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A Christ-like Response
Capitalism/Consumerism/Materialism

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West Valley Church
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Isms: A Christ-like Response
Capitalism/Consumerism/Materialism
Matthew 19:16-23

We are going to cover three isms today – capital, consumer, material. Because materialism (having things) comes out of consumerism (consuming the things we have), which comes out of our capitalistic culture – since we live in the USA. To start off these isms today, I want to show you a few pics of the top ten useless things you can actually buy. Capitalism – is when goods and/or services are owned privately or corporately, sold based on competition in a free market. Since you live in the U.S. if you have something worth selling, you get to decide what to sell it for, it doesn't always mean it's worth that much, but you own it, you get to decide. And then the consumer has to either be willing to pay what you want for it or not. Consumerism is when the focus is on the consumer and getting them what they are wanting or needing. And then materialism is the focus on stuff or materials that we consume. So you can see how these three are all connected. Today we are going to focus more specifically on how consumerism and materialism affect us as followers of Jesus, living in a capitalistic society and what a Christ-like response should be towards these ISMS.

Pray

If you get nothing else today, hear this, “don't be greedy”, and “love to give”. Greed affects all three isms we are talking about today. The three isms aren't necessarily bad, but when you mix in greed, they can be. If you love to give, all three isms can be very good.

Proverbs 21:26... Some people are always greedy for more, but the godly love to give! Don't be greedy, and love to give.

Jesus teaches a lot about giving to others and helping others. Some people think the root of all evil is money, it's not, and that's not what the Bible tells us. This verse in 1 Timothy 6:10 says...

“For the love of money is a root of all kinds of evil. Some people, eager for money, have wandered from the faith and pierced themselves with many griefs.”

It's not that money is the root of all evil, but the “love” of money. This is why Jesus taught about a rich young man who wanted to go to heaven. The man wanted to follow Jesus, but you know what he wanted more? His money, his wealth, his stuff. He claimed to love his neighbor as himself but as I studied, I learned that Jesus was asking him to do this to test him. This rich man tells Jesus how he has kept all the commandments including loving his neighbor as himself. So Jesus tests him in Matthew 19:16-23...

Someone came to Jesus with this question: “Teacher, what good deed must I do to have eternal life?” “Why ask me about what is good?” Jesus replied. “There is only One who is good. But to answer your question—if you want to receive eternal life, keep the commandments.” “Which ones?” the man asked. And Jesus replied: “You

must not murder. You must not commit adultery. You must not steal. You must not testify falsely. Honor your father and mother. Love your neighbor as yourself.” “I’ve obeyed all these commandments,” the young man replied. “What else must I do?” Jesus told him, “If you want to be perfect, go and sell all your possessions and give the money to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven. Then come, follow me.”

But when the young man heard this, he went away sad, for he had many possessions.

Then Jesus said to his disciples, “I tell you the truth, it is very hard for a rich person to enter the Kingdom of Heaven. Christ told the rich man to “sell what you have and give to the poor, and you shall have treasure in heaven; then come, follow me.” (Matthew 19:21)

When the man went away sorrowful “because he had great possessions,” Christ used it to illustrate the point that it is often difficult for a rich man to enter the Kingdom of God, not impossible to get to heaven, just difficult. But Jesus wanted his disciples to understand that devotion to material wealth can be a major hindrance to spiritual growth.

The young man here was placing his wealth before God, which is precisely why Jesus told Him to give it away. This wasn’t a rule for every person, for some are able to possess wealth while maintaining proper perspective and living by love toward God and neighbor. Lots of rich godly people in the Bible – Abraham, Isaac, David, could do both. But if you can’t do both, then it would be better for you to give it away, like Jesus asked the rich man. Jesus taught a lot about money, but not just about giving it away. Jesus also taught about the value of increasing wealth through proper investments.

Shortly before His death, Christ gave some final teachings to His disciples. In the parable of the talents in Matthew 25:14-30, He tells of a man taking a trip to a distant country. Before he leaves, he gives his money to each of three servants, with the understanding that they will try to increase what they are given.

Paraphrased: One servant was given five bags of silver, and was able to invest and earn five more. Another was given two bags of silver and earned two more. But the third servant who received one bag of silver dug a hole in the ground and hid the Masters money. When the master returned he asked for an account of his money. To the two who doubled their money he said, “Well done my good and faithful servant.”

The one who buried it for fear of losing it was called wicked and lazy. Then Jesus said in Matthew 25:29...

“To those who use well what they are given even more will be given, and they will have an abundance. But for those who do nothing even what little they have will be taken away.”

What this parable teaches is that we should exercise and build on whatever God blesses us with, not just money but spiritual talents, skills and abilities.

You can love God and still have money, but you can’t have God if you love money.

We are all consumers. We consume food, services, goods, everything. When we look at things through a consumer lens, it’s all about us.

As we built we were very careful during the building process to make sure things were done and done the way we wanted them. After all, we are the ones paying for it. There was a few times when we felt like we were being a little greedy. A few things were done that we thought needed to be redone or touched up – minor things. One of our jobs to lower the building costs was to clean up after the crews. In the end, our contractor gave us a roll of blue tape and said, mark everything that needs to be touched up. Well we marked everything we saw. Some things we wondered about how picky we were being. But our contractor told us, we needed to be. He said it was our house, we were the customer and they were going to do it exactly as we wanted. So as the consumer, it was all about us.

Marketers know this, which is why a commercial wants you to think you need to have something (like a DVD re-winder), or you deserve to have something. If we are paying for a cheeseburger, and don't want onions, we are paying money to get it the way we want it – Burger King – have it your way. We are the consumers in life – food, services, goods, and because we are paying for it, we want it our way. We get used to being consumers at home and work and other areas that we start looking at everything as a consumer including our faith, church and our relationship with Jesus. We get to pick what church we go to – like a new car, got to test drive it a little, will it meet our needs?

Even our language when deciding what church to go to is consumeristic “we are church shopping” or “we are going to shop around a little as we look for a new church”. You aren't wrong for using that kind of language either, it's the reality of the world we live in, we view almost everything from consumer lenses. I have a fun video that takes consumerism in the church to the extreme. Have any of you seen House Hunters?

It's a reality show where a couple is looking for the best house. Well this video was created by a Christian comedian and is making fun of two different concepts: house hunters and church shopping, and it's called Church Hunters.

video

There are things that as the consumer, we should be self-centered on, maybe a little greedy – like food to eat, water to drink, medicine or medical treatments. If we aren't self-centered on our needs, we die. If we are paying for something, we should be getting what we paid for, that's fair. Even if you don't get what you paid for, or you aren't satisfied with the service you receive, there is always a loving way to handle it. But some things are not all about us. Church isn't all about us, our relationship with Jesus, isn't all about us. Even prayer is sometimes made all about us. If prayer is a conversation with God, how much of the time are we talking instead of listening? Or asking for something instead of telling God how great He is? If you have a friend, and whenever you hang out, all you do is talk about yourself, you won't be friends long.

Consumers are focused on receiving, not giving. Consuming Jesus is a good thing, but we consume Jesus so we can turn around and give Jesus to others. We consume the Bible; we consume knowledge of God's Word and plan, so we can share it with others. Not just to benefit us, but benefit others, our church and community.

But don't just listen to God's word. You must do what it says. Otherwise, you are only fooling yourselves. (James 1:22, New Living Translation)

Don't just consume God's word, do what it says. Alyssa and I read two books prior to moving into our new house – both of them on organizing and having less stuff. So as we unpack we are organizing and sorting as we go – piles for trash, yard sale, or a particular room. Had I read that book but never actually changed how I unpacked, it would have been like I took the book and buried it in my yard out of fear I would lose it.

The other book Alyssa and I recently read about getting rid of stuff kept asking the question, "Is this thing adding value to my life?" Because if it is, then it's worth keeping; it's worth using or storing or it's worth buying in the first place. But if it's not adding value to your life, don't buy it, or get rid of it. Every year our teens have a rummage sale to help pay for them to go to camp and other mission trips. Every year we all bring in stuff to fill the gym and they sell it and make thousands of dollars. When I first got here, I was amazed that they did it every year. I figured, "No way it's as good as the year before." Where does all the stuff come from? But every year it's just as good of a fundraiser as previous years, because every year we have more stuff to get rid of because we don't like it, need it, or we've replaced it. We have stuff.

A blog writer, Dave Anderson said, "Contrary to what Hollywood promotes, it is not what you get or accumulate that makes you significant but what you giveaway; what you contribute, the value you add to others and what you become in the process."

Matthew 6:33 says... Seek the Kingdom of God above all else, and live righteously, and he will give you everything you need.

CLOSING: Whatever you consume, don't be greedy.

Whether you have stuff, money, or talent; love to give. Put God and others first. Like I said last week with Ageism, we are in this together – which means it's not always all about us. A relationship with Jesus isn't all about us, church isn't always about us. God gave us this life, which means it's sometimes about you, sometimes about us, but always about God. Don't be greedy, love to give. Let me leave you with a quote from the Minimalists, who are two men who live intentionally on very little: "Love people and use things, the opposite never works."

PRAY