



"It is better to die for a conviction than to live with a compromise."
—Vance Havner

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Somewhere in the Middle

A few weeks ago, a local talk-show host, self-described as "an aging hippie," remarked that he believed that in most matters one can find "the truth somewhere in the middle." He proceeded to explain that on just about any issue, if a person took a middle course between the lunatic Left and the Neanderthal right, he could arrive at or near the truth. My immediate reaction—an automatic response from constantly working with words—was to devise a pun on his key phrase. I thought, "His thinking on this in somewhere in the muddle."

Certainly, [wisdom](#) has escaped him on this idea. Perhaps in an overall sense, in terms of politics, what he has concluded contains an element of reality: Practical, governmental policy usually lies between two extremes. For instance, in the matter of environmental regulations, nature-worshippers push for draconian land-use laws, arguing that plants and animals and their natural habitats take priority over human development. On the other extreme falls the "git off mah land" crowd, which contends that no one and no government can regulate what they do on and with their property. Just, workable procedures walk a fine line between property rights and the common good of the community.

However, a tenet supposing that "the truth lies in the middle" is an ethically dangerous one. Applied universally, it guarantees a person a life—and communally, a culture—of compromise. Such a person or community will take a stand on nothing. Every decision will be a negotiation between whatever is perceived to be at the far ends of the spectrum. This is life in the gray land of rootless vacillation. It is living without convictions, without belief in the existence of truth.

The peril in living by this principle reveals itself most readily in matters of morality. In His Ten Commandments, [God](#) outlines truths regarding human conduct, both toward Himself and toward fellow man. These rules are not guidelines, as many seem to consider them today, but non-negotiable standards. As He patiently explains in places like Leviticus 26 and Deuteronomy 28, if we live by them, we will receive all sorts of blessings, but if we reject them and violate them, we had better brace ourselves for calamity. With God and His laws of happy, successful human behavior, there is no middle ground.

Yet, those who try to walk a centrist road often consider the Ten Commandments to be one of the extremes—the aforementioned Neanderthal right—and begin backpedaling toward antinomianism, otherwise known as anarchy or lawlessness. For example, God instructs us, "You shall not murder" ([Exodus 20:13](#)), an unambiguous statement. In other places, God explains that manslaughter is an exception to this, but even one who commits manslaughter must pay a stiff penalty for ending a human life (see [Exodus 21:13](#); [22:2-3](#); [Numbers 35:16-28](#); [Deuteronomy 19:4-6](#)). As clear as this is, though, centrists rationalize further exceptions to reach personal comfort zones.

Abortion is a sad case of such compromise. As the murder of a human life, abortion falls under the umbrella of the sixth commandment. A centrist may not agree with radical, pro-choice advocates that abortion should be on demand at any time and for any reason, yet he might allow the use of RU-486 (mifepristone), the abortion pill, because he concludes it does not technically cause an abortion (in many—but not all—cases, it is used to prevent conception).

Another concession on the abortion issue is the ubiquitous proviso, "except in cases of rape or incest." If one believes that abortion is murder, accepting this position opens a crack in the dike. It assumes that the life to be extinguished is of lesser worth due to the manner of its conception. Ultimately, this exception operates on a belief that it is permissible to end a pregnancy if it can be determined—somehow—that the child would not enjoy a certain quality of life. Thus, it also becomes allowable to abort malformed and retarded babies, and the next step would be to abort potentially chronically ill children, say, those with genetic markers that point to certain debilitating diseases and syndromes. How long is it before abortion is tolerated for reasons as basic as gender (already common in India and China) or hair or eye color?

This is the proverbial slippery slope that eventually ensues from living "somewhere in the middle." The apostle Paul maintains in [Romans 8:7](#) that human nature is essentially hostile toward God and His law; it recoils from submitting to divine standards, which are, admittedly, oftentimes difficult to observe. The Bible shows that people have an innate tendency to compromise to placate the human drive to live by its own rules. Every day in myriad situations, men and women repeat the [sin](#) of Adam and Eve in the Garden ([Genesis 3:1-6](#)), rejecting God's command in order to fulfill their own desires. Seeking "truth" through compromise will only end in sin and its destructive consequences.

Fundamentally, those who seek the "truth" between extremes are playing God. They have taken upon themselves the job of determining what is right and wrong, a position that the great Sovereign of the universe has not abdicated. Truth be told, we have all been guilty of this usurpation of God's throne, and there is no time like the present to give it back to the One to whom it rightfully belongs.

This suggests that we have to adjust our thinking. Men have formulated a spectrum of choices, all of which are legitimate to human minds, yet this is not a biblical construct. The Bible reveals, not a continuum with extremes bracketing an expansive center, but a simple alternative: We can choose between God's way and the wrong way (see [Deuteronomy 30:15-20](#)). This is why God has established the process of conversion, so that over a lifetime of

overcoming and growth, we can [repent](#) of our lives of compromise and begin to live by His righteous standards.

- Richard T. Ritenbaugh

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by John O. Reid

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