

Christianity vs. materialism



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Just two weeks ago I was in Radio Shack looking at a pair of head phones I wanted. Though merely forty dollars, I couldn't at first bring myself to buy them. Why? Because that was money I could give to God, and allow for Him to use it for His glory. I didn't buy them. But a mere week later I did. What was this battle that was going on inside me? It was the battle between materialism, and my faith.

Reasoning sent me back and forth, changing my mind dozens of times. "Should I return God's money directly to Him and allow Him to bless others with it, or should I bless myself?" "Do I really need head phones?" "Or do I want them?"

"What is the Biblical standard on issues like this?" "Is there a right or wrong decision to make here?" "I will use the headphones to bring me closer to God, so that makes it ok." The battle continued to be waged on.

Materialism's heart can be summed up by the bumper sticker, "he who dies with the most toys wins."

Using this as a guideline we will be measuring both Materialism and Christianity to see which one serves us most. We will examine the three most basic and common measurements we use everyday to answer the question; will buying the head phones, or giving the money to God serve me better? These proverbial yardsticks are, how we do feel about it, what are the time considerations, and the most important, how much will it cost me?

Intro Materialism

Materialism is much more than we often perceive it to be. “ Put bluntly, the view is just this: Everything that actually exists is material, or physical.[i]”

What does this practically mean? Materialists do not believe in a god, a spiritual realm, or the supernatural.

They believe that the incorporeal world is dependent on the corporal world. For example if the body did not exist, the mind, spirit, or soul, wouldn't either. This further leads to a world where if mental awareness did not exist, then ideals such as love, or hate, or thoughts, or any other non-physical entity simply would not exist due to a lack of perception.

“ *Esse est percipi,*” George Berkeley's famous dictum, “ to be is to be perceived” befits materialism quite well. Materialism takes empiricism to its extreme, where it leads one to live in world where no moral absolutes exist, due to a lack of anything that would be immutable. Materialism lacks a foundation from which to build moral absolutes. As such, the natural alternative would be to go off whatever mankind, a society, or even independent individuals are currently supporting.

This type of society, seeing no moral absolutes, simply invests in itself. Why? Because there is no motivation, no higher power, no real reason to help out anyone but you. Also since there is no eternal soul, there is no afterlife, since once the body is dead, the mind and soul die, there is no reason to live for anything but the here and now. As such you would pursue that which would give you the most temporal pleasure. In a Materialistic world you would work your hardest so that you could earn the most “ toys.”

Heart

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Materialism takes a definite stance in choosing between giving to God or keeping it all for ourselves. Why give the money away, when you could entertain yourself, honor God by listening to good CD's and tapes. All these arguments are not focused on whether I need them or not; instead it hammers upon the question, " do I want them."

Materialism then goes on to offer all the good reasons why I should invest my forty dollars in the headphones. On the other hand consider giving the money over to God. To a materialist, that is crazy because God doesn't exist.

The only reason you would give money to anyone, is if it would return to you multiplied. Whither that return is in physical as in a reward, or if it just satisfies your guilty conscience, you are sure to act only if it helps you. This brings us to an underlying presupposition this paper will continue to work under, which is the fact that you never do anything you do not want to do.

This is a simple fact of life, even if you can think of things you did which you know you didn't want to do, ask yourself why you did them. Among the options given, you always chose the option you thought would be in the best interest. The result of this whole process finds the materialist scoffing at the concept of giving to God, and buying the headphones so he can add to his pleasure, in the here and now, so he can win because he has more " toys."

Time

With the average American living almost seventy-eight years old one of our most valuable assets is our time. It is one thing we cannot replace, or gain more of or manage.

As such it often plays a rather large position in all our decisions. When I was considering the headphones I first turned to all the time I would spend on them. Quickly I heard the materialist, within me speak up, “ just think about all the time you can spend listening to these. Whether you are working, driving, using the computer, mowing the lawn, or all the other times when I could use them.”

This appealed to me, because I love listening to books on tape, sermons, and music, these would do just fine for all these purposes. What went on here? I quickly bypassed God and claimed time as my own, and thought of all the ways I could bless myself through their use. I saw how it would bless me in the short today, forgetting the long tomorrow. I bought into materialisms lie, hook, line, sinker, and saw all the benefits of investing in the tangible world before me.

The headphones are a prized possession of mine, which is why I use them, because I am quite proud of them. As such I want to show them off and get the most I can out of them. Materialism tells me that my latest investment gets me a little bit closer to winning in having the most “ toys.” But does it? People spend their whole lives striving to serve themselves, but I would challenge, do they find it?

We are familiar with the phrase “ eat, drink and be merry for tomorrow we die,” roughly taken from Ecclesiastes 15: 8, this sums up the existence of those who live for themselves. You cannot find true joy in material wealth, as we will see in our next section. Where do you turn? The wisest man who ever

lived, and wealthiest of his time, Solomon, proclaims in the opening verses of his book, (Ecclesiastes 1: 2) “Vanity of vanities! All is vanity.”

He expounds upon this going over all that he did, and ends with these two verses in Ecclesiastes 2: 10-11, “All that my eyes desired I did not refuse them. I did not withhold my heart from any pleasure. Thus I considered all my activities which my hands had done and the labor which I had exerted, and behold all was vanity and striving after wind and there was no profit under the sun.”

Solomon learned that money, power, and all that a man may pursue leaves you only running after fleeting mirages. Most people run out of the means before they run out of idea, but Solomon didn't. He didn't find any pleasure in it. The promise is this, spend your time on yourself and you will be happy, but Solomon who had the time and the money to do all he could have ever wanted, and where did he end up?

Declaring it all as fruitless as chasing after the wind. It appears then, that Solomon and you will both utterly fail in finding happiness in materialism, and pursuing yourself, because they are not connected. Materialism plants the lie, we buy into it, and we begin a rat race that runs us into the ground. You can pursue winning by materialism standards, but if history and past experience are worth anything you're not going to win by pursuing the most “toys.”

Money

In Cairo, Egypt there is the Egyptian National Museum, inside the museum, lies the young King Tutankhamen and all his treasure. If there is one story of material success, his is certainly that and a lasting one too. For only seventeen when he died, he amassed much wealth and led the Earth's most powerful nation.

Materialism naturally requires you to obtain material, and it goes without saying that, nothing's free, everything else is going to cost you. Why financially did I deduce my material wealth, and purchasing the headphones? Easily, I considered various headphones, which were the best value, which fit my budget, and what I "needed," I selected what I thought was the best option fiscally considering my present situation.

There are several underlying presumptions that materialism sows in all our hearts, breeding the above listed perspective. Materialism tells me that I own everything I have power over. It also tells me that earth is my home, and since there is no God I should just live for the here and now. If these are all true, then by all means I ought to invest in all the material, wealth can afford. This begs the question though, "does wealth truly bring the happiness materialism promises?"

Remember Solomon who wrote Ecclesiastes in which we find this verse, in chapter one verse fourteen, "I have seen all under the sun, and behold it is vanity and striving after the wind." Further on in Ecclesiastes 5: 10 and 12 he says "Whoever loves money never has money enough; whoever loves wealth is never satisfied with his income the abundance of a rich man permits him no sleep." What do millionaires say for themselves?

Andrew Carnegie said, “ Millionaires seldom smile.” Henry Ford after making his millions said “ I was happier when I was doing a mechanic’s job.” W. H. Vanderbilt said, “ The care of \$200 million is enough to kill anyone.” Or one of the wealthiest men of all time John D. Rockefeller gave this perspective on money, “ I have made many millions, but they have brought me no happiness.” Materialism promises happiness, but all those who have the money renounce the fact that it brings any happiness.

It appears that money and happiness have very little connection, apart from those that materialism makes within us. However materialism unquestionably appears to fail at coming through on its promise of happiness. Materialisms promise that more stuff will bring you happiness, teases, disappoints, and repeats infinitely until you give up on it. So do you really win by getting the most “ toys?”

Intro Christianity/Heart

We’ve taken a look at the perceived benefits of materialism, and seen how they are not. How materialism makes many promises, and fails to keep a single one. Where do we go now? Let us examine these same three questions but by a different set of promises. By those made by Christianity. Let us examine and see if they lead us into the ground as materialism did. What are the promises of Christianity? God promises that if you give Him your heart, and follow Him in all you do that you will gain all that truly matters. If you surrender your time to God, He will honor it.

And finally if you joyfully give your money to God, then God will give that will lasts eternally, possibly in this life, but definitely in the next. While

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materialism may go by the rule “ he who dies with the most toys,” God gives us an investment plan, by which we can invest in others, God, and ultimately, ourselves.

This plan unlike materialism does come through on its promises of happiness, and eternal joy. To buy or not buy the headphones get a vastly different answer with a possibly similar result. How can this be? Simple Christianity believes in God. This God sets moral standards by which we can determine what is right and wrong; these rules are written in God’s word, the Bible.

The Bible commands us to live for God, live for our eternal life in Heaven, where God will keep an account of all actions done. Those who have been chosen and accept Jesus Christ as their Lord and Savior will have all their deeds of rebellion against God forgiven. Beyond that though, God will remember and reward us for all our actions we did for Him, and His glory.

Through our actions on earth we can store up treasure in Heaven. By doing this we can keep forever any and all actions in which we do to serve God and bring glory to Him. In Heaven you will never lose, your treasure, you will forever keep, enjoy and cherish all that God bestows upon you. With this is mind let us examine the purchasing of the headphones and God’s glory.

There is a basic principle that I know as the liberty garden, it works like this. On certain issues in life, where the Bible does not take a definite stand, you measure the action not by right or wrong, but instead by its fruit. So then the question comes down to which will bring God more glory? Before we answer

this let us examine Christianity compared to Materialism; which would tell us to buy them because if I want to “ win” in life, I need more “ toys.”

What in the end will happen to these toys? At the end of my life, when I die, and go to Heaven, I will not be able to take anything with me. In his book *The Treasure Principle* Randy Alcorn relates this story, “ John D. Rockefeller was one of the wealthiest men who ever lived. After he died someone asked his accountant, “ How much did John D. leave?”

The reply was classic: “ He left all of it.”[ii]” When we die, we will not be able to take anything from this earth. But the principle behind Alcorn’s books title is this “ You can’t take it with you but you can send it on ahead.” We cannot take anything with us when we die, but we can invest it God who will return our investments with 10, 000% interest. That’s the whole point of Jim Elliot’s famous quote, “ He is no fool who gives what he cannot keep to gain what he cannot lose.”

To give the headphones which I cannot keep, so that I can gain the eternal treasure that I’ll never lose! This type of heart is what God is looking for in His followers; one that will pursue both God’s glory and my benefit to the utmost. God is not trying to rob me of pleasure, He is trying to grant me a greater pleasure than I could ever have found on Earth and in the things of this world. Who should we trust more?

Our fallen sinful flesh, and our desires, or the Creator of the universe who is perfect and has promised us such a great reward that we could never begin to conceive how great He can and will bless us!?! (Excuse the grammar I’m getting increasingly excited as I write!) In summary, the heart God wants is

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one that desires above any and everything else to pursue Him, and bring glory to His name.

Forget the toys! What will bring God the most glory, what will at the same time bring me the greatest pleasure? What will last? There is no room for question, Christianity shouts out true joy and happiness, while the end of Materialism merely whimpers defeat.