

MIDDLE GROUND

Middle Ground in the Ecclesia

- The Clearly Wrong Choice

- Sinful - Easiest - Leads to Eternal Death - Requires no Faith at all - Doesn't require us to admit that God exists, or that he is at work in our lives

- The Clearly Right Choice

- Righteous - Hardest - Leads to Eternal Life - Requires a large amount of Faith - Requires us to accept that God is in control of our lives, and that He cares for us

- The Middle Ground

- Neither Sinful nor Righteous - Complicated - **CAN** lead to either Eternal Life or Death - Depending on how you deal with complications - Appears to require less faith in the beginning... But, often evolves into something very complicated that will test you - Usually requires us to have Faith that God is alive and active... But, we feel that we need to help out a little bit... Often doesn't provide the rich, level of reward that comes from doing what is Clearly Right... But, neither the soul destroying guilt of doing what is Clearly Wrong

- Again, our purpose today is:

- 1) To remind us to keep looking for what is Clearly Right and what is Clearly Wrong, and to discuss the choices found in the Middle Ground that are neither Right nor Wrong
 - 2) To remind us that complications will come into our lives whenever we chose the Middle Ground
 - 3) To encourage us to strive for the higher ground, and not be so happy to accept the Middle Ground in our lives
- We've looked at our home life, and encouraged us to always remember that there always exists better choices that we can make...

- We spent some time thinking about work, and reminded us to make the best of the situations that we find ourselves in, and to live lives of a worthy servant...
- Now, we are going to look at our Ecclesial Life...
- Surely, there can't be any compromises here...
 - Surely, we haven't accepted anything but the ideal in our Ecclesial Life, right?
- Unfortunately, organized religion, almost by definition, accepts less than the ideal...
- First, let's take a look at our Memorial Service:
- Clearly there is a wrong choice:
 - Not meeting together at all
- Hebrews 10:24-25:
 - 24 - And let us consider one another to provoke unto love and to good works:
 - 25 - Not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together, as the manner of some is; but exhorting one another: and so much the more, as ye see the day approaching.
- Abandoning our relationship with our Lord, and never remembering his sacrifice on our behalf is Clearly Wrong...
- Jesus also tells us what is Clearly Right:
 - Breaking Bread Daily
- 1st Corinthians 11:25-26:
 - 25 - After the same manner also he took the cup, when he had supped, saying, This cup is the new testament in my blood: this do ye, as **oft** as ye drink it, in remembrance of me.
 - 26 - For as often as ye eat this bread, and drink this cup, ye do shew the Lord's death till he come.
- Our fellowship was intended to extend into our personal lives...
 - That kind of was the idea behind the "last supper"...
 - It was a meal that the first Christians shared together...
 - Eating, talking, encouraging one another, praying for each other...

- As often as they got together...
 - Not relegated to a certain day of the week...
 - Not restricted to a symbolic sip of wine and crumb of bread...
- A daily remembrance of our Lord, around a meal of fellowship, would Clearly be the Right choice...
- We have accepted to walk on the Middle Ground
 - That, in and of itself, is not Right or Wrong...
 - Just an alternative of meeting together once a week on Sundays and taking the bread and the wine together...
- It's not Wrong...
- It's just important that we all remember that accepting this road often doesn't provide the rich, level of reward that comes from doing what is Clearly Right...
- The fellowship that we share will be stilted and will not grow as strong as it possibly could if we invested more time, energy, and intimate personal connection into our relationships...
- Our relationships and fellowship will not grow as strongly as they could if we spent more time together
- I'm not trying to condemn what we do...
- I'm just trying to make sure that we all are aware of the consequences of the Middle Ground
- This Middle Ground is probably much more comfortable, and easier for us to grasp hold of going in...
- It would require a significantly greater amount of faith to be like the first Christians:
- Acts 2:42-47:
 - 42 - And they continued stedfastly in the apostles' doctrine and fellowship, and in breaking of bread, and in prayers.
 - 43 - And fear came upon every soul: and many wonders and signs were done by the apostles.
 - 44 - And all that believed were together, and had all things common;

- 45 - And sold their possessions and goods, and parted them to all men, as every man had need.
 - 46 - And they, continuing daily with one accord in the temple, and breaking bread from house to house, did eat their meat with gladness and singleness of heart,
 - 47 - Praising God, and having favour with all the people. And the Lord added to the church daily such as should be saved.
- But the rewards would also be significantly greater...
 - Another area of Middle Ground with “organized religion” is “fellowship”...
 - It would be Clearly Wrong to “pretend” that you are in fellowship with everyone, and share the Lord’s Table with others regardless of their belief...
 - It would be great if our relationships were so small and intimate that we could sit down with everyone that we would ever have contact with, and personally discuss their beliefs and work out agreements between us... This would be Clearly Right, and no one could find fault in it...
 - But, the consequences of being a member of a worldwide community cause us to chose a Middle Ground:
 - Issuing a Statement of Faith, and basing our Fellowship on others acceptance of it...
 - Obviously, this method, like all Middle Grounds, is going to bring with it some complications (that I’m sure you all are intimately familiar with...)
 - When it comes to Disfellowship we often find ourselves often travelling in Middle Ground also...
 - The Clearly Wrong choice would be to ignore the un-Christlike actions and lifestyles, and allow them to continue (to the ultimate destruction of the people performing them...)
 - Ezekiel 3:17-19:
 - 17 - Son of man, I have made thee a watchman unto the house of Israel: therefore hear the word at my mouth, and give them warning from me.
 - 18 - When I say unto the wicked, Thou shalt surely die; and thou givest him not warning, nor speakest to warn the wicked from his wicked way, to save his life; the same wicked man shall die in his iniquity; but his blood will I require at thine hand.
 - 19 - Yet if thou warn the wicked, and he turn not from his wickedness, nor from his wicked way, he shall die in his iniquity; but thou hast delivered thy soul.

- Jude 1:22-23:
 - 22 - And of some have compassion, making a difference:
 - 23 - And others save with fear, pulling them out of the fire; hating even the garment spotted by the flesh.
- The Right thing to do is also very clear:
- 2nd Thessalonians 3:6-7:
 - 6 - Now we command you, brethren, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that ye withdraw yourselves from every brother that walketh disorderly, and not after the tradition which he received of us.
 - 7 - For yourselves know how ye ought to follow us: for we behaved not ourselves disorderly among you...
- Where we fail is in the cold outworkings of an “organized religion”...
 - The concept here is that the fellowship we have been enjoying with our Brother or Sister is so precious and valuable, that life without this fellowship should be almost unbearable for the offender...
 - They really would feel a loss if we were to withdraw from them, and that is inspiration enough for them to want to change from their wrong ways...
- The reality is that they often have already slipped between the cracks, and we are not enjoying the relationship with them that we should be...
 - And in reality, we end up sending them a letter telling them that they are no longer able to Break Bread with us until they resolve their problems...
 - Sure... This isn't Wrong...
 - I'm not saying it is...
 - But, it is a Middle Ground that woefully falls short of the Ideal...
- But, that kind of has been indicative of Middle Ground all day, hasn't it?
- It falls dreadfully short of the Ideal...
- Another way to look at the concept of Middle Ground, and the concepts of Clearly Right and Clearly Wrong...
- Cynicism:

- Devoid of principle or Faith
- Giving up on the existence or service to God
- Pragmatism:
 - Based on principles
 - But, altered and bent to fit “Reality”
- Idealism:
 - Directed by higher principles
 - A life based on Faith and obedience
- Conclusion
- That really is the problem with the Middle Ground...
 - By it’s definition it falls short of the Ideal...
- Our calling in Christ is to take the highest road possible...
 - To follow the Ideal...
- Matthew 5:38-42:
 - 38 - Ye have heard that it hath been said, An eye for an eye, and a tooth for a tooth:
 - 39 - But I say unto you, That ye resist not evil: but whosoever shall smite thee on thy right cheek, turn to him the other also.
 - 40 - And if any man will sue thee at the law, and take away thy coat, let him have thy cloak also.
 - 41 - And whosoever shall compel thee to go a mile, go with him twain.
 - 42 - Give to him that asketh thee, and from him that would borrow of thee turn not thou away.
- Jesus is calling us to Higher Ground...
 - Think about it!
- If someone hits you... You have the same three choices:
 - The Wrong Choice - Hit them back

- The Middle Ground - Don't hit them back, just walk away...
- The Right Choice - Give them another cheek to hit also...
 - That is what our Lord did...
- If someone sues you for \$1,000...
 - The Wrong Choice - Fight it out in court, and stop them from getting it
 - The Middle Ground - Pay it, and get it over with
 - The Right Choice - Give them \$2,000
- Totally opposite of what we would naturally do...
- Even farther than what we might think the right thing to do is...
- If someone tries to force you into going a mile...
 - The Wrong Choice - Say "No!"
 - The Middle Ground - Go ahead and go with them
 - The Right Choice - Go TWO miles with them...
- The Middle Ground is quite reasonable in these examples...
 - You are doing what is expected of you...
 - They are very "Realistic" responses... Even Christian...
- But, Christ wants MORE from us...
- Ephesians 4:28:
 - 28 - Let him that stole steal no more: but rather let him labour, working with his hands the thing which is good, that he may have to give to him that needeth.
- This is the teaching of the New Testament
 - This is the teaching of Love... Not "Eye for an Eye"...
- To Steal - Clearly Wrong

- To Steal No More - That's ONLY the Middle Ground
- To Work and to give to them that needeth - The Right Choice!
 - The Higher Ground!
 - What our Lord expects from us...
 - What he gave for us...
- Goals:
 - 1) To remind us to keep looking for what is Clearly Right and what is Clearly Wrong, and to discuss the choices found in the Middle Ground that are neither Right nor Wrong
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- Boiling Frog Story
 - If we continue to accept the Middle Ground as what's Right... We'll eventually forget altogether that there even was a Right...
- One more analogy...
- The Water of Life:
 - Drowning
 - The Clearly Wrong Choice
 - Sure, it's the easiest choice, and it requires the least from us... But, we don't want to be overcome in the ocean of sin that we live in...
 - Treading Water
 - The Middle Ground - Trying to keep our head above water is often our goal (and our position in life...)
 - That's not progress... That's not growth...

- Swimming
 - The Clearly Right Choice
 - If we are actually ever going to get closer to our goal... We have to start moving...
- Examine your life...
- Don't settle for less than what God wants you to be...
 - Don't chose the Middle Ground!