

Colossians 3:17

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Preacher: David MacPherson

- [0 : 0 0] The marketing men at Nike have been challenging us for the best part of something like 25 years, I think, to just do it.
- Maybe one of the most recognizable slogans, perhaps one of the most successful slogans or brand identities.
- Just do it. Rather begs the question, just do what? And I guess the answer is just spend fabulous amounts of money on their products.
- But long before Nike was concerned with us doing it, Paul was challenging Christians to just do it. He doesn't use those exact words, but words that really come to the same thing.
- Colossians chapter 3 and verse 17, which is where we're going to be focusing our attention this evening. We can read what Paul says to the believers in Colossae and to us also this evening.
- [1 : 0 7] And whatever you do, whether in word or deed, do it. Do it all in the name of the Lord Jesus. Giving thanks to God the Father through Him.
- Colossians 3.17, our text for this evening, pivots around these two words of Paul. Do it. Or at any rate, our consideration of the verse will be structured in that way.
- So, do it. And three questions that surround or are connected to this call, this charge directed to us to do it. First of all, what are we to do?
- It's a very basic one. What is it that we are to do? But then secondly, another question that we can pose and hopefully find an answer in the text is, how are we to do it?
- Whatever it is that we are to do, how are we to do it? And then thirdly, for whom are we to do it? So, those three questions we want to pose to the text and particularly to this charge directed to us, do it.
- [2 : 0 9] So, let's think of each of these one by one. First of all, what are we to do? Now, at one level, this is the easy part because we simply look to the verse and we read, and whatever you do, whether in word or deed, do it all in the name of the Lord Jesus.
- Whatever you do. And whatever means whatever. You can't get something more all-encompassing. I think you could find a word that is more encompassing than that.
- Whatever you do. And I think we can take it in that all-encompassing way. That said, the verse is found in a particular context and is part of that context within the letter.
- And the context is instructions regarding how the church is to live as a united community of believers. In the verses that we read that lead up to this charge, we read of how Christians are to behave, how we are to put up with each other, to forgive one another, to love one another, to teach, to admonish, to sing.
- And all of these things form part of our community life. And we are to do all of these things in the manner described. Do all of these things in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him.
- [3 : 3 1] But Paul's words, I think quite rightly and quite properly, have been and should be understood as having a far broader, even universal application.

Whatever really is whatever. Whatever you do, you have to do in the way described. In the way that Paul urges you to. Whatever you do, do it all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him.

Indeed, that little expression there, whether in word or deed, is a kind of catch-all phrase. It's as if Paul is concerned that maybe some of his readers might not be just sure if he really means whatever.

And he says, I really do mean whatever. So whatever you do, whether in word or deed, and as I say, that kind of expression meaning everything. Whatever you say, whatever you do, and of course what we say and what we do is born of what we think.

So everything is covered by this exhortation, by this charge. Now, before going any further and without wishing to preempt what we are going to be saying in a moment, note that this simple truth, whatever means whatever, it doesn't sound very profound, but that simple truth is a very revolutionary truth.

[4 : 55] It cuts right through a dualistic worldview that divorces the sacred from the secular, the body from the soul, a church from work, Sunday from Monday.

And that divorce is something that we're often guilty of really playing along with, if not consciously, unconsciously.

And so we think of what we do in church as being somehow different to what we do in our work or at college. What we do on a Sunday isn't really the same as what we do on a Monday.

The sacred and the secular, we think we can somehow divide them. One is maybe more important than the other. Or in one area of our lives, we have to be more careful to do things in a manner that pleases God.

Well, in the other areas, it's not quite so important. What Paul says here cuts through that error, that lie that somehow we can divide our lives in that way and keep part of our life as Christian or good or holy.

[6 : 00] And what the other part, well, we can just do as we please. Or in any case, not the same rules don't apply. God is interested in and gives instructions to us regarding everything, every activity that we are engaged in, interests God and is to be done, to use the language that we're going to be thinking about what it means in a moment, in the name of the Lord Jesus.

I think this verse, in a way, is kind of like an echo or a New Testament formulation of what's been called the cultural mandate that I spoke about just as I introduced the reading in Genesis.

We read the verses in Genesis 1, 27 and 28. In the garden, God instructs Adam and Eve or mankind to be fruitful, to increase in number, to fill the earth and subdue it.

But then it rather begs the question to fill the earth with what? And you say, well, with themselves. But who are they? Well, the ones to whom this is directed, Adam and Eve, are God's image bearers.

Indeed, the verse immediately before the charge is given highlights that. These are those who bear God's image. And as those who bear God's image, they are to reflect God's glory.

[7 : 18] So when God tells them to fill the earth, it's not that God is particularly interested in population growth. It's not that God's concern is that there be lots and lots of people. God's concern is that His image bearers, those who reflect His glory, would fill the earth so that the earth would be filled with the glory of God.

It kind of ties in a little bit with the great hope that we have in the new heaven and the new earth where the glory of God will shine so brightly and fill everything. Well, we have a task in the here and now to fill the earth with the glory of God as we, His image bearers, reflect His glory everywhere and in everything we do.

And so Adam and Eve and those of us who follow in their footsteps are to obey this command. And in the measure that the command is obeyed, the earth will be filled with the glory of God.

But this requires us, and this connects it with the verse in Colossians, it requires us as God's people to reflect God's glory in everything we do. Not just on a Sunday, not just at church, not just when we're involved in ministry, but in everything we do.

The word ministry, after all, simply means service. Well, our lives are to be lived in the service of God in everything we do. And that is how we will fill the earth, at least in a measure.

[8 : 45] We will contribute to filling the earth with the glory of God. What are we to do? Well, we are to whatever we do.

So what are we to do? It's whatever we do is what is Paul's concern. Everything we do. But the second question, not only what are we to do, but how are we to do it?

Which takes us on to the second part of the verse. Whatever you do, whether in word or deed, do it all in the name of the Lord Jesus. Do it all in the name of the Lord Jesus. Now, what does that mean?

What does it mean to do everything that we do, whatever we do, in the name of the Lord Jesus? I think there are three complementary meanings of this phrase.

Let me just suggest what the three ways we can understand it are. And as I say, it's not that we need to choose one or other. I think the three of them complement one another. So to do whatever we do in the name of the Lord Jesus, at one level means in representation of the Lord Jesus.

[9 : 54] Everything you do as a Christian, if you identify as a Christian, if you identify as a disciple of Jesus, then everything you do, you are doing in his name, in his representation, in your condition as a disciple of Jesus.

Because if you're a disciple of Jesus, you're always a disciple of Jesus. You can't just on a given day say, well, I won't be a disciple today. Or I won't be a disciple in this activity.

It simply doesn't work that way. If you're a disciple, you're a disciple. In anything and in everything that you do. Being a Christian is essential to who you are.

You can't turn your identity on and off like a light switch. You can't, in regard to your Christian identity, speak about, well, I'm putting on my Christian hat.

You know, sometimes we speak about in that way. When we're talking on a given subject, you might say, well, I've got my work hat on or whatever it is.

[10 : 57] I'm speaking in that capacity or on the basis of that part of my identity. But in terms of your Christian identity, that is something that is always true of you.

And given that you are representing Jesus in everything you do, given that you do everything in the name of the Lord Jesus, you must ask yourself, we must ask ourselves two further questions.

Can I do A or B or C, whatever it is, in representation of Jesus? Is what I'm intending to do, is what I'm planning to do, is what I'm being asked to do, something I can do as a disciple of Jesus?

If you can, then that leads to a second question. How will you do A, B or C or whatever it is, in a manner that is fitting of a representative of Jesus?

When we think of this idea of doing everything we do in representation of Jesus, of our Savior, of the one whom we follow, we could maybe kind of illustrate that with the example of an ambassador of state who goes to represent, we think of a British ambassador, who represents the queen in whatever country it is that the ambassador has been sent to.

[12 : 23] Now that ambassador, imagine an ambassador in Washington, to give one example. Now the ambassador doesn't only represent the monarch, doesn't only represent the country that he is an ambassador for, at official functions.

The ambassador can't say, well, it's only when I'm at official functions that I am representing the monarch or the nation that I am from. But there's a very real sense in which the ambassador is representing the one he represents all the time, at the weekend also.

You know, an ambassador can't go and get smashed on a Friday night and say, oh, well, I'm acting in my personal capacity. I can do what I want. No, because he knows that all of his time is in representation of the monarch or the nation that he represents.

How much more as Christians? As Christians, we don't really have our own time. All of our time, everything we are and everything we do belongs to Jesus.

So when Paul says, whatever you do, whether in word or deed, do it all in the name of the Lord Jesus, first of all, I think he's saying, do it in representation of Jesus. I think a second sense of what he's saying is, do it empowered by Jesus.

[13 : 43] Now, if what we do, if everything we do is empowered by Jesus, enabled by Jesus, the implication of that, of course, is that even the most difficult tasks, even the tasks that we find most frightening, that we're most reluctant to take on, maybe tasks that we know we should do, but we just sometimes are reluctant to because they seem so difficult, they seem beyond our capacity.

If we remember that we're doing so empowered by Jesus, accompanied by Jesus, given the grace sufficient by Jesus, then we can approach them and take them on with that greater confidence and be encouraged that whatever we're doing, we're doing in the name of the Lord Jesus, in his service, helped by him, empowered by him.

So whatever you do, do it all in the name of the Lord Jesus, in representation of Jesus, empowered by Jesus, and then in a third sense, which kind of overlaps perhaps a little with the first, in a manner consistent with who Jesus is and what Jesus wants.

So to do whatever we do in the name of the Lord Jesus requires that what we do be in a manner that is consistent with who Jesus is.

What we do must reflect Jesus' priorities, the manner in which we do it, but also the recognition of his sovereignty overall, that he is the Lord Jesus, he is the one who rules and governs, the Lord of all and so interested in and with purposes in all.

[15 : 25] Maybe we can try and tease out some of the practical applications of this, of doing everything you do in the name of the Lord Jesus. Those of you who are students, how do you study in the name of the Lord Jesus?

How do you investigate in the name of the Lord Jesus? For those of you who have families, how do you raise your children in the name of the Lord Jesus?

For all of us, how do we shop in the name of the Lord Jesus? How do we send text messages in the name of the Lord Jesus? How do you fall in love in the name of the Lord Jesus, representing him as his disciple empowered by him in a manner that's consistent with his character and that's in sync with his priorities how do you work in the name of the lord jesus how do you engage in that negotiation at work in the name of the lord jesus how do you drive in the name of the lord jesus how do you eat and drink in the name of the lord jesus i've been having a bad time over the last two or three weeks in my fantasy football and one or two of you know that i've responded not in the best way to that and so i'm not meaning to be trivial but it's a serious question how do i participate in fantasy football in the name of the lord jesus not being overly resentful at people who shouldn't be at the top of the league finding themselves at the top of the league you know there's no justice sometimes in the world but anyway let me move on but you know we laugh but really that's what paul is saying everything you do not just the big things not just the things that seem to be very important and and serious but everything you do do it in the name of the lord jesus now i've posed all these questions to you and i'm not going to give you the answers that's for you to reflect on to think on how do i do all of these things that i do in the name of the lord jesus now in the passage we've thought a little bit about what precedes the verse but also we have what follows the verse and in what follows the verse we see paul applying this truth in the very practical area of relationships in the home and in the workplace areas where this principle is to be applied because in the immediately following verse from verse 18 of chapter 3 right through to the beginning of chapter 4 you have paul dealing with all of these different human relationships which really are so much part of our life so much of our life revolves around these different relationships and paul is saying in all of these relationships whatever you do do in the name of the lord jesus so what are we to do well whatever we do and how are we to do it we are to do it in the name of the lord jesus in representation of him empowered by him in a manner that is consistent with his character and his priorities and then the final question that we want to pose is for whom are we to do it whatever we do for whom are we to do it and here i want to focus on the last part of the verse giving thanks to god the father through him that is through jesus giving thanks to god the father through him so whatever we do we're doing it in the name of jesus and we're doing so giving thanks to god the father through jesus now you might reasonably ask the question how does that expression answer the question for whom are we to do it is it not rather a continuation of the answer to the question of how we are to do it well we're to do it in the name of lord jesus and we're to do it giving thanks and we're to do everything gratefully and we're to do everything humbly politely even but there's more to it than that for paul giving thanks is not just good manners you know we sometimes think of saying thank you as being an expression of good manners and of course it is but for paul giving thanks is much more than just good manners giving thanks is at the very heart of worship paul is not just telling you to be polite when he says giving thanks to god the father uh through jesus he's calling you to to total worship if we can use

that expression everything that you do is giving thanks it's to use the greek word that is translated here giving thanks elcharisto from where we get the english word eucharist the thanksgiving meal you we're going to be celebrating communion next sunday morning and that's the a thanksgiving meal a eucharist it's an offering to the father it's an act of worship worship and so our lives are to be an act of worship a giving thanks to god through jesus and we have echoes of this of course in in the language of paul as he writes to to the romans in romans chapter 12 that very well known passage at the beginning of the chapter where paul begins in light of god's mercies in the light of all that we've discovered about god's great salvation offer your bodies offer your very lives as a living sacrifice to god which is your reasonable act of worship offer everything you are to him everything you do all your dreams all your aspirations the totality of your being in the light of god's mercy you can offer him no less in the light of all that he has done it's simply not enough to offer him your sunday or offer him uh part of of who you are or or some of your dreams you know everything is to be offered to him as an act of of thanksgiving a eucharistic thanksgiving offering to the father now that paul is is talking about this holistic whole life worship is is confirmed by the manner in which he expresses this he says giving thanks to god the father through him it's not just giving thanks to god the father but giving thanks to god the father through him through jesus the giving thanks in everything is directed to god the father through jesus our approach to the father our giving thanks to the father our worship is mediated through jesus christ we worship through him resting on his finished work on our behalf in him and jesus our service our lives our lives our everything our worship is acceptable to the father and so the whatever that we do to be done in the name of the lord jesus but it's to be done as an act of thanksgiving and to god the father through jesus our very lives uh offered uh in in in worship whatever you do whether in word or deed do it all in the name of the lord jesus giving thanks to god the father and through him as you embark on whatever this week holds for you some of you will be classes and writing essays or going to work or working at home looking after your kids whatever it is whatever activities you have planned for this week i would encourage you to to think about them maybe at the start of the day as you think well what am i am i going to be doing today and ask yourself these questions how can i do what i'm going to do today in the name of the lord jesus can i do what i'm planning to do in representation of him in what measure will the manner which i live today reflect his glory and so in a small way and begin to fill the world with the glory of god reflect consider and go out and live and whatever you do whether in word or deed do it all in the name of the lord jesus giving thanks to god the father through him well let's pray heavenly father we do thank you that you call us to your service we thank you that though you are the god who is altogether self-sufficient you do not need our help

and yet you have so ordered your purposes for the world that you involve us in the fulfilling of your purposes and we thank you for that we thank you that you are pleased to involve us and you are pleased to receive our our worship to receive and to delight in our service to you and as we do reflect on your manifold mercies as we reflect on how your grace has been lavished on us in the person of your son jesus it is indeed a reasonable thing for us to respond offering up our lives as a living sacrifice to you help us then in this week that has begun that whatever this week holds whatever it is that we will be doing however seemingly important or however in our eyes perhaps trivial whatever we do in word or deed help us to do in the name of the lord jesus and may it be a thanksgiving offering to you our father that we offer to you through jesus and we pray in his name amen