

“What’s Your Motive?”  
Colossians 3:17  
(Preached at Trinity, September 23, 2018)

I’m supplying these notes for the benefit of busy pastors who may be engaged in bi-vocational work, feeling the pressure of preparing to preach twice on the Lord’s Day while trying to balance full-time secular work as well as caring for their families. While the notes of another man are no substitute for personal study, I pray that these may aid in the process of preparing to preach.

**Disclaimer:** These are the actual notes I bring with me to the pulpit, which I follow loosely. They are not designed for publication. While I try to make every effort to give proper credit to my sources from the pulpit, adequate citations will sometimes be absent from my notes. If anyone feels their intellectual material has been used without adequate citation, please contact me and I’ll make immediate correction giving credit.

1. The question of motive is one of great importance. It weighs heavily upon our criminal justice system.  
For example, a man is putting away his firearm and it discharges killing the person on the other side of the room. He is charged with involuntary manslaughter or negligent homicide. His motive was not to fire upon the bystander.  
On the other hand, a man enters a store to commit armed robbery and kills the cashier. His motivation was to commit a crime and do bodily harm. He is charged with criminal murder.  
In both cases a person is killed, but motivation is important.
2. Parents weigh motive when training their children. There is a difference between a child guilty of a careless oversight and a child committing willful disobedience.  
Motivation is important.
3. Motivation is important to God.  
God acts out of the purest motives. Everything He does is a reflection of His Divine perfection. He does everything for Himself, for His own glory.
4. God looks upon the purity of our motives. Motive is important
  - A. We are to do everything with the motive of honoring God  
**1 Corinthians 10:31 NAU** - "Whether, then, you eat or drink or whatever you do, do all to the glory of God."
  - B. Love must always be our motivation for action—love for God, love for our fellow man.  
**1 Corinthians 13:3 NAU** - "And if I give all my possessions to feed *the poor*, and if I surrender my body to be burned, but do not have love, it profits me nothing."
    1. Paul says love is the fulfilling of the Law.  
**Galatians 5:14 NAS** - "For the whole Law is fulfilled in one word, in the *statement*, "You shall love your neighbor as yourself."  
**Romans 13:8-10 NAS** - "Owe nothing to anyone except to love one another; for he who loves his neighbor has fulfilled *the law*.<sup>9</sup> For this, "You shall not commit adultery, You shall not murder, You shall not steal, You shall not covet," and if there is any other commandment, it is summed up in this saying, "You shall love your neighbor as yourself." <sup>10</sup> Love does no wrong to a neighbor; love therefore is the fulfillment of *the law*."
    2. This is often greatly misunderstood. Paul is not saying love has replaced the Law. There are those today who believe the New Covenant is a covenant of grace under the law of love—thus the Ten Commandments have been abrogated.

- a. It is absolutely false to presume that love somehow erases God’s standard of righteousness as presented in the Law. Rather, love must be our motivation for keeping the Law.
  - b. John Murray described it well:  
 “Love is the motive and active principle of fulfillment. Love renders to the requirements enunciated in the law the full measure of the obedience demanded. Paul did not say, ‘Love IS the law.’ We may speak of the law of love. But, if so, what we must have in view is the commandment to love or the law which love fulfills. We may not speak of the law of love if we mean that love is itself the law. Love cannot be equated with the law or can law be defined in terms of love. *The notion* that love is its own law . . . is a fantasy which has no warrant from Scripture and runs counter to the witness of biblical teaching.”<sup>1</sup>
3. But love is our high motivation for obedience.  
 J.V. Fesko writes: “The Law is a rule of love between God and His people. Breaking God’s Law is violating that bond of love. Alternately, Christ fulfilled that rule of love because He loved His Father, obeying Him perfectly. And now the Holy Spirit applies the Word to us and enables us to love our triune God.”<sup>2</sup>  
 “If we are to reflect the image of Christ, the Law will assist us by showing us what we are supposed to look like. With the Psalmist, we should love the Law of God because it shows us who we are in Christ and the righteousness with which we are to shine forth.”<sup>3</sup>
5. God must be the high motivation for all that we do. We must have an eye upon reflecting and exalting His glory. The best of our actions towards God fall apart without the proper motivation. There are three qualifications—or three motivations. Our Confession makes a high statement on the importance of a proper motivation for our good works.  
 LBC, 16:7 - *Of Good Works*: “Works done by unregenerate men, although for the matter of them they may be things which God commands, and of good use both to themselves and to others; yet because they proceed not from an heart purified by faith, nor are done in a right manner according to the Word, nor to a right end, the glory of God, they are therefore sinful, and cannot please god, nor make a man meet to receive grace from God, and yet their neglect of them is more sinful and displeasing to God.”
    - Without faith it is impossible to please God. Our motive is mere religion.
    - Without the perfect standard of God’s Word our motivation becomes mere superstition.
    - Without the motivation of God’s glory every work becomes mere legalism.
  6. Nicolas Byfield writes: “In general, unto the goodness of the action a good *motive* is essentially required; for though a good intention make not the action good, yet without a good intention the action cannot be accepted as good in God’s sight.”<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Murray, John, *Principles of Conduct*, (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1957), Pages 24-26.

<sup>2</sup> Fesko, J.V., *The Rule of Love*, (Grand Rapids: Reformation Heritage Books, 2009), Pages 4-5.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid. page 17.

<sup>4</sup> Byfield, Nicolas, *Commentary on Colossians*, (Stoke-on-Trent: Tentmaker Publications, 2012) Page 342.

7. **Verse 17** deals with the important issue of motivation.  
**Colossians 3:17 NAU** - "Whatever you do in word or deed, *do* all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks through Him to God the Father."  
 A. Everything we do, whether in word or deed. Must be done in the name of Jesus, with an attitude of thanksgiving, through Christ and to the Father.  
 B. Christ becomes the motivation for everything we do. This is the heart of Paul's teaching in this passage. It is at the heart of the Christian life.  
**Verse 18** - "Wives, be subject to your husbands, as is fitting in the Lord."  
**Verse 19** - "Husbands, love your wives"  
 In his Epistle to the Ephesians Paul stresses Christ as the model and motivation: "just as Christ also loved the church and gave Himself up for her,"  
**Verse 20 - Colossians 3:20 NAU** - "Children, be obedient to your parents in all things, for this is well-pleasing to the Lord."  
**Verse 22** - "Slaves, in all things obey those who are your masters on earth" With Christ as the motivation:  
 Verse 23 - "Whatever you do, do your work heartily, as for the Lord rather than for men,"
8. This morning I want us to consider this important question of motivation. What is the motive behind your actions?  
 You've heard me say often, "People always do what they want to do."  
 The question then is what do you want to do? Why do you do what you do?  
 Every action reflects a motive and a priority.  
 In everything, our motive must be Christ.  
**Verse 16** instructs us regarding our singing in worship. But our lives are not lived out only in corporate worship. The Christian life is lived out daily. How are we to live? What motivates us? What is the all-encompassing motive for what we do?  
 May **Verse 17** serve to instruct us well this morning.
- I. It's a motive that's universal in scope – "Whatever you do in word or deed"  
 A. No part of your life should be unaffected by your love for God and eye towards His glory  
 1. The two words *λόγος* and *ἔργον*, word and deed, are used in the NT to describe totality of one's interaction with the world.  
**Luke 24:19 NAU** - "The things about Jesus the Nazarene, who was a prophet mighty in deed and word in the sight of God and all the people,"  
**Acts 7:22 NAU** - "Moses was educated in all the learning of the Egyptians, and he was a man of power in words and deeds."  
**Romans 15:18 NAU** - "For I will not presume to speak of anything except what Christ has accomplished through me, resulting in the obedience of the Gentiles by word and deed,"  
 2. Paul is speaking of the totality of our life  
 John Calvin – "There is no part of our life or conduct, however insignificant, which should not be related to the glory of God."<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> Calvin, John, *Commentary on the Epistles of Paul the Apostle to the Corinthians, Vol.1*, (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2003), Page 347.

3. Most people live without any sense of purpose, no direction. They are just living.
  4. Paul is saying here that everything in our life has significance  
“Whatever you do . . . do all”  
What you wear, what you eat, how you clean your house, how you drive.  
How you raise your family. How you work. The attention you give to your church. The kind of words you speak. The things you allow, the things you deny.
- B. Paul’s words are purposely left vague
1. On one hand Paul’s charge is specific—universal and all encompassing. It leaves nothing out – “Do all”
  2. But it is also vague, in that it leaves us with wonderful freedom and liberty as to *how* we live.
    - a. Most of the Christian life is what we call “adiaphorus.” In other words, things that the Bible describes as neither right nor wrong.
    - b. Most of our life is left without specifics. The NT doesn’t give us a detailed list of rules, although it’s amazing how we invent rules. We are not given specifics on politics, homeschooling, family size, vaccinations, hairstyle.
    - c. We naturally desire rules, specifics, do’s and don’ts. And we tend to bind the consciences of others with our personal preferences.
    - d. Our choices can become a matter of pride.
      - (1) While the Bible is certain in its condemnation of drunkenness, it really doesn’t teach total abstinence regarding alcohol. But some groups make it an absolute requirement. It can become a matter of pride.
      - (2) Other groups glory in their liberty and flaunt their use of alcohol. It can also be a display of pride.
  3. What is required of all, regardless of your actions, that it have the proper motive. In this sense, there is nothing adiaphorus—nothing indifferent. Why do you do what you do? We are not permitted to live without a keen sense of direction and purpose.
- II. It’s a motive that’s specific in focus – “do all in the name of the Lord Jesus”
- A. Paul wants us to understand that everything in our life must have Christ as the motive.
1. When confronted with a moral issue or one of the endless decisions of life the Bible may not give us specifics but we can ask ourselves important questions regarding our motive.  
Can I do this without compromising my Christian profession?  
Can I do this in the name of the Lord Jesus, whose glory and reputation is at stake?
  2. F.F. Bruce writes: “The right course of action may not be unambiguously clear, but such questions, honestly faced, will commonly provide surer ethical guidance than special regulations may do. It is often easy to get around special regulations; it is less easy to get around so comprehensive a statement of Christian duty as this verse supplies.”<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> Bruce, F.F., *Commentary on the Epistles to the Ephesians and the Colossians*, (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1984), Page 160.

- B. What is meant by – “the name of the Lord Jesus?”
1. In biblical terms the name of a person represented his character, dignity, work, reputation, and his power and authority.
  2. The name of Jesus is not just a title – it is a signal for knees to bow. It is a recognition of His lordship.  
**Philippians 2:10 NAS** - "that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, of those who are in heaven, and on earth, and under the earth,"
  3. To do all in the name of Jesus is have an eye upon the fullness of His being – all that His name stands for  
It is a recognition of His power and majesty, of His holiness and infinite purity. It is a recognition of His worthiness of worship and praise.
  4. To do all in the name of Jesus is an expression of faith – a recognition of His rightful reign and a trust in His sovereign direction. It is a life lived with an eye upon the risen Christ – **Verses 1-2**  
It is a heart geared towards obedience to His commands and an interest in the promotion of His glory.
- III. It's a motivation fueled by a single source – "giving thanks through Him to God the Father."
- A. This is an expression of the source of everything
1. Notice the equation “through Him to God.”  
**Romans 11:36 NAS** - "For from Him and through Him and to Him are all things. To Him *be* the glory forever. Amen."
  2. God is worthy of all things
- B. We recognize that God is the source of all things and we receive all things with thanksgiving.
1. Thanksgiving governs everything in the Christian life. Notice the previous verse – “singing with thankfulness in your hearts to God.”
  2. Our motivation in everything we say and do is simply to express our gratitude to God for all things.
  3. This demands a work of grace within us. Paul described our natural state  
**Romans 1:21 NAS** - "For even though they knew God, they did not honor Him as God, or give thanks; but they became futile in their speculations, and their foolish heart was darkened."  
**Romans 1:25 NAS** - "For they exchanged the truth of God for a lie, and worshiped and served the creature rather than the Creator, who is blessed forever."
  4. The life of the Christian is a life of thanksgiving  
**1 Thessalonians 5:18 NAS** - "in everything give thanks; for this is God's will for you in Christ Jesus."

#### Conclusion:

1. Motive is important. What is your motive for the things you say and do?  
Paul's charge is for us to do everything in the name of Jesus Christ from a heart of gratitude to God.
2. Such a heart changes everything. It is the heart of Biblical Christianity. The motive of Christ is the fuel that fires every action in the Christian life.