

INTRODUCTION

I'd like to introduce what I'm preaching about by taking a little survey. What is your favorite television program of all time? Mine is the A-Team back in the 80's. Remember that with Hannibal, Mr. T., Face Man, and Murdock. I loved that show because it was always funny, the good guys always won, and no one was ever seriously injured or killed. That is my favorite show of all time but what about you? What is yours?

That you and I answered that question reveals something about us. We watch television and because we do, we need a *TV Guide*. I don't mean the magazine *TV Guide* of course. I mean a principle instead that guides how we watch it. Paul gives us that principle in Colossians 3:17 and that's what I'm going to preach about today.

WATCHING TELEVISION

Colossians is my favorite letter of Paul in the New Testament. I especially enjoy an ethical section in it that begins in 3:18 and goes through 4:6. In that section, Paul tells his readers and us how to live. He reveals specific things that we should and shouldn't do. In verses 18-21, for instance, he tells us how we should relate to our family members. In verses 22-25, he tells slaves and us how we should do our work.

But what I want to focus on today is how he introduces this ethical section. It's with a summarizing principle in verse 17. That principle is, *"Whatever you do in word or deed, do all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks through Him to God the Father."* That's an excellent introduction because it's so comprehensive. The words *"whatever"* and *"all"* encompass literally everything that we do: waking up, eating, working, driving, shopping, playing, going to sleep, and for our purposes today, watching television.

Watching television is without doubt America's favorite pastime. Studies show that the average American watches 5 hours of it every day. That's 35 hours a week, almost a workweek. Along those same lines, the

average preschooler watches approximately 6000 hours of it before entering kindergarten. Imagine that. It's staggering. 6000 hours. It's an indisputable fact. Watching television is America's favorite pastime.

Now, that may or may not be true of us. But even if it isn't true of us, most of us do watch television. So, we need to grasp two things – its impact on us and our proper response to it. Let's examine both of those.

THE IMPACT OF TELEVISION

I begin with the impact of television. 150 years ago, Danish philosopher Soren Kierkegaard said this: *"Suppose someone invented an instrument, a convenient little talking tube which, say, could be heard over the whole land . . . I wonder if the police would not forbid it, fearing that the whole country would become mentally deranged if it were used."* We do have just such a tube today don't we that not only talks but televises as well. Television may not have left the nation deranged but its impact is certainly powerful and profound.

It does many things, one of the most significant of which is this. It erodes values. Watch an evening of television programming sometime and you'll quickly discover that it fervently and pervasively promotes three things: sexual promiscuity, lewdness (immodesty in behavior and dress), and consumerism/materialism.

I saw a promo, for instance, of a new sitcom called *The Bill Engvall Show*. A father and mother anxiously confront their young teenage son about what he's hiding in his backpack. When he reveals that its pornography, the father proudly says *"Good boy!"* and the mother says *"Oh"* and walks away as if it's nothing serious at all.

That promo is instructive. It illustrates that television consciously rejects the Biblical values of sexual purity, modesty, and simplicity and puts sexual promiscuity, lewdness, and consumerism in their place.

But why does it do that? Does television programming merely reflect values or does it create them? That's the hotly debated issue today.

The television industry of course claims that it merely reflects

values. It argues that what it shows is simply a mirror image of what's going on in the lives of the masses. It only displays the attitudes, beliefs, and behaviors of the people who watch it. The people on television are just thinking and acting as the people who watch it do.

I don't believe that for a minute. Television doesn't reflect values. It creates them. The promo that I just mentioned is a case in point. Let me ask you. Is it commonplace in American homes for fathers to be proud and mothers unconcerned that their young sons are using pornography? From my experience with people, the answer is "no" – not yet at least. The truth is that typical secular fathers and mothers want their sons not to use pornography. It isn't something they encourage them to do. But television executives and producers want them to. So, they create episodes like that the one that I just mentioned. They aren't presenting things as they are but as they want them to be. They aren't reflecting values in their shows. They're creating them.

And it's working – through sheer repetition alone. Repetition is a powerful thing, far more so than most of us realize. It regularly channels the mind in a specific direction, which in turn ingrains habits of thought in it. That is the basis of psychocybernetics. Psychocybernetics tries to help people by training them to repeat certain affirmations regularly. It might be, for instance, "*I am a person of value and worth.*" That kind of repetition is so powerful that it's not even important that the person believe what is being repeated. The inner mind is being trained and will eventually modify beliefs and behaviors to conform to the affirmation.

That's exactly what makes television programming so powerful. Being repeatedly exposed to what it presents alters how we think and what we do. To one degree or another, our minds eventually modify our beliefs and behaviors to conform to what is repeatedly presented.

People, especially Christians, often deny that. I knew a long established Christian who devotedly watched the *Seinfeld Show*. He insisted over and over again that its blatant sexual promiscuity didn't affect him - that he was able to watch it discriminately, appreciating the

humor but being unaffected by the sex. He was deceiving himself though. We can deny it all that we want to but none of us can escape the power of repetition. To one degree or another, repeated exposure to what television presents will modify our beliefs and behaviors. To one degree or another, it will create destructive patterns of thought and action in us.

The ultimate consequence of that is the erosion of values.

Television viewers, including Christians, are slowly taking on the values that executives and producers create. Just look at the way that many young people and adults, including Christians, dress, for instance. They have totally discarded modesty. They repeatedly see on television what earlier generations and the Bible itself would consider lewd. But repeatedly seeing it has altered how they think. So, they dress immodestly, provocatively, and don't even seem to know it.

It's true then. Television is the most powerful medium ever invented. It profoundly impacts those who watch it in many ways. One of those ways is that it erodes values.

OUR PROPER RESPONSE TO TELEVISION

It can do that though only if we let it. So, don't let it. Don't let it impact us in negative ways. Control television; don't be controlled by it. That's our call and proper response to it.

But how do we do that? Paul tells us in Colossians 3:17. What he gives us here is our "TV guide," that is, the principle that guides how we should watch it. That TV guide is *"Watch it in the name of Jesus."* That's how we control television. Watch it in the name of Jesus.

In the Bible, a person's name is synonymous with the person himself or herself in general and with his or her character in particular. With a name like Bobby, I'm glad that's no longer the case but it was the case in Biblical times. So, to do something in Jesus' name means to do it in His character, to do it as He would do it if He were in our place.

Now, notice what we should do that way. It's *"whatever"* and *"all"* we do or say. We should always say and do everything in the character

of Jesus, as He Himself would say and do it if He were in our place.

How do you wake up in the morning for example? You've probably heard the old joke. A friend of his asks a husband, "*Do you wake up grumpy in the morning?*" To which he replied, "*No, I let her sleep.*" Do you wake up grumpy in the morning and no one had better say a word to you until you've had your first cup of coffee? Well, that isn't the way Jesus would do it and neither should we. We should wake up as He did I'm sure, with a smiling face and cheerful heart, looking forward to the day ahead. We should wake up in the name of Jesus.

But it isn't just waking up; it's everything, including watching television. We should watch it in the name of Jesus, that is, in His character. We should watch it as He Himself would if He were in our place. That's our TV guide and we should follow it in two respects.

The first respect is what we watch. I'm old enough to remember when there were only three channels on television and no remotes. We had to actually get up off of the couch, walk over to the television, and turn a dial to change channels. There weren't that many shows on and the ones that were on were censored enough to be suitable.

But cable TV and remotes have changed all of that. There are now hundred of channels with thousands of shows and all that we have to do to change them is push a button on the remote. We don't even have to leave the couch or move any other body parts beside our finger to do it.

The problem is that encourages thoughtlessness. Most of us don't consciously decide what we watch. We just push buttons and channel surf, looking for something to get our attention. Then, when something does, we watch it without reflecting on our doing so at all.

That needs to change. We should actually give thought to and decide what we watch, with this guide in mind. Would Jesus Himself watch it? We should specifically ask and answer that question with regard to every show that we watch. Would Jesus watch it? If He would, then we can. If He wouldn't, then we can't. It's as simple as that.

Someone asked me, for instance, if I watched *Dancing with the*

Stars? I do like different styles of dancing, including Ball Room. So, I asked the question, ***“Would Jesus watch this show if He were me?”*** I then gave thought to that and answered, ***“No!”*** It’s because the women’s costumes are so immodest and provocative. It pollutes my mind to watch it and so I don’t. Now, I’m not condemning you if you do and I’m not telling you not to. I’m just saying that you should actually think and decide before watching shows. Prayerfully and carefully ask and answer the question, ***“Would Jesus watch this if He were me?”***

There’s a second respect in which we should follow our TV guide. The first is what we watch. The second is how much we watch. Television is a valid and wonderful form of entertainment and we need to be entertained. But how much should we be? That’s the question.

Jesus calls us to be good stewards of everything that He gives us including our time. When it comes to our time, the issue is, ***“How much television is too much?”*** Most people don’t address that issue and I mean at all. They just sit down and unthinkingly watch as much as they want to. But followers of Jesus should actually reflect instead. We should prayerfully and carefully ask and answer the question, ***“How much time would Jesus spend watching television if He were me?”***

So that’s our TV guide. We should watch television in the name of Jesus. We should watch only *what* and *how much* He would watch if He were us.

CONCLUSION

Think of that another way in closing. Imagine that Jesus is physically present with you. He’s sitting on the couch next to you. Would you watch what you’re watching if He was? Would you watch how much you’re watching if He was? Those are urgent questions because the fact is that we never watch television alone. Jesus, who is omnipresent, is always with us when we do. What we watch, He watches through our eyes. So, watch only *what* and *how much* we would watch if He were actually with us – because He is. That is our TV guide.