

Gray Areas In Human Reasoning

There are no Gray Areas with God

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Never before has a society offered so much variety to choose from—assortments of food, cars, houses, furnishings, fashions, entertainment, and sadly, even life-styles. As if that's not enough to make your head spin, there's innumerable religions and churches to choose from as well.

Some variety is good. After all, God is the Author of variety. His creation abounds with different shapes, sizes, colors, smells, and sounds—all types of things for us to enjoy. But we have to be careful, because not all diversity is from God. He did not create a diversity of religions. Mankind, with Satan's influence, did that!

Satan is a super intelligent spirit being who has had millennia to perfect his deception and perversion. One of the ways he wears a Christian down is to place as many issues as he can in gray areas—areas, that man reasons, have no right or wrong answer. They are areas full of "what if" pitfalls.

When it comes to the Judeo-Christian religion today, most people place their beliefs in illusive "gray areas"—areas characterized by presumptuousness, compromise, and ignorance.

Lisa Keys, a staff writer for the *Forward Newspaper* wrote an article titled: "For Many, the 'December Dilemma' Loses Its Sting; As Anxiety Wanes, Christmas Revelry Gains Multicultural Appeal." I want to read part of this article to you because it is very eye-opening to the way not only this world at present thinks of such holidays as Christmas, but also many who used to be with the Church of God. She writes:

Although she was raised a Jew, this year Lauren Silberman will be home for Christmas. "Holidays are best for spending time with loved ones," said the 25-year-old photographer from Williamsburg, Brooklyn, who plans to enjoy a special dinner with her family in Stamford, Conn. "It's not necessarily Christmas if you're Jewish, it's just a day that's called Christmas. It's a special day—it's a holiday, we don't have to go to work—and we should take advantage of it."

Whether Ms. Silberman's statement warms your heart with holiday spirit or sends shivers running down your spine, hers is not an isolated sentiment. Anecdotal evidence suggests that a growing cadre of mostly non-observant Jews are finding ways to embrace aspects of the Christmas tradition—such as singing Christmas carols with the local choir, sending Christmas cards, or having a special dinner at home—without sacrificing a stitch of Jewish identity.

These Jews insist that it's all a part of being American in a multicultural society, whether its Barbara Streisand releasing her second Christmas album, or author Robert Rand recalling, in his book *My Suburban Shtetl*, how the Jews of Skokie, Ill., celebrated Christmas at a local school. As New York Times columnist Judith Shulevitz, a practicing Jew, wrote recently, "we have turned the American Christmas into an adoration less of a divine Christ than of the quasi-divine in us—our homes, children, families and communities."

She is realizing there that what people are really worshipping are themselves. Continuing...

...And Christmas, as many Christian clergy are wont to complain, has a wide range of secular associations. "Let's get real here," said Egon Mayer, director of Jewish studies at the City University of New York. "It's not like people who are not Jewish are doing Christmas because they are pious.

...Christmas, said Mr. Mayer, "is a holiday celebrated throughout the country, by people of all philosophical and theological persuasions because its largely turned into a national holiday that lends itself to fairly liberal interpretations. It's hard to reinterpret Yom Kippur for other than what it is, but it's easy to reinterpret Christmas ..."

(because Christmas has always had that history of being reinterpreted according to the paganism surrounding it!)

For Ms. Silberman, Christmas was "never about religion when I was growing up," she said. "We never talked about Jesus. We never even had a tree. It was about getting presents—and Santa Claus and snow and reindeer. It was part of the spirit."

She emphasizes the "spirit of getting" as being part of the spirit. Continuing on...

Of course, for many observers, Jewish participation in Christmas traditions—despite what these revelers say—comes at a cost to Jewish identity.

When people contend Christmas is a secular holiday, "They're missing the historical framework here," said Steven Bayme, director of Jewish Communal Affairs at the American Jewish Committee. "Christmas is a holiday of another faith, rooted in historical events in which Jews reject their theological significance. We do have a real theological difficulty with this—we disagree on whether or not Jesus was the Messiah."

Although he understands that many Jews are led to believe Christmas is a strictly American holiday, "I acknowledge Christmas as a religious holiday and therefore I think it's hard to celebrate without a compromise to Jewish identity."

...The 1990 National Jewish Population Survey found that while 54% of households with at least one Jewish resident never had a Christmas tree, 31% always do—a statistic that sent shock waves throughout the Jewish community.

...More typically, Jews fought back by elevating Hanukkah—a minor holiday in the Jewish calendar—in a sort of holiday arms race, and by pressing church-state litigation to quell Christmas displays on public property.

..."Intermarried Jews, even if they have established a Jewish home and have raised their children as Jews, will often go to their in-laws' house for Christmas," said Gail Quets, research director at the Jewish Outreach Initiative. "In other words, they'll participate in the celebration of the holiday, even if it isn't their own. In some instances, if the non-Jewish spouse maintains a religion distinct from Judaism, kids will see it as 'helping' that parent celebrate his or her holiday."

A common occurrence, said Ms. Quets, is when parents of a non-Jewish spouse grow too old to host their annual Christmas dinner. The intermarried couple "will offer to host a Christmas dinner in their Jewish home," she said. "They don't see it as a dilution of their Judaism or religious commitment, but see it as obeying the commandment to honor one's parents. ... I think most Jews think it's perfectly acceptable to help their non-Jewish friends celebrate holidays, to drop-in and help celebrate their traditions."

During Christmas time, Ms. Quets herself likes to have special dinners with friends and enjoy their Christmas trees, although she does not celebrate the holiday. "It's a way of spreading good cheer," she said. "I don't feel it dilutes my commitment to Judaism. I know many other Jews feel the same way."

Thousands of members of God's Church have, over the years, begun to celebrate this world's pagan holidays by first moving them into gray areas, by reasoning that they are harmless and even promote family peace. These are some of the many justifications that they use.

In this article, we see presuming, compromising and ignorant attitudes with regard to the celebration of Christmas. We see religious confusion! God made it very clear to the Israelites, including the Jews, that they are not to learn the way of the Gentiles or heathen (depending on the translation). The principle involved is found in Jeremiah 10. I have heard the arguments over the years that this is not about the Christmas celebration. I can agree with that only in the strictest sense. It is not about the Christmas celebration that designed and developed since Christ's birth. However, it is about the same exact type of traditions and the same tendencies and the origins of such traditions that are brought into Christmas.

Jeremiah 10:1-5 Hear the word which the LORD speaks to you, O house of Israel. Thus says the LORD: "Do not learn the way of the Gentiles; do not be dismayed at the signs of heaven, for the Gentiles are dismayed at them. For the customs of the peoples are futile; for one cuts a tree from the forest, the work of the hands of the workman, with the ax. They decorate it with silver and gold; they fasten it with nails and hammers so that it will not topple. They are upright, like a palm tree, and they cannot speak; they must be carried, because they cannot go by themselves. Do not be afraid of them, for they cannot do evil, nor can they do any good."

The part of the Scripture that people try to zero in on to justify Christmas is that last comment, "...nor can they do any good." They ignore that in verse 2 it says, "do not learn the ways of the Gentiles."

One of the woman interviewed for the article justified her decision to celebrate Christmas by explaining, "I don't feel it dilutes my commitment" (What she is actually saying is "*I don't think I'm compromising my beliefs*"). You can say things all you want, but if you do such things then you are compromising your beliefs *if* you believe in the Word of God as being the only source of truth.

She also uses the bandwagon justification, "most Jews think it's perfectly acceptable" and "many other Jews feel the same way." That must be one of the most common justifications for people doing things today. These justifications move things into the gray areas.

She also justifies her approval of pagan practices by ignorantly pitting the commandments of God against each other, as she presumes to disobey the first Commandment in order to keep the fifth Commandment. This is typical human reasoning for situations considered gray areas. But with God there are no gray areas. These are human fabrications.

Presumptuousness, compromise, disobedience and ignorance are just some of the characteristics that produce gray areas in human reasoning. As human beings, we tend to place unclear actions and thoughts (for which we have a lack of understanding) into what we call "gray areas."

It's an understatement to say that sometimes we feel distressed by the number of spiritual battles and temptations we face. And many of these battles we place in gray areas. Sometimes we may think the anxiety we feel comes from doing something wrong. But, for the true Christian it is more the result of doing something right.

It takes a great amount of resistance and perseverance to go against the world, Satan, and our own human nature.

The apostle Paul knew, only too well, that the steadfastness of a Christian—the desire to live godly lives—would result in persecution and suffering, and at times weariness. This weariness that we sometimes feel, that comes from some of the gray areas we create in our lives is a natural human tendency.

II Timothy 3:10-14 But you have carefully followed my doctrine, manner of life, purpose, faith, longsuffering, love, perseverance, persecutions, afflictions, which happened to me at Antioch, at Iconium, at Lystra—what persecutions I endured. And out of them all the Lord delivered me. Yes, and all who desire to live godly in Christ Jesus will suffer persecution. But evil men and impostors will grow worse and worse, deceiving and being deceived. But you must continue in the things which you have learned and been assured of, knowing from whom you have learned them,

This is something we, as Christians, have to solidify in our lives. Otherwise, we will flow into gray areas with issues in our lives.

If we rightly follow Christ, then we are a threat to the kingdom of Satan, and we will face opposition. Satan's goal is to keep us from moving forward spiritually. As a result, the battle rages on. He knows he can't overpower God, so he wants to draw us out by our own free will.

We observe that one of the most effective strategies he uses is the forming of gray areas by humanly reasoned compromise. Many times we have areas in our lives in which we are not sure how we should act. Or we might decide we want to do something that is not quite right. So we put it in a gray area so that we feel comfortable with doing it.

Webster's Dictionary says "compromise" means, "to weaken or give up (one's principles, ideals, etc.) as for reasons of expediency."

"Expediency" is, "the doing or consideration of what is of selfish use or advantage rather than what is right or just, self-interest." It is exposure, as of one's reputation, to danger, suspicion, or disrepute—a weakening, as of one's principles.

We have to be careful of the type of compromises we are making—we can never compromise with God's truth.

Here is the framework of a compromise. Satan wants us to make a small concession. If we look at any time in our lives when we have fallen into sin—if we retrace our steps, we can be sure that in most instances we will find that it started with a little bit of compromise.

We reason our desire into a gray area with a thought such as, "Go ahead, just don't go too far."

It's not a complete denial of what we know is right, but it is a compromise.

Satan knows just what buttons to push, to get us to reason around the desire, until we feel that we have found a "good" reason or angle to justify doing it. We are wise to not put our personal desires into areas of gray.

When Satan puts thoughts into our minds such as, "I believe Jesus Christ is my Savior and I go to church and I study my Bible, but let me have this one little area of my life. After all, it is a gray area."

Contemplate these questions:

How near can we get to the world's enticements and still be safe?

How close can we get to the lust of the flesh and the lust of the eyes?

How much prayer can we miss without suffering a lethal anemia?

How long can we go without opening a Bible, keeping second tithe, or praying for the sick?

How long can a professing Christian look at pornography or watch immoral movies?

How long can a professing Christian remain an independent "free thinking" Christian only partially committed to God's Church?

How many Sabbath services is it "OK" to miss?

How dark does Friday evening have to get before its sunset for us?

In all these circumstances and in many others we could list, a gray area may be formed from human reasoning. It may not be fatal at first. But it's only a matter of time before "longer" becomes "too long," "occasionally" becomes "often" and "a bit more" becomes "too much." Then, "seldom" becomes "never."

When dealing with situations not directly prohibited or promoted in Scripture we have to consider godly principles before we enter into the gray. God has left lots of decisions to our conscience that can't be called a sin or righteousness by man's authority. But God has given us principles in His written word to help guide us in choosing whether or not certain activities or situations are appropriate for Christians.

Let's look at some guidelines in the form of questions for addressing gray areas created through human reasoning. These are situations that are left to individual conscience. No question is sufficient in itself, all factors must be considered, and still prayerful decision within the principles of God's Word is needed in all humanly created gray areas.

Eight Points or Questions:

1. Is it the master or a slave?

The apostle Paul considered the correctness of using certain things that had been esteemed lawful. The expression, "all things are lawful," is abused by people who allow themselves certain indulgences, and who justify their vices.

Paul resolved to reply to them. His reply begins in verse 12. He had been correcting them for their vices, and had specified several sins. We should not assume that they would indulge in them without some sort of justification or show of defense.

I Corinthians 6:12-20 All things are lawful for me, but all things are not helpful. All things are lawful for me, but I will not be brought under the power of any.

Paul's declaration here is similar in appearance to a proverb, or a common saying—that all things were lawful; that is, God has formed all things for our proper use, and there can be no evil if we use them properly.

The specific things to which Paul refers, are those that have been called indifferent; that is, relating to such things as certain meats and drinks. With this Paul also connected the subject of sexual immorality—the subject specifically under discussion. This was defended as "lawful," by many Greeks, and was practiced at Corinth; and was the sin to which the Corinthian Christians were often exposed.

Paul was determined to show them that these indulgences were not proper for Christians, and could in no way be defended. Paul was showing that sexual immorality is in no way lawful. He showed that the practice could in no way be justified.

Human reasoning places such unlawful things in "gray areas"—godly reasoning sees no gray areas. Paul showed:

- A. Even though something may be lawful does not mean it is something that should be indulged in.
- B. Even though something may be lawful does not mean a person should allow himself to be under its power, especially if it is an improper indulgence. Any habit should be abandoned when it becomes the master.
- C. Even though something may be lawful does not mean that sexual immorality is ever lawful. It is positively a sin, and against the very nature and essence of Christianity.

I Corinthians 6:13-20 Foods for the stomach and the stomach for foods, but God will destroy both it and them. Now the body is not for sexual immorality but for the Lord, and the Lord for the body. And God both raised up the Lord and will also raise us up by His power. Do you not know that your bodies are members of Christ? Shall I then take the members of Christ and make them members of a harlot? Certainly not! Or do you not know that he who is joined to a harlot is one body with her? For "the two," He says, "shall become one flesh." But he who is joined to the Lord is one spirit with Him. Flee sexual immorality. Every sin that a man does is outside the body, but he who commits sexual immorality sins against his own body. Or do you not know that your body is the temple of the Holy Spirit who is in you, whom you have from God, and you are not your own? For you were bought at a price; therefore glorify God in your body and in your spirit, which are God's.

Remember the requirement of the spirit of the law in Matthew 5:27-28.

Matthew 5:27-28 "You have heard that it was said to those of old, 'You shall not commit adultery.' But I say to you that whoever looks at a woman to lust for her has already committed adultery with her in his heart."

Many people move sexual immorality, or even looking upon a woman and lusting, into the gray areas. They justify that it is okay, "It is only occasionally." They have many justifications.

Christian's have a constant fight against again becoming a slave to worldly enticements. Often we see someone who is completely under the power of some habit that destroys his usefulness and happiness.

He may be the slave of laziness, or carelessness, or of some vile habit—such as the use of tobacco or of the abuse of alcohol. He doesn't have independence enough to break the cords that bind him; and the consequence is, that life is passed in lethargy or in self-indulgence. His life is wasted by ineffective use of time, strength, and property. Everything in his life is wasted by becoming a slave to a sinful habit.

A person who doesn't have the courage and firmness to overcome bad habits is a voluntary slave to them. Is a Christian's conversion questionable if he doesn't have enough zeal to break off from such habits that he knows are doing injury? I'll let you answer that question.

We have to analyze every choice we make, as to whether or not the resulting action will be a master over us. If something seems to have dominance in our life, and we can't balance it with other areas of our lives, it may have mastery over us. We know we are to have no other gods before God.

Questions related to point 1:

Is it the master or the slave?

Is this situation something that has power over me?

Do I feel as if I can't do without it?

Have I done it with the right motives?

Is it something that I spend the majority of my time pursuing?

Are there times when I do this without thinking?

Has it become a habit?

2. Is it a stumbling block to others?

We have to make up our minds not to put any stumbling block or obstacle in our brother's way.

Romans 14:12-13 So then each of us shall give account of himself to God. Therefore let us not judge one another anymore, but rather resolve this, not to put a stumbling block or a cause to fall in our brother's way.

"Stumbling-block" literally means anything put in a man's path, over which he may fall. In the Scriptures, however, the word is used commonly in a figurative sense to signify anything that will cause him to sin. In connection with this, sin is often represented as falling.

Verse 13 admonishes that we should make up our mind not to act in such a way that would in any way cause a spiritual brother or sister to sin—either by our example, or by a severe and harsh judgment, or by provoking them to anger, or by stimulating jealousy, envy, or suspicion.

We don't want to be an excuse for someone to violate his conscience. This applies primarily to a brother who is uninformed or ignorant in some area of God's truth. But, the principle certainly applies to all.

While a certain activity may not be sin, but our brother in Christ feels as if it is, we must be careful not to promote confusion or offence that may encourage him to use us as an excuse for doing things he has placed in gray areas. Until that brother's conscience is better educated, don't tempt him to violate his conscience, nor offend him by participating in such lawful activities in his presence. It is best to avoid doing something that is going to offend or cause someone to stumble.

Questions related to point 2:

Is it a stumbling block to others?

Will this cause unnecessary conflict between my brother and me?

Does it unnecessarily offend my brother?

Does this hurt my brother's faith?

3. Is it helpful and does it edify others?

There are many things that are not forbidden in Scripture, but the principle that Christian activity must be beneficial is important. Many things can be done, but those things that will detract from our spiritual life rather than help it along should be avoided. In all aspects of life, a Christian must

CONSIDER THE END of his action! He must consider the consequences of his deeds! He must consider the result of his decisions!

I Corinthians 10:23-24 All things are lawful for me, but not all things are helpful; all things are lawful for me, but not all things edify. Let no one seek his own, but each one the other's well-being.

Although something may be lawful, it may not be expedient, profitable or helpful. It might injure someone; produce scandal; or lead others to sin. All lawful things don't build up, or edify, the Church, and when they don't have this effect, they aren't beneficial, and are improper.

Paul acted for the welfare of the Church. His goal was to teach the Truth of God. Anything that promoted that goal was proper; anything that hindered it (though in itself it might not be strictly unlawful by the letter of the law) was improper by the spirit of the law.

Some activities may not be sin, but they also may not edify others. Certain activities and choices may be ruled out because in principle they don't edify or spur others on to greater faith. As followers of Christ, we should always seek to edify our brothers and sisters in everything we do—being very careful not to tear down another's faith.

Here's an example: If a recovering alcoholic is present at a personal gathering it's best to not have alcohol so we don't tempt them in their weakness or needlessly offend them by our example. This type of situation has come up many times in God's Church.

If this simple rule—seeking the well-being of others—is applied to gray areas, it will help to regulate our conduct in many things for which there may be no exact and positive law. It will help to regulate our dress, our style of living, our entertainment, and our approach to the world. So it will regulate our way of life.

We may not be able to point at a specific law to say that this or that item of clothing is improper; that this or that hairstyle is absolutely forbidden; or that this or that tradition is contrary to any explicit law of God. But we may see that it will interfere with God's will and His great purpose.

Questions related to point 3:

Is it helpful and does it edify others?

Does this encourage my brother's faith to God?

Does this promote the well-being of my brother?

Will this help my brother grow in Christ?

4. Does it provide a proper witness for Christ?

As messengers for Christ we should be stepping-stones for those to whom we witness. Too often our actions show little or no difference between the believer and the unbeliever.

Some may not seek Christ because they don't see a difference. Instead of stepping-stones we become stumbling blocks. Paul said he tried not to offend as long as it didn't conflict with God's law.

I Corinthians 9:19-23 For though I am free from all men, I have made myself a servant to all, that I might win the more; and to the Jews I became as a Jew, that I might win Jews; to those who are under the law, as under the law, that I might win those who are under the law; to those who are without law, as without law (not being without law toward God, but under law toward Christ), that I might win those who are without law; to the weak I became as weak, that I might win the weak. I have become all things to all men, that I might by all means save some. This I do for the gospel's sake, that I might be partaker of it with you.

We see Paul's approach: whether to offend or not to offend a brother does not fit into a gray area at all.

On the other hand, one thing that commonly offends an unbeliever is the message of Christ itself. Christ said He came to divide people over the truth. But, many people are very willing to compromise to keep peace. By doing this they create innumerable gray areas in their lives.

Christmas is portrayed as a time of peace. Yet, in reality, it is a time of great violence. Year after year statistics show an increase in murder during the Christmas season. Many people want "peace" so badly, they're willing to do almost anything, ironically, even kill to have it.

But peace is not what Jesus promised for this age.

Luke 12:51 "Do you suppose that I came to give peace on earth? I tell you, not at all, but rather division."

Earlier in Luke 12, Jesus had told the people, "Don't worry, look how God cares for the birds of the air and the flowers of the field—aren't you more important than they?" Don't worry about this world's treasure, but be rich toward God, for God will give you the kingdom. And while over and over again, Jesus spoke of God's love, grace, and mercy, and how God will provide all, He does indicate that while it is all a free gift, God expects that we live His way of life at all times. So He does have specifics. If something is a gray area in our minds, and we go ahead and do it, we are not really living His way.

So, while God is loving, gracious and merciful, he is also demanding and specific—and that bothers some people. Our lives would be much easier, we reason, if we only had to be obedient some of the time, so that once a week we could come to Sabbath services to have peace and feel good about ourselves. Some prefer that it be that way. They think they could handle that aspect of God's truth!

But God says that's not enough. He wants more than a segment of our life. God wants our whole life—24/7, 100% of the time! And that's the problem. We could let God come first, if it was only sometimes, but all the time, in all we do? That seems somewhat tough to many people. Yes, God is demanding, but just and fair.

Jesus Christ comes to create division. Either we are all for Christ, or we are against Him. No gray areas! And that divides not only people, but families also. Most families work by means of

compromise, each gives a little for the sake of peace with all. Compromise can be good if it's not a compromise of personal convictions of God's Truth. Otherwise Compromise is a bad thing.

Compromise occurs not only within a family, but at work and school as well. And even at church. From this comes innumerable gray areas—areas of spiritual compromise for the sake of peace.

There are no compromises when it comes to the commandments of God.

It doesn't say, "You shall not steal, most of the time." Or, "You shall not bear false witness, but white lies are OK." First among the commandments is—you shall have no other gods!

Some people may have learned and understood this Commandment differently, and by it they believe they can have other gods, just as long as the God is chief among them. Of course, that's not what it means. It says, "before me", it means, before my face, that is, anywhere God can see them, and God can see everything.

For many people this is a tough pill to swallow—that God is so specific; that He does not accept spiritual diversity; that God does not compromise. We should understand this, because we live in families, and people keep saying, can't you give a little, for the sake of peace? I mainly mean this regarding families that are in the church dealing with their unconverted families in the world. They may not always use the word "peace". Sometimes they say, "to get along," or "to help," or, "to love."

When it comes to witnessing to our extended families and fellow workers by example, we can't give a true witness if we have a belief system that is full of gray areas. A person whose life is full of gray areas has a life full of compromise.

Speaking of those who compromise, Winston Churchill said, "An appeaser is one who feeds a crocodile, hoping it will eat him last."

Tryon Edwards said, "Compromise is the sacrifice of one right or good in the hope of retaining another—too often ending in the loss of both."

Elbert Hubbard said, "It is the weak man who urges compromise—never the strong man."

Charles Sumner said, "From the beginning of our history the country has been afflicted with compromise. It is by compromise that human rights have been abandoned."

Reginald Wright Kaufman said, "Compromise is never anything but an ignoble truce between the duty of a man and the terror of a coward."

Questions related to point 4:

Does it provide a proper witness for Christ?

Does my action set Christ on a pedestal for the world to see?

Will this hinder or help my witness to others?

Does this show a difference in my life because of Christ, or does it make it seem as if I am just as bad off as the world?

5. Am I faithful in what is least?

I Corinthians 4:2 Moreover it is required in stewards that one be found faithful.

God has given us everything in life. He has also given us charge of the resources we use. Our time, our money, our energy, and our bodies are all resources. We have to examine gray areas and determine if our resources are being put to good use.

The Parable of the unjust steward tells us—he who is true and loyal in minor things is true and loyal in great things! He who is genuine and truthful in insignificant areas is genuine and truthful in significant areas.

Luke 16:10-12 "He who is faithful in what is least is faithful also in much; and he who is unjust in what is least is unjust also in much. Therefore if you have not been faithful in the unrighteous mammon, how will you commit to your trust the true riches? And if you have not been faithful in what is another man's, how will you give you what is your own?"

This is a saying that will universally hold true. Someone who shows loyalty, reliability, and trustworthiness in small matters will also manifest them in large matters. And the person that will cheat and defraud in little things will also swindle and deceive in things involving more trust and responsibility.

One of the ways *Webster's* defines "faithful" is: firm in adherence to promises or in observance of duty. (The main synonym is "conscientious.") The same holds true for commitment in marriage. Commitment to our spouse is required in small areas of our marital relationship if we expect our marriages to be successful in important areas. Loyalty and integrity depend not as much on the amount entrusted, but more on the sense of responsibility. He that feels commitment and loyalty in little, will feel it in much, and vice-versa.

If we have the genuine principles of loyalty and faithfulness, we'll carefully attend to even the seemingly insignificant things; and it's by forming good habits in little things that we act uprightly in things of greater concern as they come along. On the contrary, if we don't act uprightly in small matters we will seldom feel ourselves bound to pay much attention to the responsibility of honor and conscience, in things of great importance.

Questions related to point 5:

Am I faithful in what is least?

Is this a good use of my time, money and effort?

Is this wasting my resources? Or, Can my resources be better used elsewhere?

How much of my resources (i.e. time, money, and energy) should be used in this area?

Anything small my hand finds to do, do I do it with all my might?

6. Do I do it , when I doubt it?

Whatever we do, without a conviction of its lawfulness, is to us sin, because we do it under a belief that we may be wrong in doing it.

Therefore, if we make a distinction in our own conscience between different kinds of meats, and yet eat of all indifferently, we sin before God. This is because we eat either through embarrassment of our beliefs, cowardly compliance, an unbridled appetite, or rebelliousness to the laws of God. Any of these is in itself a sin against the sincerity, honesty, and self-denying principles of the doctrines of Christ.

Romans 14:22-23 Do you have faith? Have it to yourself before God. Happy is he who does not condemn himself in what he approves. But he who doubts is condemned if he eats, because he does not eat from faith; for whatever is not from faith is sin.

We should not do something while doubting its correctness, appropriateness, or goodness. We should have a strong conviction that what we do is right; and without this conviction, it is sinful. The rule, is again, of universal application. In all cases, if we do something that we don't believe to be right, it's a sin, and our conscience will condemn us for it.

The converse of this is not always true, that if we believe a thing to be right, that therefore it's not sin. Many of the persecutors of God's people were conscientious; and the murderers of Jesus Christ did it ignorantly; and yet are guilty of enormous crimes.

If we have a feeling that what we're doing is wrong, or we just don't know if some situation is all right, we shouldn't do it. If we doubt that what we're doing is pleasing to God, it is sin to us, whether or not in other situations it's pleasing to God. When we think it might be a sin, and we go ahead and do it, it is a sin because of our doubt, and because it violates what we think is righteous. So we obviously cannot please God if we do something that we doubt—even if it is lawful.

So if doubt remains in a gray situation just don't do it. **WHEN IN DOUBT—DON'T!**

Questions related to point 6:

Do I do it, when I doubt it?

Am I sure this is right?

Do I have some doubt to the goodness of this action?

Do I know all the facts?

7. Would Jesus have me to do it? Or, Would Jesus do it?

Most people are far too presumptuous when it comes to creating "gray areas." They presume to know God's will without ever asking, "What would Jesus Christ do in this situation?"

I John 2:3-6 Now by this we know that we know Him, if we keep His commandments. He who says, "I know Him," and does not keep His commandments, is a liar, and the truth is not in him. But whoever keeps His word, truly the love of God is perfected in him. By this we know that we are in Him. He who says he abides in Him ought himself also to walk just as He walked.

To declare ourselves on Christ's side binds us to imitate him. We abide in Christ—that is, have habitual fellowship with Christ. This is maintained by keeping God's commandments. "Just as He walked," indicates in the original Greek that the imitation must be exact and in all things.

We ought to—we are bound to—we have a debt obligation to Christ (as Luke 17:5-10 explains). The pattern of Christ as set forth in the word of God always includes the primary characteristics of humility and self-sacrifice.

I Peter 2:18-21 Servants, be submissive to your masters with all fear, not only to the good and gentle, but also to the harsh. For this is commendable, if because of conscience toward God one endures grief, suffering wrongfully. For what credit is it if, when you are beaten for your faults, you take it patiently? But when you do good and suffer, if you take it patiently, this is commendable before God. For to this you were called, because Christ also suffered for us, leaving us an example, that you should follow His steps

We see there that Christ lived a life of humility and sacrifice. We should follow in His steps and live that same life. The word rendered "example" is from the Greek term *hupogrammon* and is only used here. It primarily means "a writing copy," such as is produced for children to learn from and memorize; or an outline or sketch for a painter to fill up. It also means an example, a pattern for imitation.

We should follow Christ as if we walk exactly along behind Him, and we should place our feet exactly where His were. There should be the closest imitation or resemblance possible. Some of the ways we are to imitate Him are specified here:

I Peter 2:22-23 "Who committed no sin, nor was deceit found in His mouth"; who, when He was reviled, did not revile in return; when He suffered, He did not threaten, but committed Himself to Him who judges righteously;"

Christ left us an example that we should set as our goal. He was perfect in His love for God and all human beings. To the best of our ability we should walk in the footsteps of Christ. He gave us the principles of how to live God's way of life. Jesus placed God first then others before Himself. First, we must love God above everything. Then, we must love our neighbor as ourselves. This is the essential requirement of our Christian walk. And it will keep us out of those gray areas.

Questions related to point 7:

Would Jesus have me do it?

Am I doing this out of love for God?

Is this showing love toward others around me?

Would Jesus do it?

8. Does it glorify God?

The most important principle to consider in everything is whether or not it glorifies God.

The other 7 questions help to answer this one question: Does it glorify God?

This is the main focal point in every decision.

I Corinthians 10:31-33 Therefore, whether you eat or drink, or whatever you do, do all to the glory of God. Give no offense, either to the Jews or to the Greeks or to the church of God, just as I also please all men in all things, not seeking my own profit, but the profit of many, that they may be saved.

The phrase "the glory of God" in verse 31 is equivalent to the honor of God; and the command is, that we should so act in all things as to "honor" Him as our Lawgiver, our Creator, our Sustainer, and our Redeemer. By doing this we lead others by our example to praise Him and to value His teachings.

A child honors his father by always obeying, respecting and having proper thoughts of him. When a child is thankful for his father's care; when he keeps his laws; when he attempts to promote his fathers plans and his interests; and when his actions encourage all those around him to appreciate the character of his father.

A child dishonors his father when he has no respect for his authority; when he breaks his laws; and when he leads others to treat him with disrespect, as Absalom did against his father David.

In like manner, we live to the glory of God when we honor Him in all areas of life. This is when we keep His laws; when we receive His blessings with thankfulness; when we deeply rely on Him; when we pray to Him; and when we live in such a way that encourages others to appreciate His goodness, and mercy, and holiness. Whatever good witness will promote the coming kingdom of God, and make Him better known and loved, will be to His glory.

There are Five Principles that "doing all to the glory of God" requires:

A. Doing all to the glory of God is a universal rule that extends to everything. If in small matters as eating and drinking we should seek to honor God, certainly we should in all other things.

B. Doing all to the glory of God is designed to be the constant rule of conduct, and we should be reminded of it often. The actions of eating and drinking must be performed often; and the command is attached to that which must often occur, so that we are reminded of it often, and so that we are kept from forgetting it.

C. Doing all to the glory of God is intended that we should honor God in our families and among our friends. We eat with them; we share together the blessings of God's divine intervention; and God has determined that we should honor Him when we receive His mercy. Because of this our daily provisions should be received in thankfulness thereby glorifying Him.

D. In doing all to the glory of God we should use the benefit we receive from His generosity to His honor and in His service. He gives us food; He makes it nourishing; He invigorates our bodies; and that strength should not be devoted to purposes of sin, and extravagance, and foolishness. It is an act of high dishonor to God, if when He gives us strength we use that strength to act foolishly and sinfully.

E. Doing all to the glory of God as a rule is designed to be the primary director of our lives. It is to guide all our conduct, and to constitute a "test" by which to try our actions. Whatever can be done to advance the honor of God is right; whatever cannot be done with that end is wrong.

Whatever plan we can form that will have this end is a good plan; whatever cannot be made to have good results, and that cannot be commended, continued, and ended with a distinct and definite desire to promote His honor, is wrong, and should be abandoned immediately.

Questions regarding point 8:

Does it glorify God?

Does this honor God?

Would God be pleased with my choice?

Is what I'm doing glorifying God by setting a good example?

John Halford wrote an article that appeared in the August 1981 issue of *The Good News* magazine titled, "Stay out of the Gray Areas!" He related a story about what Herbert Armstrong thought of gray areas.

"I remember a ministerial conference I attended several years ago.

Mr. Armstrong called and said he would be late that morning, and asked that the conference start with out him. The meeting was temporarily conducted by one of the senior ministers. The ministers were discussing a question on some aspect of Christian living, but somehow got bogged down in a quagmire of "what if" questions.

After about an hour Mr. Armstrong arrived and, of course, the temporary chairman immediately handed control over to him. Mr. Armstrong settled himself behind the desk and then asked, "Now, what are you fellows discussing?"

The ex-chairman explained and then said, honestly: "But we were not getting anywhere. It's one of those gray areas."

"Well," said Mr. Armstrong, "what are we doing in the gray areas? Stick to the trunk of the tree. Then we can see clearly."

We did, and soon the problem was resolved.

It was a good lesson. Too often we wander into those gray areas. Most of us don't leap suddenly and deliberately into Satan's darkness. We edge away from the light. Not too far at first. We think we are safe, because we can still see the light."

Only someone with the full power of the Holy Spirit has no gray areas in their life. Until we receive the Holy Spirit, there is a veil over our faces distorting righteous judgment. The greater portion of the Holy Spirit we have working in us the less gray areas there are.

II Corinthians 3:12-18 Therefore, since we have such hope, we use great boldness of speech—unlike Moses, who put a veil over his face so that the children of Israel could not look steadily at the end of what was passing away. But their minds were blinded. For until this day the same veil remains unlifted in the reading of the Old Testament, because the veil is taken away in Christ. But even to this day, when Moses is read, a veil lies on their heart. Nevertheless when one turns to the Lord, the veil is taken away. Now the Lord is the Spirit; and where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is liberty. But we all, with unveiled face, beholding as in a mirror the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image from glory to glory, just as by the Spirit of the Lord.

When we turn to Christ by accepting Him as our personal Savior, by repenting, by overcoming sin, by obeying, and by honoring Him—the veil of spiritual darkness is taken away. His Spirit in us reflects Christ as a mirror reflects an image. The glory of the Lord is reflected in us as we are transformed by the Holy Spirit into the same image as Christ. We become at liberty to see things as they really are. We cannot glorify God if we do not reflect His image. And if we do not reflect the image of God, we will have gray areas in our lives.

We can know, if we reflect His image, if we produce the fruit of the Holy Spirit. This list of fruit is also a wonderful guideline for eliminating gray areas.

Galatians 5:22-25 But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, longsuffering, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control. Against such there is no law. And those who are Christ's have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires. If we live in the Spirit, let us also walk in the Spirit.

...thereby eliminating the gray areas.