

The Messy Middle

Success or Failure?
Good vs. Bad?
In vs. Out?
Liberal vs. Conservative?
Going to Heaven vs. Going to Hell?
Now or Never?



“Which (or Who’s) side are you on?” Do you ever get asked that question? This is called “dualistic thinking” and it means that you view a situation with only one of two possibilities. Have you ever pushed back and refused to choose or offered another option? I often find myself in the “messy middle”; unhappy with either extreme for a variety of reasons. For a lot of my life, I have felt that I really don’t fit ... anywhere: not popular society, not politically, not even religiously... It’s like I’m watching a tennis game – and both sides keep demanding I pick up a racket.

Admittedly, some decisions are more critical than others *and* every one of these examples are extremes. Yet in the game of life, how often are you ever 100% on board with anything? Nothing’s perfect. And yet everywhere we go – church, politics, relationships, careers – we seem to get asked the same kind of question and pushed to make a hard choice. The opposite can be just as problematic and that’s not at all what I’m advocating. Making no decisions leaves you with, well, nothing. What we choose to believe and stand for becomes our identity. It colors everything in our life. “*Watch your thoughts; they become words, watch your words; they become actions, watch your actions; they become habits, watch your habits; they become character, watch your character; it becomes your destiny.*” ([Fr. Richard Rohr](#) said that. I love that guy.)

Religious stuff is often *very* dualistic. “Do you believe?” “Are you going to heaven?” “Are you a church member?” “Do you accept the Bible totally?” The more questions you decide to answer, the more “boxed” in you become and you suddenly find yourself in a community of like-minded individuals who can sometimes view “the other” in a less than favorable way.

The point I’m trying to make, I guess, is that there are very few things in this world that we should acknowledge are perfect or that we can stand behind 100%. *Acknowledging* your concerns and sharing your insights *actually shows wisdom and integrity*. Growth means that we continue to learn and ask questions. Discernment means we work to have the ability to judge or evaluate something wisely always searching for the Truth.

Jesus didn’t live in the extremes, he lived in the messy middle. He showed love to all and found fault with all. While he taught that all of us were lost, he also explained that he had come specifically to find us. He was a huge critic of the organized religion of the time calling them [hypocrites](#) and [greedy](#)! The analogy he used was that they were [cups](#) – beautifully clean on the outside and full of maggots on the inside. His only stand was that we should [love the Lord with all our passion, prayer, intelligence, and energy](#). (No dualism there!)

Realizing that Jesus didn't fit socially, politically, or even religiously during his time with us was in a weird way a comfort for me. I could 100% embrace what he taught and how he lived. If he chose to exist in the messy middle of life, well then it was good for me, too. I'm comfortable now that I don't make the liberals or the conservatives happy. It's quite ironic that I can't align myself with a specific Christian denomination completely. Even when I wrote my fiction books, I was rejected because I was "too god-y" for the secular publishers and "too world-ly" for the religious publishers. Maybe faithfulness isn't about picking a side – maybe it's about staying close to Jesus. Why don't you join me? You might be surprised how comfortable it can be.

The Messy Middle.

- Neither a success nor a failure, and still a work in progress.
- Not "good" or "bad" but loved and wanted in spite of my many faults.
- Not "in" or "out" by any kind of worldly definition.
- Not liberal or conservative, just endlessly trying to be faithful to Jesus' Truth.
- Not obsessing over "heaven" or "hell." (Hope that intrigues you... I'll write more about that later!)

Scripture to maybe check out:

- Here's Jesus' rant against the religious scholars of his day: [Matthew 23](#)
- Jesus' advice on living: [Luke 12:22-34](#)

P.S. I used The Message in these Scripture links, written by Eugene H. Peterson in 1993, 2002, and 2018. It's written in very casual, contemporary language. Feel free to check these passages out in whatever Bible version you prefer—almost all of them are available on Bible Gateway!

What are your thoughts about this post? Email me and let me know!

honesttheology@gmail.com