

Does Materialism Matter?

Introduction. There is a way of faith, and there is a way of disbelief. Which way you choose will matter in every area of your life.

The way of faith rests on believing what God has told you through scripture (Romans 10:17). The Bible contrasts faith and empirical understanding (2 Corinthians 5:7). Faith involves believing what we cannot know through physical resources because God has told us they are so (cp. Hebrews 11:3).

In contrast to the way of faith is the way of disbelief, a way that values human perception above divine revelation. This disbelief is materialism — placing confidence in the perceivable world of human experience rather than in the unseen world of spiritual truth. Notice how this episode played out in Eden (Genesis 3:1-6). Rather than trusting in what God said (the way of faith), Eve formed a contrary opinion based on the desires of her eyes and went down the path of disbelief and ruin (the way of materialism).

This contrast between the way of faith (informed and directed by scripture) and the way of disbelief (informed and directed by the material world) is outlined in 1 John 2:15-17. This choice, either to believe what God has told us or to invest ourselves in the material world, is at the root of every ethical, moral, and doctrinal decision we make, and it matters to us in three crucial areas.

I. Materialism Matters In The Home

- A. Materialism, placing an emphasis on the tangible rather than the intangible, limits a person's life to the acquisition and manipulation of material goods (Luke 12:15). Jesus went on to tell the parable of a man who had made every material provision for himself. Yet, this rich man was foolishly unprepared to meet God, and he would die that night (Luke 12:20).
- B. Trusting this material world, men and women plow themselves into a madness of acquisition. They become enslaved to possessions, status, and hedonistic pleasures, but these are empty and foolish (Ecclesiastes 2:1-11) In this dehumanizing process, the emphasis shifts away from eternal truth towards a focus on present gratification. Paul contrasts the love produced by following the law of God with the adversarial mindset of materialism (Galatians 5:14-15).
- C. Whatever controls your life functions as your god. For those who believe in the message of scripture, the Lord is God, and He has promised to care for you absent of materialism (Matthew 6:24-33). For those, however, who trust in this material world, possessions have become their god (cp. Colossians 3:5).
- D. Families bound together in a shared commitment of faith can weather any storm. Families blinded by materialism will be pulled apart (Genesis 13:10-12).

II. Materialism Matters In The Nation

- A. "Ideas have consequences," social historian George Weigel observed, "and bad ideas can have lethal consequences." For over 1,000 years, the pursuit of the common good as a social contract overseen by God and answerable to His law has been the bedrock of Western culture. This ideal was never consistently followed, but it served as a corrective against sinful behavior.

- B. The market economy of capitalism originated in the framework of biblical history and values (Genesis 2:15; Deuteronomy 24:14-15; 2 Thessalonians 3:10; James 4:13).
 - 1. To the extent that the free market submits itself to the law of God, it provides great benefits to society. When, however, it is cut loose from the restraints of biblical values, capitalism can become ugly and oppressive (Proverbs 3:31; 16:11; 20:10; 22:16).
 - 2. Even more ugly and oppressive is socialism, which has a thoroughly atheistic and materialistic origin. You only have to consider the communist governments who have killed 85-100 million of their own citizens. When the only value in society is materialism, people become expendable means to an end.
- C. It is good and right for a nation's character to be such that they take care of their own. God is compassionate and kind, therefore His people should be the same. James exhorts the wealthy to take stock (James 1:9-10; 5:1-6) and to practice the royal law of love (James 2:8, 16; cp. 1:25; Acts 20:35). However, in the United States, public policy discussions have increasingly slid into bickering over the distribution of material goods. Materialism will only lead to more social division as competing interests attempt to outmaneuver the others for money.
- D. Religious principles shaped the national character of America. Our nation continues to live on this moral capital, and our best hope as a nation is to look beyond materialistic pursuits and reorient ourselves in faith (Proverbs 11:11; 14:34; 16:12). With a shared commitment to biblical principles, America will have a framework for productive social progress.

III. Materialism Matters In The Church

- A. Beginning with the Enlightenment in the 1700s, there has been an increasing emphasis on the material, naturalistic world of scientific observation and skepticism. This has resulted in many churches changing their convictions about the truthfulness and the authority of scripture.
- B. What you believe about the Bible and Christ speaks volumes about your faith in God's honesty and ability.
 - 1. The scriptures are inspired by God (2 Timothy 3:16-17; 2 Peter 1:20-21), and have many proofs to support that claim such as fulfilled prophecy, unity of the scriptures, historical information, scientific foreknowledge, and impartiality. Furthermore, obeying Christ must be preceded by faith in the historical, miracle-working Christ. His deeds logically testified to His supernatural existence (Luke 19:37; Acts 2:22; 10:38).
 - a) This is constantly an issue as was seen at the end of 2014 when Newsweek published *The Bible: So Misunderstood It's A Sin*. Kurt Eichenwald, the article's author, attacks the Bible in several areas: creation/flood accounts, birth/resurrection accounts of Jesus, and claims of corruption in the New Testament text.
 - b) But these attacks have been around for a long time, and they have been sufficiently answered! The Bible, properly understood, does not contradict itself. If anything, it is man's misunderstanding of the Bible that has created "contradictions" that cannot seemingly be resolved! Furthermore,

the accuracy of the biblical text has been verified by outstanding scholarship over the last few centuries. Although man continues to attack the scriptures, they stand up to the most severe scrutiny.

2. Your belief in the divine origin of the Bible and the reality of Christ leads you to accept the Bible as your authority in religion. If God has spoken and if Christ is real, it makes all the difference in the world in its practical application (Luke 6:46; 1 Peter 4:11).
- C. Those who are embracing a different religion will introduce other sources of authority to justify the changes they put forth in the church. These other sources are inevitably an expression of materialism, as they are based on human experience rather than being based on divine revelation.
1. For 100 years, from the late 19th through the late 20th centuries, congregations were remarkably united in faith and practice because of a shared view of scriptures. But once you change your view of scripture, you change the very essence of Christian faith.
 2. Without a common bond of the Bible, there can be no unity in the Lord's church (1 Corinthians 1:10; Philippians 3:16; 4:2). We will be continually troubled by changing definitions of what it means to be a Christian, the nature of the family relationships, and the work and worship of congregations.

Conclusion. Our existence as Christians rests on faith in God, who speaks to us through scripture. If we lose this conviction, we will have lost everything. Without confidence in the truth and authority of the Bible, our faith will collapse into materialism, a false and self-serving religion of our own creation. Arm yourself and be ready to give a defense (1 Peter 3:15). For churches of Christ to address the materialistic thoughts that are destroying the foundations of our society, we must first get our own house in order. Remain committed to believing what God has told you and never be seduced by this material world. Keep your heart for from it flow the issues of life (Proverbs 4:23).