lead any one of us to do what we would otherwise deem unwise. If others choose to move to one of these countries – howbeit with my voiced "disagreement" – I should still love them. I should not seek to condemn, attack, vilify, defame, slander or reject them for their "gray choice."

LORDS OF THE "GRAY"

God in His wisdom has specifically left *most* details of life – some of them huge – outside of "black" or "white." Some are not comfortable with this latitude of freedom from which God draws.

There are even those who will seek to lord over the lives of others in this arena. They do not seem to trust God or His grace for themselves, nor for the lives of others. They must place some restrictions on the "neutral." Their personal constraints become the standard for others – but only if others allow them to.

Don't Give Up Your Liberty

However, we must never forget that freedom and liberty are central themes of our Apostle. Paul's instruction is abundantly clear:

It is for freedom that Christ has set us free. Stand

firm, then, and do not let yourselves be burdened again by a yoke of slavery (Galatians 5:1).

We are not to surrender or forfeit the ground of liberty that we have in Christ. We're not to trade freedom for someone's "rules for Christian living" ("touch not; taste not; handle not," Colossians 2:18-23). Such an exchange would be an insult to our position as God's sons.

FREQUENT QUESTIONS

The students and teachers of God's Word often get asked a lot of questions. Some of them have to do with these columns of "black, "white" and "gray."

These inquiries arise partly because of the very nature of the religion from which they came, especially Christianity. They're used to having men *lord over* them, telling them what they can and can't do, directing very specific details of their lives. They are not used to being entrusted to God and the Word of His grace (Acts 20:32). They ask such things as:

Is sanctioned?	
Is approved?	
Is alright?	
C	
Do you advocate	_?
Do you promote	_?
Do you support	?

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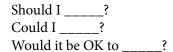
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APPLYING AN ANSWER

Some questions are difficult to answer because of the way they are asked. The classic "Have you stopped beating your wife?" comes to mind. There is no way to answer that question with a "yes" or "no" if a man has never beaten his wife. A "yes" or a "no" would simply implicate that the answerer is something untrue.

Not all questions are to be answered; some are actually to be avoided, or refused (II Timothy 2:23; I Timothy 1:4; 6:4; Titus 3:9). The Pharisees had mastered the art of asking questions so as to entrap the answerer in a manipulation of words. This was amply demonstrated in the earthly life of Jesus Christ.

In light of the list of questions from above, let's revisit the issue of one's residence.

Is living in Baghdad sanctioned? Is living in Baghdad approved? Is living in Baghdad alright?

Can you see an apparent difficulty in trying to answer some of these questions with an unqualified "yes" or "no"?

If you answer "yes" to any of these questions you would seem to suggest to someone that there is direct revelation from God that would place them in the "white" column. You would be accused of saying,

"It's good and honorable - God approves - go for it!"

If you answer "no" you would seem to suggest to others that God's direct revelation actually condemns it.

"It's sinful and shameful - God condemns it - stay away!"

Neither of these answers would be correct. The fact is that one has the freedom to live in Baghdad if they so choose. However, it is here where wisdom, prudence, discretion and discernment come into play - all under the direction of the spirit of God. Just because one has a particular freedom does not necessarily mean that it is always wise or practical to practice it.

Still, even if you simply and honestly say that someone

has the freedom and liberty to relocate and live in Baghdad - you stand the risk of being accused by someone of advocating, promoting and supporting "living in Baghdad." Recognizing a certain freedom, and actually advocating it, are two completely different things.

EXPEDIENCY

Surely no one would suggest that we should be engaged in everything that we have the freedom to do. Not only would that be unwise, it would also be impossible (seeing that some freedoms are practiced to the exclusion of others - e.g. you can't live in Baghdad and Baton Rouge at the same time). not to mention that some freedoms could also be inherently and/or potentially deadly.

Paul makes it clear that although we have freedoms, clearly not all is expedient, or edifying (II Corinthians 10:23):

All things are lawful for me, but all things are not expedient: all things are lawful for me, but all things edify not (KJV).

All is allowed me, but not all is expedient. All is allowed me, but not all is edifying (CV).

"All things are lawful?" Yes, but not all are good for us. "All things are lawful?" Yes, but not all are edifying (Moffatt).

All things to me are lawful, but all things are not profitable; all things to me are lawful, but all things do not build up (Young).

(A part of a series on *Liberty*).



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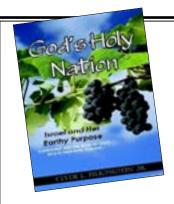
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by — Clyde L. Pilkington, Jr.

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