

GRAY MATTERS

Part 3

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Gray Matters, Part Three

Rarely does anyone ask if it's wrong to lie, to steal, commit murder or adultery. Most Christians don't need to ask whether or not to pray, read the Bible, and introduce people to Jesus; the Bible is clear about those things and many more. There are *other* things, though, that the Bible is *not* clear about, and those things fall into "gray areas." As Christians our decisions in the "gray" areas matter – in fact, they make all the difference. So in this sermon series, we're exploring how to make decisions when the Bible is silent, and we're looking at a few gray areas because they really are important. Gray Matters. It matters a lot.

We started out by looking at 1 Corinthians and finding seven questions to ask ourselves whenever we are making significant decisions that the Bible doesn't speak directly to. If you weren't with us, I'd very strongly encourage you to go to the sermons page of our website so you can listen to it or download the manuscript, because that will always help you.

Last week we looked at the issue of drinking alcohol; while we can justify it from Scripture, if we consider what alcohol does to our own health, as well as what that industry does to society in general, then we need to think more about our use of it and our support of the industry.

It might not be popular to ask ourselves about these issues, but this is exactly why the gray areas matter. I strongly believe that ***God wants us to carry the love and light of the Gospel to not only the darkness of this world, but especially into the gray areas.***

Today I want us to consider another approach to the gray areas besides the seven questions. We are going to get this perspective from the Apostle Paul again, and it is also going to come from his letter to the church in Corinth, this time it's a part of chapter six. But before I read the passage, I feel like I need to give you the context of it.

The new Christians in Corinth were "Gentile Christians" – that means that they were not Jews who became Christians, like the first Christians were. These non-Jews heard the Gospel and realized that the One True God could forgive them, they could be set free from sin, and given God's Spirit in order to live an abundant life of love in the world. They accepted Christ and became brand-new people – Christians. But, without some of the moral guardrails of the Jewish faith, these believers began to exercise their freedom in ways that were not always sinful, but they were very self-seeking and damaging to others. That's why Paul wrote the letters to the church in Corinth, including the seven questions that we've looked at already. But there was more.

One of the things that the people in Corinth kept saying in order to justify their selfish-but-not-sinful-actions was this:

“I am allowed to do anything” (1 Corinthians 6:12, 10:23, niv)

If you remember, we talked about this last week. In other words, “As a Christian, I can justify my behavior and do what I want.” Paul’s answer to this statement was, “Yees, buuut...Yes, some things aren’t necessarily sin when you do them, but they could be if you are not careful and mindful of others.”

So I need to give you the background of that statement, so that what we’ll see next will make more sense.

The statement was popular in their culture; it comes from a belief system called **“Gnosticism.”** Gnosticism was a heresy – it was a false teaching that taught that Jesus Christ was not actually THE God, he was a “lesser” God. When you understand what Gnosticism is, you will see that a lot of the New Testament letters (or epistles) and the book of Revelation were teaching against this false doctrine. We don’t have time to go into all of what it is, but one of the things that Gnosticism taught was that the physical world was lesser than the spiritual world (and only those with special knowledge or insight could understand the spiritual world; “Gnosis” means “knowledge”). So because the physical world, including our bodies, is lesser, the body was useless. This way of thinking was called “dualism” – that the spiritual was good and eternal, and everything physical was bad and temporary.

This was a popular false teaching that came from Greek philosophy, and it resulted in two approaches; one was to say, “I can do anything I want” because the physical body is irredeemable – in other words, the physical body can’t be saved because it is lesser than the spiritual, it is corrupt, and it is evil. So because of that I can do whatever I want with my body because it can’t be saved, it can’t be redeemed, and it can’t ever be good.” The other approach was the opposite – that a person should avoid anything and everything that has to do with our bodies. Does that make sense? Since the physical body was bad, either you could do whatever you wanted with it, or you should abstain from all physical pleasure of all kinds. Either you abstained from everything or you indulged in everything.

The Corinthian Christians were indulging – eating, drinking, and doing whatever they wanted no matter what it did to others. In fact, some of them even thought it was okay to be with prostitutes.

Paul, filled with the Holy Spirit, wisdom, and grace, gave an amazing response, which I want to share with you now. Would you stand with me as I read this passage from 1 Corinthians? This is Paul speaking:

“You say, “I am allowed to do anything”—but not everything is good for you. And even though “I am allowed to do anything,” I must not become a slave to anything. You say, “Food was made for the stomach, and the stomach for food.” (This is true, though someday God will do away with both of them.)

I'll explain this more in a bit, but basically Paul is saying, yes, there are things that are naturally pleasurable and it's okay to enjoy them. You don't want to become addicted to them. But they are not the priority – people are the priority. Let's continue:

But you can't say that our bodies were made for sexual immorality. They were made for the Lord, and the Lord cares about our bodies. And God will raise us from the dead by his power, just as he raised our Lord from the dead.

Paul here is saying that you can't apply the reasoning he just gave about food to sexual immorality; that the Bible is very clear that certain things are sinful, like immoral sexual activity, and for good reason – Here's why:

Don't you realize that your bodies are actually parts of Christ? Should a man take his body, which is part of Christ, and join it to a prostitute? Never! And don't you realize that if a man joins himself to a prostitute, he becomes one body with her? For the Scriptures say, "The two are united into one." But the person who is joined to the Lord is one spirit with him.

Paul goes on to say:

Run from sexual sin! No other sin so clearly affects the body as this one does. For sexual immorality is a sin against your own body. Don't you realize that your body is the temple of the Holy Spirit, who lives in you and was given to you by God? You do not belong to yourself, for God bought you with a high price. So you must honor God with your body." (I Corinthians 6:12-20, nlt)

We don't have time to go into all of this. But before you sit down, it's those last two verses that are going to help us the most, so can I ask you to read those with me:

Don't you realize that your body is the temple of the Holy Spirit, who lives in you and was given to you by God? You do not belong to yourself, for God bought you with a high price. So you must honor God with your body. (1 Corinthians 6:19-20, nlt)

Thanks so much! Great job – please have a seat.

So here's the first point – Paul is saying we have...

1. Holiness in a Human

Paul is making a point very, very clear: when Jesus died on the cross for us, he did it to restore the whole person: not just our spirit, but our spirit, soul, and body. You are a whole person, and what you do with every part of your being matters. Every part of who you are has been saved, redeemed, and restored by Christ's work on the Cross, and his resurrection from the dead. When we get to heaven someday, we'll have new bodies, so we've only got these bodies while we're here – so what we do with them HERE really, really, matters. We really do only have one life here – so yes, we can enjoy it, but even more, we need to use it to serve Christ and people. Paul makes this point powerfully by saying, "Don't you know that your body is the

Temple of the Holy Spirit?" In other words, when the Spirit filled you, he filled your life, including your body. That makes your body sacred.

Temples were considered places that housed a god – this was true for the many gods of the Greeks and Romans, and especially true for the Jews. For them, the Temple was the special residence of God on earth. Not that God was contained in a building, but it was the place where the Presence of God could be met and experienced. Earlier in this letter, in chapter 3 (3:9), Paul refers to the believers collectively as the building of God. Peter called the church living stones that together make up the temple or building. (1 Peter 2:5). In this passage, Paul refers to each individual believer as the Temple, too. You are the temple. So am I.

Jesus referred to himself as the Temple – the residence of God, when the Jews challenged him:

“The Jewish leaders demanded, “What are you doing? If God gave you authority to do this, show us a miraculous sign to prove it.” “All right,” Jesus replied. “Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up.” “What!” they exclaimed. “It has taken forty-six years to build this Temple, and you can rebuild it in three days?” But when Jesus said, “this temple,” he meant his own body. After he was raised from the dead, his disciples remembered he had said this, and they believed both the Scriptures and what Jesus had said.” (John 2:18-22, nlt)

So Jesus considered his physical body the temple of God. So if Christ’s body is the Temple of God, and the gathered church makes up the body of Christ – and therefore the Temple of God – that means that, since the Holy Spirit of God himself resides in us, then *our* bodies also, individually, are the Temple of God. Make sense?

You need to understand how significant this is; it is not a metaphor; it is not an analogy. Your physical body is the physical residence of God himself.

The Jews called the presence of God in the Temple, “the glory of God” – the word in Hebrew is “shekinah.”

“Then the cloud covered the Tabernacle, and the glory of the Lord filled the Tabernacle.” (Exodus 40:34, nlt)

The glory – the shekinah – of God was the proof of the presence of God. It was his white-hot holiness. And now, *that very same exact presence is in you*, Christian. That makes your body a holy place.

It also means that you have received the Spirit of God to help you against sin. So, even though you are free to do anything, you are not to let anything else other than the Holy Spirit be the master of you. The great thing about the Christian life is that **the Spirit is given to you, not to make you free to sin, but to make you free *not* to sin.**

So what you do with your body matters – whether the Bible is black and white or gray, you need to think carefully about whatever you do with your body. Because the reality is, when you give your life to Christ, you give your *entire, whole* person to

him: your spirit, soul, and body. In fact, Christ *owns* you; he bought you with a price – the highest price that could be paid. He owns you. Paul says, “you are not your own.” When you accepted Christ, you signed over the deed to your body – your property, your physical house that you live in. You signed it over to Christ. And the price he paid for you was not cash or check or even bit coin – he bought you with his holy, sinless, blood (Ephesians 1:7; 1 Peter 1:18, 19). The picture is of you as a slave of sin (Romans 6:17; 1 Corinthians 7:23) being purchased out of the horrible system of slavery. You have now become a slave to freedom – a slave to Christ (Romans 1:1; Romans 6:18). So while before you were a slave to sin, now you are a slave to Christ.

Paul is saying *this* (listen carefully): The Spirit is in you, just as he was in Jesus. Jesus has risen and ascended into heaven, and will come back some day. Until then, **Christian, your body is the physical presence of Jesus in this world.** *God carries on the exact works of Christ through you now.* That means your body is the carrier of Christ. It is exactly what the Bible means when it says:

“God has chosen to make known among the Gentiles the glorious riches of this mystery, which is Christ in you, the hope of glory.” (Colossians 1:27, niv)

Your life carries the shekinah glory.

God wants to advance his Kingdom of love through your life, your body, your choices, and your relationships. So don’t think of this in the negative; don’t think this means that you have to start abstaining from all kinds of stuff. Think of it in the positive: **Keep your body as healthy as possible, so that that you can be the most effective for Him as long as possible.**

Does that make sense? *That’s our timeless principle.* So let’s apply this to a couple of other gray areas of your life. This may be dangerous for me, but let me lovingly tell you this principle means that you need to consider that...

2. You ***are what you (don’t) eat***

“Jane Fonda, Lady Gaga, Katie Couric, Fiona Apple, Elton John, Lindsay Lohan, Audrey Hepburn, Janet Jackson, Meredith Vieira, Richard Simmons, Alanis Morissette, Joan Rivers, Paula Abdul, Princess Diana, Kelly Clarkson, Russell Brand, Sharon Osbourne, Wynonna Judd, Sally Field and Oprah Winfrey. What do these 20 celebrities have in common? All of them have battled eating disorders — unhealthy relationships with food. And they’ve all been brave enough to go public with their struggles. (So one author asks) why do we have such a hard time doing the same in our churches? Why don’t we talk about our food struggles? Why is it so hard to admit when food is an idol? Why are we so private about our battles with food?”¹ My goodness, the US is the 16th most obese nation in the world, and Yakima is the 4th

¹ https://churchleaders.com/pastors/pastor-articles/312339-idol-thats-eating-away-church-steve-hoppe.html?utm_source=outreach-cl-daily-nl&utm_medium=email&utm_content=text-link&utm_campaign=cl-daily-nl&maropost_id=&mpweb=256-8252216-742153138

most obese city in the nation. *We really ought to talk about this.* But please hear my heart: I don't want to shame you. I know that our relationship with food is a difficult one.

"I recognize that eating disorders are confusing, complex and potentially catastrophic clinical problems affecting the mind, body and soul. They have psychological, sociocultural, physiological, emotional, mental and spiritual roots. If you are struggling with an eating disorder, you should talk to a trusted pastor and counselor, but let me also encourage you to talk to a medical professional who specializes in eating disorders."² I've had the opportunity to provide pastoral counseling to people on both extremes of this issue – from anorexia to obesity, so trust me that I'm not trying to make this a black or white issue; it really is a gray matter. I'm not talking about eating disorders. But there is something that the Bible talks plainly about: gluttony is a sin. Gluttony is like greedy eating. What drunkenness is to alcohol, gluttony is to food. So the Bible says:

"Do not join those who drink too much wine or gorge themselves on meat, for drunkards and gluttons become poor, and drowsiness clothes them in rags."
(Proverbs 23:20-21, niv)

Here we see that being drunk and being a glutton are equally destructive.

The New Testament says this about people who are gluttons:

"Their destiny is destruction, their god is their stomach, and their glory is in their shame. Their mind is set on earthly things." (Philippians 3:19, niv)

In an earlier verse Proverbs is even more clear:

"Put a knife to your throat if you are given to gluttony." (Proverbs 23:2, niv)

That sounds harsh, but isn't that basically what we are doing when we are gluttons to the point of obesity – we are cutting our lives short.

I'm not saying we shouldn't enjoy food – there are plenty of places in the Bible that talk about feasting and festivals and people are specifically told to eat the fattest, sweetest foods as part of their celebration. So I'm not saying we should all become vegans or starve ourselves. But you have to admit; most of us are guilty of indulging too much.

It's crazy – we live in a society that holds up skinny people as the model of perfection, and yet at the same time tries to get us addicted to junk food. Fashion magazines have airbrushed pictures of men and women who are inhumanly fit, and in between are ads for McDonalds and Starbucks! A couple of articles point this out: "Every year the average American eats 33 pounds of cheese and 70 pounds of sugar. On average, 11 percent of our diet comes from saturated fats. Every day we eat 8,500 milligrams of salt—that's four whopping teaspoons of salt." In his book *Salt Sugar Fat*, Michael Moss shows that during the past two decades some of America's largest food producers carefully studied how to "help" us crave all this junk food.

² ibid

For example, some of the food industries biggest names--including Campbell Soup, General Foods, Kraft, PepsiCo, and Cadbury--hired "crave consultants" like the scientist Dr. Howard Moskowitz to help them determine what they call our "bliss points," the point where food companies can "optimize" our cravings and get us addicted. Or as another example, Frito-Lay, makers of Lay's potato chips and the 21 varieties of Cheetos, operated a research complex near Dallas that employed nearly 500 chemists, psychologists, and technicians and spent up to \$30 million a year to find the bliss point for their junk foods. One food scientist called Cheetos "one of the most marvelously constructed foods on the planet, in terms of pure pleasure." Cheetos has what's called "vanishing caloric density." In other words because it melts down quickly, your brain thinks that there's no calories in it, and you think you can just keep eating forever.

Interestingly, many of the former executives who Moss interviewed for his book avoid the foods they tried to get us to eat. Howard Moskowitz doesn't drink Pepsi products because he claims "[soda's] not good for your teeth." A Frito-Lay executive admitted to Moss that he avoids most processed foods—like Cheetos. Moss concluded, "Like other former food company executives I met, [this Frito-Lay executive] overhauled his diet to avoid the very foods he once worked so hard to perfect."³ They literally are working to get us addicted to the food that is so bad for us. And it's working.

If you need help, whether from a fitness trainer or a medical doctor or a nutritionist or a counselor, please – do it and do it right away. God needs you to be as healthy as possible for as long as possible.

Is it okay for me to say this?

So it's similar to the issue of alcohol: gluttony, like drunkenness, is a sin – that's black and white. But the gray matter here is our daily relationship to food, so please choose wisely. Yes, you can eat unhealthy foods. *But* we need you as long as possible in our lives and in our church and the world needs your witness for Christ. Be as healthy as possible.

Now, along those same lines then, let's also make sure we are not doing this...

3. *Filling the temple with smoke*

I want to mention another gray matter: smoking and vaping. Let's start with the easiest one: vaping. Don't. Do. It. I'm going to come as close as I can get to being black and white on this. The Bible does not say anything at all about vaping. Go ahead and look; you won't find it. But listen: *vaping is killing people*. You are putting unnatural chemicals and minerals in your body that are not meant to be there. It's only been a social practice for a few years, and people are *already* dying from it. You don't know what's in those things, and what's really scary is that many

³ Michael Moss, "The Extraordinary Science of Addictive Junk Food," The New York Times (2-20-13); Nina Storchlic, "How Fast Food Hooks Us," The Daily Beast (2-25-13)

of the companies selling them don't fully know either. But one thing we know: people who do it are getting mysteriously ill and dying. Let me be clear: unless a doctor is using e-cigarettes to help you break the habit of smoking, you have no reason at all to vape. You say, "I am allowed to do whatever I want..." Okay. But just because someone is legally selling something, it doesn't mean you should soak your lungs and bloodstream in it.

What about marijuana? Same thing: the research is out there already. Unless it is medicinal and you are under a doctor's care, then, why? You are either self-medicating or using it for recreational reasons. Why? Again, you are shortening your life, just because "you can do whatever you want." And God wants you to live as full and healthy of a life as possible.

Well then, so what about tobacco use? The Bible does not talk about this, either. It also is a gray matter – even more gray than vaping and marijuana.

Let me tell you a story. I had a dear friend in my other church who was a great guy, but he had real struggles. Jerry was a Vietnam veteran, struggling with some of the most severe PTSD for some horrible reasons. He suffered some injuries that doctors threw painkillers at. He came home from the war addicted to drugs, and the VA docs just kept piling up the opioids. He was addicted to several drugs, marijuana, alcohol, and cigarettes, and probably a bunch of other things. He lost his jobs, his wife, his kids, and his girlfriends. His parents were dear, sweet saints of God who loved him but in his addictions, he severed the relationship so badly that they weren't speaking, even though they lived within 45 minutes of each other. I knew his parents – they attended the church that I had been youth pastor at before I became the Lead Pastor at my next church. Jerry fought hard and beat his addiction to drugs and alcohol, but he still smoked. That was the last thing that he just couldn't kick.

Then his mother died, and they had never reconciled. He was wracked with guilt. After his mother's funeral, as soon as the graveside service was over, he couldn't handle it anymore. He walked off behind a tree in the cemetery and lit his cigarette. Next thing he knew, he heard a voice behind him. The pastor who officiated the funeral had walked up to him and said this: "All I know is I wouldn't let one of those cancer sticks keep me out of heaven." Sometimes pastors can be real jerks.

As I built a relationship with Jerry, he felt he couldn't become a Christian because he couldn't quit smoking. Eventually, he and I were able to pray together, and he accepted Christ. But he felt guilty and apologized for what he called his sin of smoking. He was afraid. He believed he wouldn't go to heaven because he couldn't quit smoking. I told him, "Jerry, I will give you a hundred dollars if you can find any place in the Bible that it says smoking is a sin. If you do, then you are correct – you won't get into heaven. But if you can't find it, then you are believing a lie." He looked at me sort of shocked, so I made sure I was clear: "For you, Jerry, smoking will not keep you out of heaven. With all that you've been through, this is the *least* of your vices. You've fought and beat much bigger ones than this. Let's focus on the more important things: your relationship with Christ and with your family." Jerry

was relieved. And guess what? As we worked with him and his father, Lawrence, his elderly widowed dad sold his home and moved into the same trailer park as Jerry – not even 100 yards away. Lawrence determined that his last task on earth was to be reconciled to his son. Lawrence had nothing – he was literally that poor. But he died rich – because his last accomplishment was to be reconciled to his son. Several years later Jerry’s hard life took its toll and he died, too. Jerry and his parents are together in heaven – I’m sure of it. Jerry might even be smoking up there, I’m not sure. Probably not. Most likely he was healed of his addiction when he left this world.

Here’s my point: smoking is a gray matter.

But – using the seven questions and using the principle we are talking about today, here’s what I want to say to you about smoking: why would you purposefully shorten your life? Why would you go to heaven early when people who are going to hell need you to tell them about God’s love? Why would you purposefully hinder your health so that you can’t easily walk to your neighbor’s house and share God’s love? With all the problems of cancer, emphysema, lung disease, heart attacks, and COPD that are *documented* –even the cigarette companies are fully aware of that – with all of *that*, why are you killing yourself with smoke? The only smoke in the Temple ought to be the Shekinah glory – the presence of God.

Okay?

Pray

Before Pastor Jason dismisses us, let me just say one last thing: the reason the Church of the Nazarene has encouraged the abstention of alcohol and cigarettes is this: love. We love you too much to see you hurt your witness and shorten your own life. But more than that, we love others. Here’s what I mean: Even though alcohol and tobacco are not sins, “intoxication and addictions are a 'danger' to many people, both physically and spiritually. Historically, the (heartbeat of the) Nazarene Church (has always been social justice – to work) to benefit the poor. *Alcohol, (tobacco), gambling...and their addictions (are) things that (keep) people poor, so (that’s why we have traditionally) refrained from those things.*”⁴ You might be able to handle them, but the poor can’t. The addicted can’t. And those things keep them poor, addicted, oppressed, and defeated. And you and I need to consider *them*. Because we don’t live for ourselves; we live for Christ. So yes, gray matters.

⁴ <https://www.christianity.com/church/denominations/church-of-the-nazarene-10-things-to-know-about-their-history-and-beliefs.html>