

Black or White

John 3:14—21

Introduction

My favorite rock band of all time, the Monkees, released a song in 1967, “Shades of Gray”:

When the world and I were young, just yesterday,
Life was such a simple game; a child could play.
It was easy then to tell right from wrong; easy then to tell weak from strong.
When a man should stand and fight, or just go along.
But today, there is no day or night; today, there is no dark or light;
Today, there is no black or white; only shades of gray.

That song was true then, and it seems to be even truer today. But there are still a few things that are black or white.

Binary Language

One thing that sees things in black or white is the computer. Computers speak a binary language of ones and zeroes. When they process information, it’s in a “this or that” format.

Life or Death

Another field that has black or white is medicine. When it comes to living things, one is either dead or alive. If someone is “half dead”, they are still alive. There is no shade of gray there.

Guilty or Not Guilty

Then there is the field of juris prudence. A defendant is found guilty or not guilty. If they are not guilty, they go free. If they are guilty, they are sentenced to a punishment that fits their crime. There is no middle ground.

Belief or Unbelief

There is no middle ground in salvation, either. ***The Apology*** says: *Christ was given, that we may believe that for His sake we are justified ... For Christ’s sake we are counted righteous when we believe that God, for His sake, has been reconciled to us (Ap IV Justification 97).*

The Dividing Line – The Cross

The dividing line is the cross of Jesus Christ. The eternal question is: “Do you believe that Jesus Christ, the Son of God, died on the cross for your sins and was

raised from the dead the third day?” There is no maybe, no half-way, no cop-out allowed. It’s a simple question that demands a simple answer: Yes or No. As Luther says: *There is absolutely no other correct and true belief than this one, which confesses that Christ is very God and very man. This is the only saving faith (LW 22:74).*

Faith by the Holy Spirit

That faith is not something we can conjure up on our own. It is given to us by the Holy Spirit through Word and Sacrament. We are saved totally by grace because the faith it takes to believe in Jesus is a gift of grace. This gives us an assurance of our salvation. We don’t have any worries or doubts or questions because Christ is the Author and Perfecter of our faith and salvation.

Saved by Grace, Damned by Self

But the unbelieving person has no one to blame but himself or herself. It’s not that God hasn’t given them an opportunity. *God is not willing that any should perish, but that all should reach repentance (2 Peter 3:9).* Irenaeus said: *[The unbelieving man] has separated himself from God by his own doing (Against Heresies 5.27.2).* Don’t mess around and resist the Holy Spirit. Remember, salvation is a “yes” or “no” question, a matter of life or death, a judgment of guilty or not guilty. It’s a clear-cut case of **BLACK OR WHITE.**

*And the peace of God,
Which surpasses all understanding,
Will guard your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus.*
