

Series: **SHADES OF GREY—March 30, 2008**

**GREY 1: WILL IT HELP...OR HINDER?
1 Corinthians 6:12; 10:22-24**

I. INTRO

- A. I was raised in a very legalistic culture—and, in some ways, a legalistic home. The thought of there being **grey issues** never really crossed my mind all that much. Things were pretty much black and white—and I accepted them as such.
- There's a legend that floats around our family of when my black and white world came into direct contact with my Great Aunt Edna's grey world as she sat smoking in my Grandfather's basement bar. I watched her for a while, then said, "Aunt Edna—you won't go to heaven smokin' those things." No comment. She took a sip of beer. I said, "Aunt Edna, you won't go to heaven if you drink beer, either!"
- Aunt Edna snorted in the way only she could and said, "That's nothin'! I swear, too!" My curiosity got the better of me. "You do?? What do you **say!?**" I think my Mom, the queen of black and white, rescued me about then—and made me apologize.
1. After a while I learned to pretty much ignore this stuff. I mean—you **have** to choose the mountains you're going to die on, right? One Sunday on vacation in North Bay, we were coming back from church—and an afternoon of gluttony at a Chinese restaurant to....look at the lake. I mean, swimming or fishing on Sunday was on the black side of the list. I saw a bait shop and thought, "Why not stop now, rather than drive back tomorrow." Lori was with me at the time. My Mom said, "Why do we need to stop today and buy bait on Sunday?" One of us, I'm not going to say which, said, "Well, what's the difference between making people in a restaurant work—and making people at a bait shop work?" My Mom didn't say a word to her—oops! That slipped out—she just humphed, threw her head back, and closed her eyes.
 2. Now, can anyone here relate to **anything** I just said? If you were to talk a walk through history—you'd find that almost **everything** has been considered wrong at some point. Beards, mustaches, chrome, electricity, charging interest, credit cards, banks, TV, phones, cards—all kinds of stuff.
- Now, most of the issues I've raised are non-issues today, right? But we have **our** issues, don't we? Like being **politically correct**.
- B. The Bible has been around for almost 2000 years in one form or another. It was written to people who lived in a vastly different culture than ours—one without electricity, automobiles, phones, TV, mass media and computers. And yet, because it was written under the inspiration of the Spirit of God to address human beings, many of the issues it addresses are still the same. Whether a person wears a suit or a toga—or drives a Mustang—or a real horse—doesn't change who we are and what we struggle with.
- What I'm saying is that what the Bible says about basic moral issues that deal with our character, our sexuality, our longings, and our money hasn't changed.
1. Some issues are black and white. Stealing will always be wrong. Murder, lying, coveting, greed—will always be wrong. But there **are** gray areas of life, aren't there. Things the Bible really doesn't address.
- What about the internet? Gossip magazines? Chocolate—I mean, could chocolate be wrong? Stem cell research? What about prescription drugs and whiskey and gambling and R-rated movies? And what about skimpy clothing—or clothing made in sweat shops?

2. We've been studying a letter written by Paul, an early church leader, to a church in Corinth. Corinth was a city a lot like Toronto. Multi-cultural. Obsessed with sex, money and power. Paul has to deal with a **lot** of issues with them—stuff they had dragged out of life before Jesus.
 - One of the issues they asked him about was a **huge** part of their culture—but one we can barely relate to. The specific issue is, “What’s wrong with going to the temples to other gods in our city to have a great meal?” Now, is there anyone here who’s had to deal with an issue like that?
 - Well, it was a hot issue for them—and in the process of answering it—Paul lays out some great principles for us as **we** make decisions where things aren’t either black or white, wrong or right—but shades of gray.

II. BEEF BBQ...OR VEGGIE STIR FRY?

- A. Now, let me give you some background. Corinth was a city that was **jammed** with temples. They had gods—and invoked the names of these gods—for almost everything under the sun. Added to all of this was the Roman domination—and with it, worship of the Roman Emperor.
 1. Here’s the problem. These temples served as both the banquet halls, golf clubs, restaurants, and meeting places for just about any social gathering. And these social gatherings would have about the same regularity in that culture as watching TV in ours. There was always something going on.
 - And, if you wanted to go out to eat, those temples **were** the only restaurants. If you wanted to buy meat—about the only meat in the marketplace was meat that had been offered to one of the gods in these temples. There was a reason for this; to make sure they were covered—they had gods for everything you could possibly imagine—and for some you can’t!
 - That’s the culture. Among the followers of Jesus in Corinth, there were people who felt **very** strongly that it was **always** wrong to go to a temple to eat—or to even eat meat from one. And then there were the people who thought it was **never** wrong to either go to a temple for a meal or eat meat from one.
 - If you were to go to a temple for a social gathering or a meal, there wasn’t just the sacrificing and offering up of the animal, there was the after-dinner entertainment—which sometimes included prostitutes. To choose not to go to these events—or these restaurants—would almost be a form of social suicide. This is where people made business contacts. This is where people hung out, spent time with friends. It was a huge deal.
 2. Because of what was going on in these temples, Paul apparently told the people not to go to them. Of course, some of them weren’t about to give this up without a fight.
 - The first issue Paul deals with is this know-it-all attitude they had. Every met someone who is **way** more confident than they should be that their opinion is right? Like, they’ve got an opinion on **everything!** And not only do they have an opinion, their opinion is **right!**
 - The **need-to-be-right** quotient among the people in Corinth was huge—and their actions were based more on their need to be right than love and consideration. So Paul says:
Now regarding your question about food that has been offered to idols. Yes, we know that “we all have knowledge” about this issue. But while

knowledge makes us feel important, it is love that strengthens the church. Anyone who claims to know all the answers doesn't really know very much. But the person who loves God is the one whom God recognizes.

(1 Corinthians 8:1-3 NLT)

-What Paul is saying is, "You knowledge—and the pride you take in it is inflating your head—and shrinking your heart!

-Anyone here remember a time in your life when you knew a *lot*—probably more than your parents? We usually hit that point in our teens—and sometimes in early adulthood. I always thought the term used in the States to used to describe a person in their second year of high school or university was fascinating. **Sophomore**. It comes from two Greek words. **Sophos**—wise, and **moros**—fool. And it means? **Wise fool**.

-Here's the point. Wherever we are in life, sometimes when we're learning a bunch of new things, we can become arrogant and begin to pass judgment on others who, in our opinion, just haven't caught up to us. That's what was going on here. These people talked in condescending terms about the people who, unlike them, just didn't **know** any better. **Poor unfortunate souls!**

-Paul is very polite—but crystal clear. Knowledge makes **you** feel important; love puts **others** first. Knowledge—and the arrogance that goes with it—can destroy the souls of people Jesus gave His life for. And that's unthinkable! In Jesus' kingdom, love is **always** what counts most!

-Here's the bottom line: When you have to make a decision on a grey issue, knowledge alone—especially if it's tainted with arrogance—will get you going in the wrong direction—no matter **how** right you are!

3. The second thing Paul deals with here on grey issues is our conscience—and the consciences of others. If, for some reason, it feels wrong and seems wrong to you or someone you're influencing, be careful. Paul says in another passage that deals with this same issue:

But if you have doubts about whether or not you should eat something, you are sinning if you go ahead and do it. For you are not following your convictions. If you do anything you believe is not right, you are sinning. (Rom. 14:23 NLT)

- a. Interesting, isn't it—that the Bible tells us to pay attention to our consciences. And one of the things we're going to talk about next week is how to respect and care about the consciences of others.

-This is talking about your personal convictions. The things you feel strongly about doing—or not doing. The important thing to realize is that your convictions are **your convictions**. You don't need to sign anyone else up on your list of convictions—on your list of what you really feel strongly about. Know why? Because, see, that's the **Holy Spirit's** job, not yours. He does that real well—we don't.

- b. I mentioned at the beginning that my Mom and Dad were pretty legalistic. What kept me going in the right direction is that, 1) they were consistent and, 2) they weren't condemning of others. They gave me the freedom to make up my own mind on issues. And where they didn't, I didn't **tell** them.

-I think Paul would say to you and me, "If something feels wrong to you—**don't do it. Don't violate your conscience.**

4. There's another issue here, when it comes to gray that I've alluded to already. Make **sure** it's a gray issue. Showing mercy, generosity, telling the truth, kindness, love, forgiveness are **always** right; and coveting, stealing in any form, greed, selfishness, jealousy, hatred and sexual impurity are **always** wrong. -In a politically correct culture, it's very easy to get wishy-washy on stuff God clearly says is wrong and destructive. The hard question I think we always need to ask is, "Am I making this a **gray** issue because it involves a pattern of behavior in my life that I don't want to give up? Know what? If God has already made something clear that He wants his followers to do—you don't need to pray to find out what His will is for **you!** You just need to be honest and say, "God, I'm not prepared to obey you on this issue." Don't call things grey that **aren't** grey!
 5. Another principle Paul uses here in this passage—and all through this book, really—**does it show love for God and others?** See, sometimes we do things that we feel perfectly okay on, but it's done in a way that is unloving, or apathetic to someone else so that it hurts them spiritually, it's wrong.
- B. You have to understand, Paul was in a tough position here. He was dealing with an issue that had huge social consequences for a lot of these people—especially some of the more influential ones. Taking **any** position on meat that had been offered to idols would probably alienate someone and maybe divide the church.
1. There was a Jewish component to this church—and when it came to food, believe me, Paul understood **kosher**. The Jewish people in the congregation would be scandalized at the thought of eating non-kosher meat—and especially meat that had been associated with an idol or a temple. -But Paul also understood the freedom that Christ brought. He knew, better than anyone, that all foods had been declared clean; that Jesus, by his death and resurrection, had defeated Satan and all the forces to darkness—and that they didn't need to be afraid of them.
 2. So, instead of giving a list of hard and fast rules, "do this, **don't** do that; go here; **don't** go there"—Paul takes a very wise approach. He appeals to timeless principles that will help them make good decisions—and can help us make good decisions, too. -And the issue of **food** is still an issue for some, isn't it? There are some religions—and some sectors of Christianity—that say that certain foods are off limits. Some won't eat meat. Some won't eat pork. Without digging too deeply into this, what I can give you is what Jesus said: "**It's not what goes into your body that defiles you; you are defiled by what comes from your heart (Mark 7:16 NLT).**"

Later, when Jesus' disciples questioned him on this he said,

"Can't you see that the food you put into your body cannot defile you? Food doesn't go into your heart, but only passes through the stomach and then goes into the sewer." (By saying this, he declared that every kind of food is acceptable in God's eyes) (Mark 7:18-19 NLT).

3. With the rise in eating disorders and whacko diets and fast food and heart disease and obesity and food allergies—I think we **all** need to think carefully about what we eat. What we—especially in North America—have to realize is

that most of the world can't afford to be as weird and finicky about food as we are.

-The problem we run into is getting obsessed with food—and getting it mixed up with our faith. Here's the deal. We have complete freedom to make healthy decisions for ourselves on what we eat based on our convictions. What we **don't** have the freedom to do, according to what the Bible says, is judge others on the basis of what we have decided for ourselves. Know why? Because the Holy Spirit who lives in them is able to lead them in the right direction. He does a **great** job—and we don't need to do it for Him.

4. Now. What am I saying? Aren't there health issues involved? Sure there are. And there are issues of gluttony and slavery to food. We **are** called to be care for our bodies. I know that. But those are personal issues—between us and God—not religious rules.

So don't let anyone condemn you for what you eat or drink, or for not celebrating certain holy days or new moon ceremonies or Sabbaths. For these rules are only shadows of the reality yet to come. And Christ himself is that reality. (Colossians 2:16-17 NLT)

III. PRINCIPLE #1: IS IT GOOD...OR BAD FOR ME?

- A. What I would like to do now is take a closer look at one of the principles the Bible gives to help us make decisions in gray areas. **Will this help me...or hinder me?**

-How many of you think that God knows what the **perfect** decision is for you to make every moment of every day? How many of you think God could lay out a splendid menu for you that would keep you trim and fit and healthy—every day of every year? How many of you think that God could handpick the perfect job, the perfect car, the perfect schedule—and the perfect TV viewing agenda for any given evening? How many of you think God is vast enough, smart enough and wise enough to do that for every human, every animal, every insect and every plant on this planet?

-Friends, from what I know about God—he could do that in the twinkling of an eye—laid out moment by moment—and burn it right onto the hard-drive of your computer.

-So, **why doesn't He?** It's because He is not a micro-manager. He's not a control freak. He's not into creating better performers. He has given us an **amazing**, but **dangerous** gift. The gift of freedom. And he's told us to **never** trade this gift in for slavery. That's the message all through the New Testament. Freedom! It's an Exodus from slavery. In particular—slavery to Satan and death and law.

1. But sometimes we don't know how to handle freedom. Sometimes we mistake rebellion--or selfishness—for freedom. And when we mishandle freedom—it almost always leads back to slavery.

-Let me illustrate. I'm free to eat what I want. I can go to MacDonald's, Pizza Hut, Dairy Queen, Tim Horton's and Haagen Daz anytime—and as much as I want. I'm free! Now, listen to this principle as Paul spells it out to the people of Corinth:

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. (1 Corinthians 6:12 NLT)

- a. Now, this principle is one of those **du-u-uh** moments—but sometimes we don't think. ***Not everything is good for you!***
 -I loved my Dad dearly. From my perspective, though, he lived a very sedentary life and ate stuff that wasn't good for him. Now, he lived to 80 and led a church and spoke twice every Sunday until a week before his 80th birthday. But his health issues caught up to him and were probably instrumental in taking away his ability to do woodwork and carving—things he loved--and ultimately took his life.
 -I'm trying to learn from that! I don't know my future—but as best I can, I'm trying to live by the principle, ***not everything is good for you!***
- b. Let's apply this to something else. How about TV? Is TV good—or evil? Well, it ***depends***, doesn't it? In and of itself, it's really neutral. It's ***grey***. I was raised without a TV—not because my parents believed it was evil, but because they felt it wasn't necessarily good for us. Anyone else like that? Okay—I'm more weird than I thought! I'd have to say that not having a TV didn't make my childhood better or worse—just different.
 -Can anyone think of a situation where TV might ***not*** be good for a person? Well, if it becomes a substitute for real life, that's a problem. If a person adopts the value system of TV as good and normal, that's a problem. If a TV gets used almost exclusively as a babysitter—that's a problem. If a person feeds off the immorality TV offers, or if they buy into the materialism and consumerism TV blatantly promotes every minute of every day—it's wrong.
2. There's another principle in this passage.

I must not become a slave to anything (1 Corinthians 6:12 NLT).

Everyone know what slavery is? I'll give you a few examples. It's when you not longer eat to live—you live to eat. It's when you no longer **choose** to have a beer—or a glass of wine—it chooses you. It's when it's virtually impossible for you to log on to your computer without getting into pornography—or some chat room.

-Friends, ***all kinds of stuff*** can make slaves of us. Boats, golf, shopping, sex, the internet, fishing, cell phones, email, gossip, judging, alcohol, driving fast, sports, lawns, TV, movies, chocolate, work, Tim Horton's—I mean, you name it. All of this stuff can become our master—and we can become the slave.

-The Bible says, "You're a human being! You've been created with amazing potential—and the freedom you have is ***very*** expensive! It cost Jesus His life.

Don't trade freedom for slavery! Ever! Know where Paul gives this principle? When he was talking about the Corinthian's sexual behavior. Sexual behavior is one of the most addictive, shaming things to get enslaved by.

3. See, what this forces you and I to do is something called ***forecasting***. To look beyond our immediate desires and pressures and ask the question, "Will this make me a slave? Will I start out—as all slavery does—feeling cool and free and exhilarated—as the chains grow thicker every year? What does a person ***chained*** to this stuff look like after 5 years? After 15 years?
 -I know this about people who have gotten enslaved to something that's sucking the life out of them, or costing them more than they realized, or stealing their health, or hurting their relationships. When the thought occurred to them that

they **could** get addicted or enslaved to destructive behavior, they calmed themselves by saying, “Not me. It won’t happen to **me**. I won’t get caught. I can quit any time I want.”

-Can I do a **by-the-way** on this? If you suspect that you’re on the road to some kind of enslaving or addictive behavior—don’t play games with it! Your freedom—and maybe a whole lot more—is at stake here. I believe that Jesus sets people free. Sometimes it takes time—maybe detox, rehab, counseling, getting involved in a recovery program—but by the power of God, you **can** be free. Don’t wait—because there will **never** be a better moment than this to get free. Freedom is an incredibly precious gift.

- B. Now, some of the areas I’ve mentioned above are not grey. Particularly addictions. I don’t think a person can say, “Well, I’m addicted to—alcohol, drugs, pornography, shopping, gambling, food, work—but, it’s really okay. It’s one of those **grey** things.” It’s not okay. The definition of sin is when something replaces God or displaces God’s will for our lives.

-But there **are** other things where it really is a grey issue—and the principle is more,

“Given who I am, where I am, and what God is asking me to do, will this help me or hinder me?”

To a group of people who were **very** big on their personal freedom in following Jesus, Paul said:

You say, “I am allowed to do anything”—but not everything is good for you.

You say, “I am allowed to do anything”—but not everything is beneficial.

(1 Corinthians 10:23 NLT)

1. There are two different concepts that are raised here—but both are getting at the bottom line of helpfulness. The first concept is, **is it good for you?** This is asking, “In the long run, will this make me a better person?” Will this somehow **help** me—or help **somebody**? Will I have something to show for my investment of time and energy?

-I recently finished a project for Lori that had been sitting in our basement for at least 10 years. We have this really cool chair from the late 1800s with a cane seat and a cane back. Sometime in the past, I tried to re-cane this chair—but had the wrong materials. It looked bad—and didn’t last. It was **unproductive!** I didn’t just have to re-cane the thing—I had to take out all the old stuff. So, this time Lori got me some instructions from the internet—and it turned out **wonderful!**

-We have a limited amount of life and the gifts that go with it. What we **do** with those gifts is sometimes not a matter of, “is it right or wrong?” It’s—will it be good for me, for my soul—and good for the others around me?

2. The second concept is, **“Is it beneficial?”** The word used here could be translated, **build a house**. It’s neither right nor wrong—but will it ultimately benefit me or someone else. Will it **build** something, or will it **tear something down**.

-I’ll tell you where I think this applies in **spades** in our world. It’s in what we say...or text...or email to people. See, a lot of times we get really steamed about something—and our instinct is to dump our load on someone. We sometimes do this verbally—but we especially do it in email.

-Now, if we were to just check the **words**, we might be able to say, “This is an accurate representation of how I feel” or “This is an accurate representation of the truth.” But **that’s** not really the question. The question is, “Is this going to be **beneficial?**” And the other question is, “Will this build up our relationship or tear it down?”

-I think what we’d find if we looked more closely at our impulses is that not only are we wasting our time by writing or saying stuff—we are on the verge of investing a whole bunch of emotional energy. See, those impulses don’t usually lead to peace and understanding; they go someplace else.

3. Sometimes the deciding factor in using this principle can be summarized in the words, **how much? how often?** This fits just about everything—watching TV, going to movies, shopping for food, phone calls, sports, fishing...! It’s not wrong; the question is—how much of my life—measured in minutes and hours--am I investing in it?

-Music would be an issue that could fall into this category. Does music, generally speaking, build you up? Is it good for you? Of **course** it is! But then the issues of **what** you’re listening to and **how much time** you’re spending at it can change music from being a positive influence to a destructive influence in your life.

C. So, let’s give this principle a trial run and see if it works.

1. How about golf—which is a big deal in our world? Is golf **good** for you? Well, it can be, right? It can be relaxing. If you don’t ride in cart too much, it can be good exercise. Golf is a **good** thing.

-Can it enslave you? **Define enslave?** It actually can. It can become all about getting better equipment, better memberships, taking trips you can’t afford. There is such a thing as a golf widow—as golf orphans.

-If golf is eating up pretty much all of a person’s extra time and a lot of money—then it may actually be tearing down what you want to be building with your life.

2. How about **shopping?** Grey area, right? If a person finds shopping relaxing, relationship-building—and uses it constructively to get good deals for the family on food and clothing it can be a good thing. If a person uses their shopping skills to purchase good things at a good price for people in need—it can be a good thing.

-But recreational shopping can also lead to coveting, right? Where a shopping trip becomes a **coveting** trip—or a “we can’t afford to save all this money” trip. Shopping, if we’re not careful with it, can be a gateway to our culture’s obsession with consuming and recreational buying. Sometimes, in shopping, the lines between what I **need** and what I **want** can get very blurry. Shopping can be a gateway to dissatisfaction with what you have, who you are, and how you look.

-And shopping can also be addictive. Sometimes people try to fill deeper needs in their souls by buying more.

3. Any grey areas you’d like to put through this grid of questions—just to see where it leads?

IV. CLOSING

- A. Next week, what we talk about is going to be very much “other” centered. I don’t want you to think I’ve ignored that—because Paul encourages us to turn away from a **me-centered** life to an **other-centered** life.

-But on the specific principle today—how's it going? How are you doing? Is there an area of your life that, to be honest, really is a **grey** issue; but for you, it's become more. It's crossed the line from being helpful in your life—and the lives of those around you—and it's sucking time and energy and money. Stuff you can't afford to feed it--given the fact that you have only have **one** life. It's **so** easy to just give away hours of your life channel surfing, IM-ing, permanently attached to an I-Pod, or cruising stores for your next conquest. And you **really** need to ask, "Is this **good** for me? Does this benefit me and especially others in any way?"

-Or even, "Is this thing **my** servant, or have I become it's slave?"

- B. Life is precious; freedom is precious—both are huge gifts from God. So don't give away either without a **huge** fight!