

GREY MATTER
Words: 3944
Heb. 5:12-14

INTRO: Over the holidays I thought I should give one message on actions, questionable actions. I understand that John spoke on dress for ladies esp. Pastor B. spoke on discernment and I thought, "Oh boy, maybe that is enough for one time." And I decided to drop the subject for now and then later came back to it for various reasons and I trust you will not find it all too much.

A while ago I observed a Christian involved in something I could not allow myself. But this Christian thought nothing of it, and I gave that some thought. As I considered such questionable practices a phrase kept popping up in my mind, and the phrase was 'grey matter.' I wasn't quite sure what grey matter was but I thought of so many actions we do that are not really white, nor do they really seem black. They are grey matter.

So I checked an internet and there was an article that asked this question: "What is grey matter in the brain?" And the answer it gave was, "Grey matter is closely packed neuron cell bodies. It helps with sensory perceptions (seeing, hearing, emotions, memory, speech) and muscle control." This grey matter is a part of the brain, and according to this article it helps with sensory perceptions such as seeing, hearing, emotions, memory, speech and muscle control.

And I thought about that. If we classed our actions in colors, white would be doing right. Black would be doing wrong, and grey would be doing questionable things. And as I thought about that, does not involvement in grey areas want to affect our spiritual sensory perceptions? Look at Hebrews 5 with me (read 12-14). There we have spiritual senses. They affect our discernment in things right and wrong. And does not involvement in grey matters affect our senses in losing discernment between right and wrong?

And secondly, the article said that this grey matter in the brain affects muscle control. Does not involvement in grey matters affect our actions? Does it not tend to impair our actions so that we get involved in wrong doing? And as I considered all this, I decided to call this message, "Grey Matter." I considered still further, and thought, "Well,

here they are again, The Good, The Bad, and the Ugly." When I did the third message on that topic with regard to people, words and works, I said that the third message was the last, but here is another one.

I had decided to do this message as soon as I could, and then, as I heard that John Klassen had spoken on various matters of dress and I understand Pastor Boehlig spoke on discernment, and I thought that too speak on this subject might be a little too much. But last Sunday I briefly gave a negative note on card playing after one of our young people mentioned how they sometimes play poker. After deciding to leave this message for a while I then got an e-mail from another of our young people and he asked for clarification. And I said, "Thank You Lord, this is my cue."

Now I want to mention something before we get started. The grey areas I will be talking about are matters we do not address in our church constitution. They are matters of the individual heart. For example, we do not have a certain dress pattern for our ladies. We preach modesty and ask you to seek your heart and live right. We do not have a church standard on how fast you are to drive on the highway. We do not disallow jewelry. We do not say you cannot listen to Country and Western, or even Rock music. We leave these as matters of your heart. And I plan to preach on this subject in such a way as to leave you to ponder these matters and determine how you ought to live in light of what you have heard and what you read in the Bible.

Also, I always say there are two ditches on the highway of the Christian life. We can drive off the Christian road by hitting the liberal ditch, everything is Ok. Or we can drive off the road on the legalistic side where nobody else can quite match up to our Christianity. The message I am about to give can lead us to the legalistic ditch and I want to forewarn you, do not go there.

So, let me briefly explain what I mean by 'Grey Matter'. If we were to class our actions into white, black and grey, white would represent righteousness. Doing right is righteousness. Black would represent sin. We have no problem with those identities. I could show you that from the Bible but my time is short. So, if white represents righteousness, and black, sin; by the same token grey represents those questionable areas of life. And some of

you will find some of these areas are not questionable for you, but they may be for many others.

Let me give you some Scriptural backing for what I am about to say. I need to spend much more time here, but it is not the main burden on my heart this morning, so I refrain. So turn with me to Hebrews 5 (read 12-14). There we have spiritual senses. These senses affect our discernment in things right and wrong. And it is my view that involvement in grey matters affect our senses in discerning right from wrong? And it is the task of those whose senses have been sharpened by reason of use, that is those who have matured spiritually, to guide those who are still immature in the in discerning between things right and wrong in the grey areas of life. Many of these grey areas are not spelled out by, "thou shalt not" in the Bible. They are discerned by those who have learned to hear and heed God's voice. Many times I have been asked, "So what is wrong with that?" Usually the tone in which that is asked tells me that I cannot tell that person what is wrong with that. That person is not even ready to listen yet.

So, just what could be classed as grey matter? Just what am I talking about when I am talking about grey matter? Well, it is those things with which there is uncertainty, the action is not clearly white or black. Some Christians believe one way on certain questionable matters and others another. It is those areas where we fudge the lines and do those things that are questionable.

I. OBEYING THE LAWS OF THE LAND

So, we begin with obedience to the laws of the land. When the sign says you are allowed to drive 100 kms an hour on the highway and you are driving 100, would that be black, white or grey matter? And you say, "Pastor Phil, umm, would it be possible to skip to your next point? Please?"

Well, I would like to do that too, but I am as uncomfortable as you are. And so I think we need to go on. And so, since you don't want to answer my question, let me do so. To drive 100 when the sign says you may, under normal conditions, that is white. Now the question we were afraid of is this: If the sign says the speed limit, limit, limit.. is 100 and I am driving 130, is that black, white or grey? Ok, ok,

that is black. Alright. So what about 120? Bbbblack? Ok, so what about 110? Ouch! Ok Ok! It's black. Now, what about 105, or 104, or 103! That is what I mean by grey matter.

My cousin's sons came in and told their dad that one of the cows had a new calf. And Dad said, "What color is it?" And they said, "Dunkol Witt!" Dark white! Driving 105, is not exactly black. It is not exactly white. It is dunkol witt! There is grey matter.

How about fishing regulations? How about hunting regulations? I want to tell you something right here. Do you know what A.W. Tozer said? Let me read it for you. He said, "I am not a good man. I am a - well you'd have to use slang to describe me. By nature I came that way and when I saw it in my boys I didn't blame them. I paddled them, but I didn't blame them. I can't go to God and say, 'God, I didn't do what that fellow did.' I've done everything either actuality or in thought that could have been done. The devil himself couldn't have thought of anything that I haven't thought of in my life-time."

Now let me tell you, that is how I feel about myself in the things of which I speak to you. But, Tozer did not stay there and I don't want to either. I don't want to be a bad man, not even in the grey matter. I want to be like Jesus. Let me tell you what my wife said to me about my obedience to speed limits. She said, "Oh yes, on the highway you religiously go 100, but when we get near town you disobey the 70's and 50's." I smiled. For 30 years I did that and then a while ago I got two pictures of our car in the mail. I couldn't see in the picture who was driving, but I couldn't really say, 'Not guilty'. So now I am working on that.

II. ALCOHOL

There is another area that is questionable, and that is the consumption of alcohol. It is my view that any consumption of alcohol is sin. Now let me say this: I have heard of one medical case where a person with a certain severe disease is helped by a certain kind of alcohol. I would exclude such cases and say that they are very, very rare. Otherwise, I believe the Bible

classes all consumption of alcohol as sin. But, probably 95 or more percent of Christians would disagree with me. Alcohol consumption among confessing Christians, is sharply on the rise, it seems. Weddings with alcohol is becoming a common thing among Christians. Alcohol consumption among Bible school students, it seems, is almost the norm.

Some time ago I was asked about attending wedding receptions of professing Christians who have alcohol at the reception. I had never thought through that. Talk about grey matter!

For those who view moderate alcohol consumption as acceptable, let me give you the most outstanding statistic I remember from the series of messages I did on this subject. One in ten persons who takes one drink will become an alcoholic. One in ten of those alcoholics will commit suicide. May I ask, do you want to take that risk? Do you want your child to take that risk?

III. JEWELRY

What about the wearing of jewelry? You may not know it, but it has been the historical view of the Mennonites that the wearing of jewelry is forbidden in the NT. Listen to these verses:

1 Timothy 2:8-10, "I desire therefore that the men pray everywhere, lifting up holy hands, without wrath and doubting; in like manner also, that the women adorn themselves in modest apparel, with propriety and moderation, not with braided hair or gold or pearls or costly clothing, but, which is proper for women professing godliness, with good works."

1 Peter 3:1-4, "Wives, likewise, be submissive to your own husbands, that even if some do not obey the word, they, without a word, may be won by the conduct of their wives, when they observe your chaste conduct *accompanied* by fear. Do not let your adornment be *merely* outward—arranging the hair, wearing gold, or putting on *fine* apparel—rather *let it be* the hidden person of the heart, with the incorruptible *beauty* of a gentle and quiet spirit, which is very precious in the sight of God."

Now, many of you will be thinking, "That doesn't mean you can't wear jewelry. It means you should wear it in moderation. And in Peter it says, 'Do not let your adornment be merely outward..." First, the word 'merely' has been supplied by the NKJV. It is an interpretation, not a translation. But second, may I ask you, have you ever prayerfully read these passages? And if you hold to moderation, how moderate are some of those ear rings that are worn? Do you see how the younger girls look with longing eyes at some of that jewelry? Could I ask, how moderate are the painted nails? It's worth thinking through is it not? You say, "Pastor Phil, would it be ok to navigate away from this subject?" May I just ask one more question? White, black or grey?

IV. CARD GAMES

Let us go on to another area, card games, the card deck of 52, with the four suites, hearts, diamonds, clubs and spades. When I grew up in the Mennonite tradition I grew up knowing for certain that playing cards with the set of 52 was far out of keeping with Christianity. When I became a Christian I questioned many things I had been taught, but this one was very clear to me. As an unsaved person I had become involved in cards, and when I became a Christian I never questioned whether this was right or wrong. Scripture said, "Abstain from all appearance of evil" and there was nothing godly about cards and what came from them.

Later I did begin to study the matter of these cards. I read much of the meanings of the cards, of which none was good and most was very evil. But I could not prove those meanings. When I began to write this message I decided that at this point I was not ready to do the amount of study I would need to do to make a case against cards by showing what the cards significance is. You can go on You Tube and other internet sights and do that.

To give you a little idea of the positions taken by Christians against cards, let me read part of a tract put out by Perry F. Rockwood. This information, even if unproven, is enough to make this game grey matter,

if not black. Here is what he writes, "The King card represents the enemy of God, the devil. The Ten spot represents the spirit of lawlessness and is in direct opposition to the ten commandments of the Bible. Closely associated with the ten spot is the Club card. When cards were invented, the club was the weapon of the murderer. ... The Jack represents the lustful libertine who lives on the gains of the prostitutes. It represents the moral leper. There is a game of cards called 'The brothel game' in which the players use the secret obscene language of the cards and converse with each other merely by dropping a card. Now we come to the part that is even more shockingly wicked. The Queen card represents the virgin Mary, the mother of our Lord. In the secrets of cards she is called the mother of harlots. The Joker in card language represents our Lord Jesus Christ. Joker means fool! Jesus Christ is held up by the card players as a fool. And if this is not bad enough yet, the secret language of a deck of cards goes further and declares that Jesus (the Joker card) is the offspring of a lustful Jack, and the Queen mother, Mary."

Well, as I studied this now, I checked into the Rook game as well. And I found the article from Wikipedia most enlightening. Listen to it: "**Rook** is a [trick-taking game](#), usually played with a specialized [deck](#) of cards. Sometimes referred to as "Christian cards" or "missionary poker", Rook playing cards were introduced by [Parker Brothers](#) in 1906 to provide an alternative to [standard playing cards](#) for those in the Puritan tradition or [Mennonite](#) culture who considered the face cards in a regular deck inappropriate because of their association with [gambling](#) and [cartomancy](#)."

I cannot say I think that playing Rook is wrong. But what I found most interesting is that according to this article, those of the Puritan and Mennonite traditions abstained from playing cards, not because of the symbolism and meaning of the cards, but because of the association of these cards with gambling and cartomancy. Let me talk about both of those briefly.

First, with regard to gambling. My wife reminded me of our good friend's son. He grew up in a godly home and later, in Bible school, he was introduced to poker. He learned to play poker and after a while began to play for smarties. Then it was pennies. Then he became quite good at winning and was invited to a tournament. He said he didn't want to pay to enter and someone offered to pay his entrance fee. Then he won several thousand dollars and paid off his car. As far as I know he never fell into serious sin, but you can see how subtle this thing is.

In Vanderhoof, folk of Mennonite persuasion, folk who had by all appearance been truly born again entered the casinos. I have been told that some get so involved in the casinos that they put on an adult diaper when they go in so that this need will not become a hindrance. Reason number one? The association of cards with gambling, and the subtle ways it leads to it.

The second reason is cartomancy. This is the use of cards to for divination, which I trust I do not need to exhort us about. It is strictly forbidden in Scripture. And you may say, "But, we would never use them for that." And some unbeliever comes to your home and he sees you playing those cards? Does not Scripture say, "Abstain from all appearance of evil?"

Now let me insert something here. There may be certain things which at one point in the development of culture have an evil appearance, but which, with time loses that stigma. For an example of what I am talking about, take the pool game. In my younger years, pool halls could be found in any town. And the crowd that frequented the pool halls did not have a good reputation and from that, the pool table gained a bad stigma. For many years now I have not seen a pool hall and as far as I know there is nothing intrinsically wrong with playing pool.

Excuse me, I'm just getting a phone call. I'll see who it is. It must be very important. "Hello"... "Who is this?"... "Rick Warren?"... "Yyyess, how can I help you?"... "You want to help me?"... "Advice?" "Yes."... "Yes."... "I shouldn't preach on grey matter?"... "We should be more 'seeker friendly'?"....."Now are

you saying that I should just preach the love of God and faith and grace and such topics, and if there are grey matters then the Holy Spirit will take care of that without me preaching on it?" "Well, that is great news. I thought it was my responsibility to preach on such things, but you say that is not my job, that is the work of the Holy Spirit?" "Ok, yes, I'll think about it, thanks, good bye."

Let me tell you what I have learned from none other than my own wicked heart. If things are not named and spelled out to us, we cannot hear. I have learned that it is when preachers are willing to spell sins and grey matter out, that the Holy Spirit speaks to our hearts. I am well familiar with the seeker friendly method, but I can tell you this; it seldom if ever produces godliness. It may produce some 'nice guys' but not goldy ones.

D. FADS AND FASHIONS

So, let us look at one last grey matter, as our time is running out. At baptism the other day I mentioned that when I became a Christian I battled through many things such as our practice of keeping certain holy days etc... And I determined that I would practice what I had been taught until I found it otherwise in the Bible. And there were some things I had been taught that I did not find in the Bible. But there were some things I was taught that I did find in the Bible.

Let me ask you how many of you were taught this, "Shtalt yount nich dee Welt jlick." It is a little hard to translate precisely, but basically it is this, "Do not be conformed to this world." Now we were taught that this referred to our outward appearance, and I ask you, were we taught right?

Turn with me to Romans 12 (read 1-2). Now my time is almost gone, but let me say this: if you study the words of this passage, it very clearly teaches that we are not to be conformed to this world by our outward appearance. That includes hair, dress, jewelry and anything else that is 'in'. So let me briefly give you the meaning of a few words here. First, the word translated 'world' is not the word for world. It is aiwn, an age. Do not be conformed to

this age. I have no doubt it speaks of that which is 'in'. Second, the word conformed, in do not be conformed to this age. It is the word that has to do with external appearance. You cannot get around that. And last, the word transformed in the clause, "...but be transformed by the renewing of your mind..." That word 'transformed' has to do with inner qualities. Our external appearance is to be changed by inner godly qualities.

Well, grey matter. What about fads and fashions? What about doing the 'in' thing? May I ask you, have you prayed about it?

Might I ask yet about the circus, rodeos, hockey games? No, I do not believe its all wrong, but it is worth thinking through all such matters. How about country music? How about videos? My own view is that by far the majority of videos, including Christian videos, do not produce godliness. How about television? Grey matter, what an important subject. But it is time to close.

CONCL: And so, in conclusion, my purpose this morning has not been to address all grey matters. Nor has my purpose been to tell you how to dress or where to go and where not to go in the things grey. My purpose has been to raise the question, and to say, "Don't just simply follow what you think, or wish, or what other Christians do. Read the Bible and honestly seek God's will. Pray about it with an open Bible and an open heart." I have no doubt that if you are truly born again, you have a desire to be like Jesus. You might ask, "Would Jesus do this? Would Jesus wear this? Would Jesus listen to this music? Would Jesus go to this place?"

And furthermore, maybe at one time some of these things I mentioned this morning would not have spoken to you, but now you have grown spiritually and you are ready to look at things in a different light. You see, the grey matter of the brain apparently helps with sensory perceptions (seeing, hearing, emotions, memory, speech) and muscle control. I recommend that what you and I do with spiritual grey matters will have an affect on what is white to us and what is black.

And then, last, if you start to change some things, set every guard against legalism. Also, do not expect everybody else to carry your convictions. Live your convictions in humility, without a self-righteous attitude. Just recently a man in our community said to one of our members something like, "Oh, you guys think you are the only Christians." It is OK to be accused of that, but here is my request of you, "Don't think like that." Just do right!