



July 8, 2012  
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## *It's Your Call: Give It Your Best Shot!*

Colossians 3: 17-24

As you read in this morning's letter, the Vaccaros and the Toones decided to sneak away for two days this week to spend some family time together. It was great. But our Monday morning departure was complicated. The night before, I heard a beeping sound coming from our basement. I went down and discovered that it was a monitor hooked to our grinder pump. How many know what a grinder pump is? It's like a sump pump, but it's for sewage. You **do not** want that alarm to go off because it means that the grinder is no longer grinding, and the pump is no longer pumping, and some very yucky water is seeping out of the container and beginning to rise up out of its hole toward your basement floor. Mmmmmmm, good!

So, the morning before we left, I was waiting for Rich the plumber to show up and solve my very yucky problem. He did show up; he worked hard on it for two days, in fact. And when we returned, I was pleased to discover that we could run showers and flush toilets without fear. Rich had done his work well.

So here's my question for you this morning: Can being a plumber who fixes people's grinder pumps... can that be a call of God? As we think about that, I want to turn to something Paul wrote that speaks to our calling as followers of Jesus.  
*[Read Colossians 3: 17-24]*

A few weeks ago I preached on the absolute priority of Jesus in everything we do as a church. You might recall that I chose for my text that morning a passage from Colossians, a majestic, soaring passage that speaks of the supremacy of Jesus, the one for whom and by whom all things were created. Jesus is the eternal one; Jesus is the one who holds all things together, and in Jesus, the fullness of God dwells in bodily form. This tiny excerpt from Paul's letter to a little church in Colossae is the sort of deep passage that you could chew on and mull on for the rest of your life.

But in that same little letter Paul offers some of the most practical words for Christian living that have ever been written: Colossians 3: 17. In fact, we ought to memorize it. We all remember John 3: 16; let's add Colossians 3: 17 to that list.

"Whatever you do, whether in word or deed, do it all in the name of the Lord Jesus..." Imagine if we could live that way. Imagine if, before we did or said anything, we reminded ourselves that we were acting as ambassadors for Jesus.

You've seen these stickers on delivery trucks. [*How am I Driving? Call 1 800\_\_\_\_\_*] If you catch one of those trucks misbehaving, you call someone and they get a sharp reminder of what it means to be a representative of that company. Maybe we all ought to wear forehead stickers that say, "How Am I Behaving? Call 1-800-HYPOCRITE." I was talking with a professional person recently who said, "Some of my worst, most demanding, most unscrupulous clients are supposed Christians. I cringe when I see them coming, and they are a horrible witness to my unbelieving staff members." Ouch! That must make the Lord so proud!

"Whatever you do, whether in word or deed, do it all in the name of the Lord Jesus..." And then Paul goes on to give examples, very practical examples, of what this should look like. Even in a time when the father had, literally, life and death authority over his family, Paul says that everyone in the family, including the father, is called to behave in a way that honors Christ. Paul even speaks to the horrible institution of slavery that existed at the time. Naturally, you would expect him to tell the slaves to behave themselves, to obey their masters. But remarkably, he even tells the masters to treat their slaves fairly. Everyone, whatever their station of life, to whatever they had been called—father, mother, children, slaves—all were to live a life, in word and deed, that honored the Lord Jesus. It was a revolutionary attitude.

But how does it apply to our sermon theme, the "Call of God"? Up until now, we have mostly been talking about the primary call of God. Do you remember what that is? The primary call of God is the same for every single believer. It is a call for us to be in intimate relationship with God. It is not about doing, it is about being. Before we **do** a single thing **for** God, we are called to be in relationship **with** God. Os Guinness, who will be with us later this summer, puts it this way: "Our primary calling as followers of Christ is by Him, to Him, and for Him. First and foremost we are called to Someone (God), and not to something (such as motherhood, politics or teaching) or to somewhere (such as the inner city or Outer Mongolia)." [*The Call*, p. 31] If we get all occupied doing stuff for God and never spend time loving him and being loved by Him, we have missed the point of call entirely. That is your primary calling.

Have I been clear enough about that? Now, having said that, we begin the transition into our "Secondary Calling." We actually started that shift last week with the parable of the talents. Our secondary calling is to take the gifts, talents and longings that God has entrusted to us and put them to use in a way that honors Christ and serves his Kingdom. Here is how Guinness describes it: "Our secondary call, considering who God is as sovereign," [*that means, God is the boss! The ultimate Lord*] "is that everyone, everywhere, and in everything should think, speak, live and act entirely for him." [*The Call*, p. 31] Hmm... where did we hear something like that? Oh yeah: Colossians 3:17: "Whatever you do, whether in word or deed, do it all in the name of the Lord Jesus..."

So then, back to my original question: can plumber Rich be fulfilling his call from God by fixing my grinder pump? Absolutely! If he does it out of his love for the Lord—if he does it with a sincerity and reverence, if he sees what he does as a way of serving Christ by serving others, if when he is crawling around in other people's sewage, he does it knowing that he is really working for his ultimate boss, Jesus—then yes, absolutely, he can be a plumber who is living out his calling in service to Jesus Christ. Yes, he can be fulfilling his calling as surely as I do when I get up on a Sunday and preach a sermon.

Does that make sense? Can you agree with that? Well, it was not always so. Early on in Christian history there was a definite pecking order in God's earthly kingdom. One early Christian thinker, a guy named Eusebius, said that there were "two ways of life" in the church: the "perfect life" and the "permitted" life. The "perfect life" was spiritual: priests, monks, nuns—only they lived the perfect life. The rest of humanity—soldiers, farmers, tradesmen, scholars, plumbers—they were living the "permitted" life. It wasn't the best, wasn't the highest calling. It was okay, and after all, someone had to do that stuff. But those who followed this path could only have "a kind of secondary grade of piety." In other words, all of you can never be as holy as I, a minister of the Lord, can be! So just deal with it!!!!

Guinness calls this the "Catholic" distortion because, of course, that was the only church that existed at the time. With the Catholic distortion, it was believed that the word "calling" was reserved only for priests, monks, and nuns; all the rest of us just had "work." [*The Call*, p. 33]

Then came the Protestant Reformation. Martin Luther lashed out at the idea that only religious people could have a calling. "The works of monks and priests, however holy and arduous they be, do not differ one whit in the sight of God from the works of the rustic laborer in the field or the woman going about her household tasks... all works are measured before God by faith alone..." [*The Call*, p. 34]

Suddenly everyday folks in everyday activities had a new sense of purpose and dignity. Suddenly, those who labored outside of the pulpit could still be fulfilling God's calling upon their lives. There was even a phrase to describe this new view of the value of ordinary human labor. Do you remember? "The Protestant Work Ethic." It was good and honoring to God to work hard, make money, improve your lot in life, but guess what? This view became distorted, too. Soon, secular work was no longer valued because honest and hard labor was a way of honoring God. No, secular work became an end in itself.

President Calvin Coolidge once declared, "The man who builds a factory builds a temple. The man who works there worships there." Henry Ford proclaimed, "Work is the salvation of the human race, morally, physically, socially." Even the Nazis got into the game. A sign over the entrance to Dachau, the prison camp in Munich

declared, "Arbeit Mach Frei." Which means: "Work brings freedom." It was a lie then—and it has continued to be the lie that every workaholic has bought into. Convinced that if they steal more hours from their families, make more money, move farther up the corporate ladder... then, at last, they will be truly free. And they never are. To every workaholic out there, you have fallen victim to the Protestant Distortion; the view that hard work and making money and improving your lot is in itself a religious undertaking.

How do we find the balance, then? If we believe that our labors—mother, doctor, teacher, plumber, politician, student—can be our calling from God, how do we find a balance between the Catholic Distortion and the Protestant Distortion? By remembering the Paul's verse! "Whatever you do, whether in word or deed— *[that means, whatever... religious, secular, writing a sermon, writing a lesson plan, going on a medical mission, healing someone in your office, leading a church, leading a company, caring for babies in our nursery, caring for babies in your nursery, whatever you do]* — do it all in the name of the Lord Jesus."

That doesn't mean just sticking a fish on your business card or having evangelistic tracts in your waiting rooms. It means working hard, working honestly, working in service to others, working in a way and with a spirit that honors Christ—working the way you would work if you were waiting on or caring for or serving Jesus himself—and doing so because every good act of labor you do is an act of worship to the One who loves you and called you and created you with those gifts, talents and passions.

And this is especially true if you are working in an area for which you are not passionate... especially there giving of your very best because, to endure unenjoyable labor is, in itself, an act of worship to the Christ who endured the unenjoyable labor of becoming a human being and allowing the rest of us to mistreat him and kill him. It could be that your job is just your job. You do it honestly and well in a way that honors Christ and serves others, but your real calling is to teach or to encourage or to pray. Our jobs are not necessarily our calling, but the way we do our secular jobs necessarily is a part of our calling. And what is that way? "Whatever you do, whether in word or deed, do it all in the name of Jesus."

John Lennox tells a story of an apprentice electrician, a Christian man, who had been hired by a big company that was building a lot of homes. But he had trouble keeping up with the others. The foreman kept riding him, pushing him to pick up the speed and get his work done more quickly. But try as he might, he could not go any faster. Finally the foreman called him into the job shack. "What's wrong with you? You are the slowest electrician I have. What is your problem?" The apprentice replied, "I don't know, sir. I am working as fast as I can. The code for this new construction is complicated. It takes time to comply with the regulations, especially for the wiring underneath the floor." "The floor!" roared the foreman.

"Who looks under the floor?" The young apprentice paused a moment and then replied, "My Lord does."

The apprentice was fired, but he found other work with a company that valued having a worker who did what was right—gave his very best—even when no one else was watching. Because he knew that at least one could see everything he had done, and He was the most important audience of all.

Maybe you view your vocation as your calling. Maybe, when you wire a new home or fix someone's grinder pump or raise your children or coach a sports team or make the numbers balance at the end of the day—maybe when you do that you know that God created you for that purpose, and you find great delight. God needs great electricians, plumbers, moms, coaches and accountants. Or maybe the job you are doing right now is an honorable way to make a living, to provide for yourself and your family and free you up to do what you sense to be God's real calling upon your life. In either case, part of the calling of your life is to give it your best shot. "Whatever you do, whether in word or deed, do it all in the name of Jesus."

## Sermon Questions

- **REFLECT & APPLY TOGETHER:** Share your thoughts. Don't teach! Listen and reflect on God's word together; grapple with what God is calling us to do and be through this passage.

- **PRAY TOGETHER:** Tell the Lord one thing you are thankful for, and lay one concern before the Lord.

- **DIG DEEPER**

1. Colossians 3:17 is a clear—and sometimes challenging—admonition. Can you think of something you have done in your life that was HARD to do in the name of the Lord? Hard to give thanks for? What was it and why?
2. This is a sermon series on the call of God. How does this passage broaden the definition of call? What has it taught you that might change the way you approach significant aspects of your own life?