

Series: **SHADES OF GREY - April 13, 2008**

**GREY 3: WILL IT BE PLEASING TO GOD?
1 Corinthians 10:12-33**

I. INTRO

A. When I was in 8th grade, my English teacher publicly asked a visiting friend if he could identify the biggest trouble-maker in the class. He pointed at all the other evil-looking guys; she pointed at me.

-In some ways, she was probably right. The goal was to cause trouble **covertly** though. See, in Wilson Junior High School, all teachers carried big sticks. Our geography teacher, Leonard Karznia, one of the biggest teachers in the school also carried the biggest stick. A **two-hander**. **Mr.** Karznia had a kind of weird cadence to his voice—**perfect** for grade 8 boys to mock when his back was turned.

1. One of my friends somehow found out his first name. Leonard. When Mr. Karznia would hand out an assignment, a friend, who could mimic his voice to perfection—would say, “**Awww! Come on now, Lennie!**” The point was to have fun—without incurring the wrath of the big stick.
2. One day, I screwed up, and incurred Lennie’s wrath. He walked me out into the hall and said, “Okay, Mr. Davis. Your brain has descended from your head into the lower regions of our body. We have to bring it back up. It may take 1 whack; **it may take five! We don’t know!** Place your hands against the wall and bow towards Mecca.” **WHAM!** My brain came back into place with amazing speed. “It’s back! **It’s back!**”
-I never crossed Lennie again—at **least** not when he was watching!

B. As I watch and talk to followers of Jesus, I sometimes get the feeling that, for them, living right means not messing with the One who has the biggest stick of all. “Don’t screw up because God has the power to turn you into a quivering grease spot with hair!”

-And sometimes, **sometimes** it appears to me that we act like a bunch of 8th graders. “How **far** can I go and not mess up my life. How **far** can I go and not humiliate myself.” Loving and following God becomes this game of limbo. Remember that limbo scene in **A Bug’s Life?** “How low can you go? How low can you go?”

1. Of course, that misses the whole point of following Jesus. When it came to his own humility and his own personal status, I’m guessing that the angels asked, “Wow! How low can He go? How much lower **can** He go?”
2. One of the most **powerful** principles in making great decisions in life, besides **Does it show love**, is the one that comes at the climax of this whole section on the gray areas. Let me read it for you:

So whether you eat or drink, or whatever you do, do it all for the glory of God. (1 Corinthians 10:31 NLT)

-I’d like to talk this morning about what that means.

II. YOU CAN'T SERVE TWO MASTERS

A. Now, some of you are new to this series of message on **Shades of Grey**. The basic question we're dealing with is *How do you make good decisions in the gray areas life—issues the Bible doesn't address?*

1. That's where the church in Corinth was at in an issue that was **very** specific to their culture: eating in temples to other gods where the meat had been sacrificed to idols. These dinners, as I mentioned a couple of weeks ago, were part of everyday life.

-Paul, the founder of their church, doesn't just give them **yes** and **no** answers; he gives them principles they can use whenever issues like this come up. Principles like, "Will this **help** you or **hinder** you? Will this **help** others or **hurt** others? Does it show love?"

a. There was this snarky know-it-all attitude behind most of the problems these people faced. They were proud of all they knew—and they assumed that getting baptized and receiving the Spirit was a kind of comprehensive insurance policy against anything bad happening.

b. So Paul gives them a lesson from Israel's history. How that God chose them, led them out of slavery, guided them with a cloud by day and fire by night, miraculously fed them and gave them water. His presence and leadership in their community was extremely obvious.

-And yet, **and yet**—even with guidance that specific, they got led astray into idolatry, into rebellion, and into sexual immorality with devastating results. Paul says,

Yet God was not pleased with most of them, and their bodies were scattered in the wilderness...These things happened to them as examples for us. They were written down to warn us who live at the end of the age. (1 Corinthians 10:5, 11 NLT)

c. Anyone here who has **never** struggled with pride? We **all** have it, and it blinds us. Whether you call it stubbornness, hardheartedness or recklessness—we have these have huge blind spots in our lives to what our actions and attitudes say about **Who** it is we really worship.

d. Now, I'm going to summarize where Paul goes, if that's okay with you. He uses the illustration of communion and says,

When we bless the cup at the Lord's Table, aren't we sharing in the blood of Christ? And when we break the bread, aren't we sharing in the body of Christ? And though we are many, we all eat from one loaf of bread, showing that we are one body. (1 Corinthians 10:16-17 NLT).

-And **then** he adds the clincher: "Don't you realize that when you go into a temple to a pagan god and join their rituals—you are in essence participating in a communion service that honors pagan gods? And there's an unseen but very real demonic world behind all that! You can't worship Christ on weekends—and then worship other gods throughout

the week. You're *inviting* disaster! And then this really uncomfortable phrase:

**Do you dare to rouse the Lord's jealousy as Israel did?
Do we think we are stronger than he is? (1 Corinthians 10:22 NLT)**

-What's he saying? "Mess around with God and He'll turn you into a crispy critter?" No. Paul is saying that there is more to life than what's on the surface of it. There's the realm we see. But there are also unseen forces of evil. There are dangerous, unseen forces behind the false gods of this world—and when we get sucked into trying to please them—or appease them—we are participating in something God has *already* passed judgment on.

2. How many of you think that when it comes to people in North America, we really don't have to worry about idols all that much? Let me define the word **idol**: **Anything you put before God in your life.** Listen to what Jesus says:

Don't store up treasures here on earth, where moths eat them and rust destroys them, and where thieves break in and steal. Store your treasures in heaven, where moths and rust cannot destroy, and thieves do not break in and steal. Wherever your treasure is, there the desires of your heart will also be.

No one can serve two masters. For you will hate one and love the other; you will be devoted to one and despise the other. You cannot serve both God and money. (Matthew 6:19-21, 24 NLT)

-It's pretty clear from what Jesus says here that money—making it, protecting it, spending it, hoarding it—doesn't *have* to be—but can become a false god; an idol. You know it's out of place—maybe before God—if you're preoccupied with it—and centering most of your decisions around it.

-Jesus does *not* say, "It's not a good thing to serve two masters; I wouldn't advise that you serve two masters." He says, "You *cannot* serve two masters!" Whatever is the driving force in your life will ultimately cause you to treat other demands for service with contempt. If something besides God is at the top of your list—you will ultimately either play worship games with God—or even try to force **God Himself** to serve whatever tops your list!

3. See, when it comes to idolatry, people aren't typically *honoring*—or standing in awe of a stone or a piece of wood or ivory or jade. They're actually trying to manipulate spiritual forces in their favor—to get good luck or avoid bad luck. -The bottom line is self-interest. And that was *exactly* the issue for both the people of Israel and the disastrous path they took—and these people Paul is addressing. People sometimes think, "As long as I occasionally talk to Jesus and worship Him on weekends, it doesn't really matter who I pledge allegiance to during the week. And it *does!*"

4. How can you tell where people worship? Well—usually where they make their sacrifices. This is tax season. Has anyone here ever been tempted to sacrifice a little truth to get more money back?
 -Name some other **gods** we, in our world, are tempted to appease or serve or bribe...or make our sacrifices to? The god of comfort. The god of consumerism. The god of good health. The god of pleasure. The god of business/work. The lawn god. The car god. The lottery. I would say that, given what I see, idolatry is alive and well!
- B. Here's the question—and the principle when it comes to gray issues. Is Jesus **Lord**—or not? Is He the driving force behind what I'm doing or, if I were to honest, is there another idol, another master, I'm putting first? Am I doing this to please Jesus—or to please **another** idol?
1. For example. Jesus seems to be saying that money and stuff is the idol humans are most likely to put before God. So here's the struggle for us, as I see it. The bottom line in business of almost any kind is money. Profit margins drive the decisions, how people are treated, how products are advertised and, sometimes, the ethics of how people operate.
 -Is it **wrong** to make a profit—to have a reasonable income? No. Jesus worked as a carpenter, so he knew about profit margins—and buying food and clothes.
 -But when profit crosses the line into greed, the driven-ness for more—no matter who gets crushed or used in the process—is evil and wrong—then it's pretty clear; money is God. And **nothing** good comes from that.
2. Another master that may surprise you is **convenience Comfort**. It's **very** easy to become pre-occupied with just spending all your time making sure there are no major hassles—and you'll be able to retire in comfort.
 -**People-pleasing** can become a god. Anyone here into being the community weirdo? I'm not. Most of us don't usually consciously chose to make things more uncomfortable or inconvenient for ourselves. We don't think, "I wonder who I can annoy today?" We want to fit in.
 -And that's where, sometimes, the test comes for us. It's the social expectations of the people around us when it comes to shopping, amusement, vacations, toys, home improvements, clothes and cars. When kids deal with it—it's called **peer pressure**.
 -For a while Lori and I had a couple of cars that served us well—but weren't very cool. They were both over 10 years old—and the glamour was **long** gone. It might've been okay, except that one of them had holes--and made a weird rattling noise. So, one of our children would be out playing street hockey—and he could **hear** the car coming. Of course, his friends would razz him. And it embarrassed him. And we felt the pressure. Can anyone identify with that?
 -We have to be really careful that our decisions aren't part of bowing before the idol of people pleasing. Our longing to fit in—or at least **not** stand out—can be a cruel taskmaster that drives our spending, our work habits, and our purchases.

- C. We have to ask ourselves the question--***What is the point of my life?*** I've got news—we aren't cats. We've got ***one life!*** Here's the deal—if the real god behind the scenes of your life is comfort—is it worth giving your ***one and only life*** to? What about money and success? Being seen as normal? What a weird goal in life, “I looked just like everyone else!”
- See, if something like this is driving your life, something called the ***law of the harvest*** kicks in—which is a good principle to consider here: ***What am I going to grow with these seeds I'm planting?*** Everyone plants ***something***. Everyone ***grows*** something. And what comes up in your garden really shouldn't be a surprise. In writing to another group, Paul says:

Don't be misled: No one makes a fool of God. What a person plants, he will harvest. The person who plants selfishness, ignoring the needs of others—ignoring God!—harvests a crop of weeds. All he'll have to show for his life is weeds! But the one who plants in response to God, letting God's Spirit do the growth work in him, harvests a crop of real life, eternal life.
(Galatians 6:7-8 MSG)

1. See, here's the deal. You can't go through life secretly serving other idols—putting other less worthy things before God—and end up with good stuff. You can't. The Apostle Paul couldn't; Mother Theresa couldn't; Billy Graham can't, Martin Luther King, Jr. couldn't; I can't. And you can't.
2. ***Everyone*** plants; ***everyone*** harvests. And a good principle—a good question to ask in the gray zones of life is, ***What am I planting here? Will it grow good stuff—weeds, or poison ivy?*** It would actually be good to think that through before you plant the seeds!

III. WHAT WOULD JESUS DO?

- A. As Paul comes down to the end of this section, he lays out a ***very*** profound principle. Let's look at it:

So whether you eat or drink, or whatever you do, do it all for the glory of God.
(1 Corinthians 10:31 NLT)

Anyone here ever heard of the Westminster Catechism? A catechism is a manual for teaching doctrine. Well, the ***Shorter Westminster Catechism*** (which has 107 questions!) says that the ***chief end of [humans] man is 1) to glorify God and 2) to enjoy him forever.*** Don't worry, I'm not going to read the other 106.

-But all of this does really force us to ask ourselves, “What does it mean to ***do*** something for the glory of God? To ***glorify*** God? It means that you do what you do as an act of worship. When you glorify anything—you declare it to be worthy of highest honor.

-When you put God first—His plans, His thoughts, His reputation—before anything or anyone else—you ***glorify*** Him. When you do something to the ***glory*** of God, you point to Him. You say, “It ain't me—it's ***Him***.”

-You've probably heard me or someone else say that ***we*** are the Body of Christ—His visible representation in this world. We are His hands and feet. When we ***glorify*** God, we help others see him for Who He really is; for how loving and kind He is.

That's He's forgiving and generous and compassionate. In a world that has largely forgotten God, or gotten twisted notions of what He's like—we **glorify** Him when others see glimpses of His unfailing love and compassion and kindness--in us! It points toward Him.

1. The opening words of ***The Purpose-Driven Life*** by Rick Warren are:

“It’s not about you. The purpose of your life is far greater than your own personal fulfillment, your peace of mind, or even your happiness. It’s far greater than your family, your career, or even your wildest dreams and ambitions. If you want to know why you were placed on this planet, you must begin with God. You were born *by* his purpose and *for* his purpose.”
2. This is the bottom-line principle that there are no loopholes in. It’s probably the toughest one to live out. Consistently.
 - a. **Whatever you eat—whatever you drink—**do that for the glory of God. Think about this for a minute: How did Jesus glorify God with His life—because He did it perfectly. Did He have fun? Sure did. Did He drink wine, go to parties? Yep. Tell funny stories and laugh? Yep. But his **whole life** was about pleasing God and serving others. Ultimately, He glorified God by laying down on a cross while Roman soldiers drove 7” iron spikes through his wrists and feet—and giving His life for us. He did everything the Father asked Him to do.
 - b. Bringing glory to God can be as simple as being grateful for all He’s given us. In 1 Corinthians 6, we are called to bring glory to Him with our bodies. What does that mean? Well—maybe by recognizing that they belong to him—and treating them with care and respect.

-We have a Sheltie named Jaz that we dearly love. She is so much fun! I would never feed her a bunch of junk that would ultimately destroy her health and take her life. So—if I wouldn’t do that to my dog, I shouldn’t do that to myself! Lori tells me I like salt too much. I tell her salt if a preservative—if I eat enough, I’ll preserve myself. She’s not convinced.
 - c. Know what **really** glorifies God—pleases Him immensely? It’s when we love others as He loves them. It’s when, for His sake, we lay aside our right to say what we want, do what we want, and spend how we want—so that we can make the difference in others lives we were meant to make.
2. I want you to think about those words... ***Whatever you do, do it all for the glory of God. (1 Corinthians 10:31 NLT)***

What does the word, ***whatever*** leave out? Nothing that I can think of. That, friends, is the phrase that totally saturates all the gray area of life. Hit some activity you’re not sure about? Ask, “Could I do this as an act of worship to God—in a way that would show Him off for how awesome He is—and cause others to want to be around Him?”

- a. You sometimes will hear me or Blaise say something as you leave like, “Now the real worship begins.” Life is an act of worship. Whether it’s cooking a meal, writing a research paper, telling jokes with a friend, listening to music, fishing, golfing—it’s an act of pleasing God with all we do.
- And it’s not just our actions. It’s our attitudes, too. Cooperation, compassion, kindness, joy, peace, empathy, humility—these are all attitudes that reflect the glory of God.
- How many of you think we can do unforgiveness to the glory of God? Is there such a thing as doing cruelty—in a way that pleases God? Can a person be unjust, unfeeling, rude, or stingy to the glory of God—as an act of worship? **“God, today I offer my greed and pride and self-interest as an act of worship to you!”**
- I think our words—the things we say and write and text and email to others should bring glory to God. How would it change our lives? Think what might happen if **before** you or I send a stinging email, or give someone a piece of our minds—you and I would ask a simple question, “Is this something I can do or say to the glory of God?” You know how we have **Spell Check** on our computers? Wouldn’t it be cool to have a **Glory To God** Check key?
- Man, **this** messes with everything, doesn’t it? TV. Driving. Dating. Conversations. Bank accounts. Fishing...and telling the truth!
- b. **Whatever** we do—whether it’s what we eat, or what we drink—what we wear—do it to the glory of God.
- Now, it would be easy to get the wrong idea on this. I told you I was raised without a TV. In her more fun, sarcastic moments, Lori will sometimes say, “Yeah, they sat around and read their Bibles all the time!” And I say, “You mean **your** family didn’t?”
- God has given us **all** our senses, our love for beauty and humor and play and challenge—all the things that bring joy to life. Jesus has given us the capacity to **fully enjoy life!** Doing everything for His glory means living fully—but in constructive, good ways that **invites others into the joy!** Especially those whose lives could be described as gray and sad and colorless. God wants **them** to come to the party. Sometimes in life it’s very easy to become preoccupied with just getting ourselves to the good things—the party.
- B. I believe our purpose, in bringing glory to God, is bigger than us just keeping our noses clean and making sure most of our friends still like us at the end of the day. I think bringing God glory gets into His purposes in this world. What’s God up to, anyway? Well, the main thing He’s up to is His Kingdom—restoring the peace, goodness, love, and justice to every part of His Creation. Bringing everything—no matter how dark it is—and everyone—no matter how far away they are—under his kind, generous, wise leadership.
- Our part in that is for our lives to make a difference—a reconciling, redemptive difference whether we’re at GE, IBM, Tim Horton’s—or buried in cubicle-land. Jesus

put it like this in his core teaching on how to build a foundation for life—how to live in this Kingdom:

You are the salt of the earth. But what good is salt if it has lost its flavor? Can you make it salty again? It will be thrown out and trampled underfoot as worthless.

You are the light of the world—like a city on a hilltop that cannot be hidden. No one lights a lamp and then puts it under a basket. Instead, a lamp is placed on a stand, where it gives light to everyone in the house. In the same way, let your good deeds shine out for all to see, so that everyone will praise your heavenly Father. (Matthew 5:13-16 NLT)

1. Salt is very cheap today—but in Jesus' day it was very valuable. Not just for flavor—but for preserving things like fish in a warm climate with no refrigeration! And in a day when there were no antibiotics, salt was many times used to purify things.
-When Jesus told us that **we**, his followers, are the salt of the earth—the imagery was immense. He was telling us that we have the potential for more influence than we could possibly ever imagine. His warning is—don't **waste** your influence! Don't water it down! Salt is only good when it gets out of the box, out of the shaker, out of township storage barns! It has to come into contact with stuff and do it's thing to actually be worth anything.
2. Of course, the next image is just as powerful. Think about it. You are the **light of the world**. Without light, there's only...**darkness**. Without light—there's no color, there's no sight, there's no way of finding your way. If you've ever been trying to walk around in the dark and stubbed your toe—you know that darkness can be painful. You say things you oughtn't say!
-When it comes to light—Jesus says, “for it to do it's thing—it can't be covered up! Light is meant to **shine!** And then this:

In the same way, let your good deeds shine out for all to see, so that everyone will praise your heavenly Father. (Matthew 5:16 NLT)

-Again, let me ask: Is Jesus primarily talking here about us not doing bad things and screwing up? No. And he's not telling us to parade all we do—make sure **everyone** knows how generous and compassionate we are. He's saying that when our focus is on bringing a loving, good, kind, just influence wherever we are—we will light up every room we're in.

3. I was raised in a culture of personal piety—which was mainly about—or seemed to be about—shining up your own life; ridding yourself of bad habits, bad thoughts, bad music, bad hair, and bad breath. **Be clean for Jesus!!!!**
-And there's nothing wrong with personal purity. Not at all! Jesus blessed purity and righteousness—and called us to live obedient lives! But this has a whole different feel here—because Jesus isn't talking about how much your personal piety will impress others. He's talking about how we engage in the things God cares about in this world. Let's see if we can figure out what that is:

- a. How many of you think God is really, **really** concerned about the TSE and NASDAC and Wall Street?
 -How many of you think that God has been watching **America's Next Top Model** and **American Idol** and the **Emmy's** and the **Oscar's** and the **Freddie's** (just threw that one in)—and is thinking deeply about the next star He wants to promote?
 -How many of you think God is concerned about me catching a trophy bass this summer and being featured on the cover of **Field & Stream**?
- b. Does God know about and care about all things? Yes. But you know what breaks His heart—and caused Him to give his son? A world of people, broken by sin—desperately needing to be reconciled to Himself. And **then** there's the immense sadness and suffering and oppression sin has caused in every corner, every home, every corporate office, and every back alley on this planet. It **breaks His heart!** He knows, intimately, the lives and stories of the 50 **million** slaves in our world.
 -I think he knows and **watches and longs for** the poor and hungry and trapped—not just on the streets of Calcutta or Philadelphia or New York or Toronto—but right here in Markham.
 -I think he knows and **watches** families—isolated, lost, trapped in addictions and ugly situations—maybe right next to me or right next to you. And, of course, the biggest tragedy is not just the stupid suffering—it's being lost—separated from a God who longs for every person to come home.
- c. I could go on, and on, and on, **and on!** The lie we sometimes believe is that we can't make a difference. And the problem is—if we're the salt of the earth and the light of the world—and God Himself lives in us—and **we** can't make a difference—then **who can?** Who **will?**
4. Do you see where the gray is? The gray is in what we do with our time, our money, and our energy. Can we trade in our 4 year old car and get a new one—just for the gleam of new paint and the smell of new leather—or vinyl? Yep! Can we change houses—just to shake things up and do something new and make the payments? Yep! Can we upgrade to a newer, faster, slimmer, sexier...**computer** every year? Yep.
 -Can we spend most of our spare time traveling or driving kids to a gazillion activities or text-messaging friends and keeping the gossip trail alive? Yep. Are these evil, wrong, sinful activities that will eat our souls alive? Probably not
 -So—we need something defining to penetrate the gray. Something like, ...**Let your good deeds shine out for all to see, so that everyone will praise your heavenly Father.** Something like, ...**Whatever you do, do it all for the glory of God.**
 -Jesus says, "Go ahead. Go! Go light up the world! Be such a powerful force of people who **love mercy, act justly and walk humbly with their God** that people's eyes automatically turn toward the **only One** who can make people like that. **God!** Just make sure that whatever you do, wherever you are—it's **Good News.** It's **Good News** to have you as a friend, as an employee, as a neighbor, as a daughter, as a parent—as just a fellow/sister traveler in this

world! That's when worship gets dangerously good! Dangerously close to what God longs to do through us—in our world. That's when gray turns to light!

IV. CLOSING

- A. Is life about decisions? Of course it is! And sometimes we are faced with issues we don't know *what* to do with. This principle is profound. Will this be pleasing to God? Will my actions cause people to think *more* of God than they do now?
- B. Then...think bigger! What impact could God make through **your** life—as salt and light? It doesn't take much of either. Think about that—and think about your life as we watch this video in closing. **Zaballeen video.**