

**Sermon Series:** Transforming Society  
**Sermon Topic:** Principles For Navigating Grey Areas by Dr Tan Gee Paw  
**Sermon Text:** Exodus 34:1-7 and John 8:1-11

“Living in a fallen world, the Christian often finds many issues in life do not fall into black and white categories but often in grey areas. Black and white areas are well covered by the Law or the Ten Commandments for which Jesus warned us that “It is easier for heaven and earth to disappear than for the least stroke of a pen to drop out of the Law.” (Luke 16:17). What about the grey areas not covered by the Law?

**Exodus 34:1-7 (NIV)**

### The New Stone Tablets

*34 The LORD said to Moses, “Chisel out two stone tablets like the first ones, and I will write on them the words that were on the first tablets, which you broke.<sup>2</sup> Be ready in the morning, and then come up on Mount Sinai. Present yourself to me there on top of the mountain.<sup>3</sup> No one is to come with you or be seen anywhere on the mountain; not even the flocks and herds may graze in front of the mountain.”*

*<sup>4</sup>So Moses chiseled out two stone tablets like the first ones and went up Mount Sinai early in the morning, as the LORD had commanded him; and he carried the two stone tablets in his hands.<sup>5</sup> Then the LORD came down in the cloud and stood there with him and proclaimed his name, the LORD.<sup>6</sup> And he passed in front of Moses, proclaiming, “The LORD, the LORD, the compassionate and gracious God, slow to anger, abounding in love and faithfulness,<sup>7</sup> maintaining love to thousands, and forgiving wickedness, rebellion and sin. Yet he does not leave the guilty unpunished; he punishes the children and their children for the sin of the parents to the third and fourth generation.”*

We live in a fallen world, and many areas of life that we encounter are in the grey area. There are black and white areas but grey areas are plentiful. We need to know what godly principles to rely on in navigating through these grey areas. The same principles that govern how we handle the law in the black & white areas would be the same ones we use in the grey areas, and even more so.

The verses today tell us that it is essential to handle the 10 commandments with objectivity, and also with compassion and love. Even as God presented to Moses His laws, he was quick to remind us He was not an unyielding but a compassionate God. Balancing objectivity with compassion and love is God’s guide in our approach, navigating grey areas in our sphere of influence. An example to illustrate this compassion: Jesus’ confrontation at the Mount of Olives (John 8: 1-11):

**8** <sup>1</sup> but Jesus went to the Mount of Olives. <sup>2</sup> At dawn he appeared again in the temple courts, where all the people gathered around him, and he sat down to teach them. <sup>3</sup> The teachers of the law and the Pharisees brought in a woman caught in adultery. They made her stand before the group <sup>4</sup> and said to Jesus, “Teacher, this woman was caught in the act of adultery. <sup>5</sup> In the Law Moses commanded us to stone such women. Now what do you say?” <sup>6</sup> They were using this question as a trap, in order to have a basis for accusing him.

But Jesus bent down and started to write on the ground with his finger. <sup>7</sup> When they kept on questioning him, he straightened up and said to them, “Let any one of you who is without sin be the first to throw a stone at her.” <sup>8</sup> Again he stooped down and wrote on the ground. <sup>9</sup> At this, those who heard began to go away one at a time, the older ones first, until only Jesus was left, with the woman still standing there. <sup>10</sup> Jesus straightened up and asked her, “Woman, where are they? Has no one condemned you?”

<sup>11</sup> “No one, sir,” she said. “Then neither do I condemn you,” Jesus declared. “Go now and leave your life of sin.”

### **Observations of Text:**

Jesus upheld the law by labeling the adultery as sin. The definition cannot be bend or altered. However, Jesus also displayed compassion and love for the sinner by casting away those whom had condemned her and brought her before Him. Jesus did not quote the commandment or dwelled upon the sin. He extended grace while telling the woman not to go back to sinful behavior.

### **Examples of Grey Areas**

Is it right to lie to save a life? Famous debate in 1960s between John Warwick Montgomery (conservative), Joseph Fletcher (Liberal). Both men answered that they would lie to save a life. Fletcher defended his lying stance, took God’s Law and made it irrelevant with the justification of saving a life. Montgomery, however, would acknowledged the sin of lying before God and be eager to seek forgiveness. Grey areas are abundant in the marketplace and in church. **Some of Dr Tan’s anecdotes:**

- 1.) A lady confined in him her worries of a deformed child, seeing that her first child was born with a cripple. He recognised that he did not have the rights to pontificate about this issue. He then provided her his fullest moral support in any decision she would ultimately make. The learning point here is that we should not practise the law or quote the commandments without compassion and love, which should always be the guiding factors in navigating these grey moments of our lives.
- 2.) Married couples with one spouse becoming Christian during the marriage. Should the unequally yoked to divorce?

<sup>12</sup> To the rest I say this (I, not the Lord): If any brother has a wife who is not a believer and she is willing to live with him, he must not divorce her. <sup>13</sup> And if a woman has a husband who is not a believer and he is willing to live with her, she must not divorce him. <sup>14</sup> For the unbelieving husband has been sanctified through his wife, and the unbelieving wife has been sanctified through her believing husband. Otherwise your children would be unclean, but as it is, they are holy.

<sup>15</sup> But if the unbeliever leaves, let it be so. The brother or the sister is not bound in such circumstances; God has called us to live in peace. <sup>16</sup> How do you know, wife, whether you will save your husband? Or, how do you know, husband, whether you will save your wife?

Let there be peace in the family and between the couple.

- 3.) The dilemma in handling a cheating student. Dr Tan was faced with the task of disciplining a student that was caught cheating. He was moved by her sincerity and honesty in her mistake but learnt later on that she was involved in another case of cheating in a separate examination. She was removed from her course but as he learnt of her poor background. He championed initiatives that were fueled by compassion and grace. These initiatives included providing her with alternatives to further her studies and a job, in the institute to generate income.

**But it is important that in any grey areas, compassion must never run ahead of moral rectitude.**

- 4.) A lady requested for Dr Tan to pose bail for another member of church on her behalf as she did not wish to let her husband know of her usage of finances. Dr Tan came to a conclusion that in the area of finance, what we dare not do in public, we should not do in private. He rejected her request firmly upon serious consideration.
- 5.) Dr Tan was requested by his boss to sign off on a vindictive letter that spoke harshly of another boss in a different department. It did not help that that person was an elderly member of the church Dr Tan attended. Eventually, Dr Tan signed off on the letter and found out later on that that boss suffered from an eye condition and did not read any letters posted to him. Dr Tan was then reminded of the Lord's Prayer, specially, "Lead us not to temptation but deliver us from evil." If both ways are negative, perhaps God will open a third path of deliverance for us.

Where the 10 commandments are insufficient to provide clear guidance in the grey areas, we should exercise compassion in our judgment and decision. As this is not always easy, we should be acquainted with the ways of God more often. Get into the Word to know His heart and mind, so that when the "crisis" comes, we are equipped to navigate these grey areas to the best of our abilities. Be like Moses who had a disquiet desire for God to spread the word alongside with him, and to guide him through the grey areas in life.

**Discussion Questions**

1. Can you describe a particular grey area you encountered in life, and how you took a decision on it. Looking back, would you consider it is in line with your understanding of the Ways of God?
2. What do you think is the basic character trait that God exhibits in His ways of dealing with men in a fallen world? (Hint: Read Ex 34:4-7). Do you find it amazing that He mentioned such character traits when giving the Ten Commandments? Why did God do so? What is the purpose of the Law?