

Materialism

This world is full of human philosophies that can take people away from the true teachings of Jesus Christ (Colossians 2:8). For, the ideas people accept as being true then impact how we live. Therefore, we must carefully evaluate everything we believe (1 Thessalonians 5:20-22). One such human philosophy that has impacted the world is called “materialism.” Therefore, let’s examine this philosophy by the teachings of God’s word.

1) Understanding materialism. Generally speaking, materialism is the belief that everything that exists is physical matter and everything that matters is measurable. Therefore, matter is fundamental to reality and is of ultimate importance. In fact, those who hold to the fullest extent of this philosophy deny the existence of anything that cannot be perceived and measured in a material way. In addition, “materialism” is often used today to refer to valuing material things (i.e. money, possessions, etc.) above things that are immaterial (i.e. the soul, relationships). Such a person often sees material things as being of utmost importance to happiness, wellbeing, and success. Remnants of this kind of materialism can even be found in people who believe in the spiritual realm.

2) The dangers of materialism. One of the greatest dangers of materialism is that it undermines belief in the existence of God (i.e. because God cannot be directly measured) and makes the entire meaning of life about material things. Furthermore, the spiritual element to human existence is dismissed in materialism, thereby making human existence focused on whatever people accumulate and experience in this physical world. Then, even in its forms where people may include belief in God and spiritual beings, materialism misplaces the importance of material/physical things. Yes, God *has* certainly created a material universe with many material elements (Genesis 1). However, materialists mistake the point of those material things as being the

main focus of life, seeking happiness and fulfillment through them. Yet, this view misses the point of what material things have been created for (i.e. the glory of God, Psalm 148:1-14) and chokes out God’s word from having its intended effect (Mark 4:18-19). Instead, materialism often leads to unfulfillment, greed, selfishness, jealousy, covetousness, the love of money, fights, and other cancers that will ruin both the soul and society.

3) Challenging materialism. The single biggest starting point in challenging the teachings and practices of materialism is to evaluate whether God exists. The Scriptures help us conclude that the material things we observe around us could not possibly have come into existence by themselves or by accident (Psalm 19:1-3; Romans 1:19-21). Then, when you establish the existence of an immaterial God (who is Spirit, John 4:24), you must come to accept that He has created you with a spiritual nature (Genesis 1:26-27). And, this spiritual existence will survive your material/physical existence when you die (Ecclesiastes 12:7; Hebrews 9:27; Luke 16:19-31). In fact, the Scriptures teach the presence of an eternal spiritual afterlife in either Heaven (a place of comfort where you will be with God) or Hell (a place of torment where you will be separated from God, Matthew 25:31-46). Furthermore, God specifically teaches that how you live on this earth matters to where you spend your eternity (Galatians 6:7-8). Therefore, you must come to recognize all the material things around you (including your own material existence) are only temporary and cannot be the right explanation for your existence or purpose! The Scriptures even record one man coming to this realization of his own mortality and the emptiness of pursuing material things in the book of Ecclesiastes (1:1-11; 2:1-11). He concluded that living to honor God is the fulfillment of your highest purpose (12:13-14)!

4) Correcting materialism. Materialism, in any of its forms, is contrary to the truth God has

revealed, works contrary to pleasing God, and must be rooted out of your life! In addition to challenging the lies that materialism offers, you must then work to adopt a different perspective toward material things. First, rather than seeing material things in this world as all that matters, see them as pointing you to the one who made them so that you will glorify Him (Psalm 145:3-7; Acts 17:24-31). Second, rather than seeing material things from a selfish perspective, see them as gifts from God that should lead you to honoring Him (James 1:17; Romans 2:4). Third, rather than seeing material things as the focal point of life, see material things as simply blessings from God to be modestly enjoyed temporarily on this earth and used in God's service (Ecclesiastes 5:18-20; Matthew 25:14-30). Fourth, as you enjoy earthly things, you must recognize that they do not lead to true happiness and find contentment (satisfaction) with whatever God has blessed you with, understanding the difference between physical desires and true necessities (Philippians 4:11-13; 1 Timothy 6:6-10, 17-19). Fifth, while it is proper to enjoy the material things God has blessed you with (within the laws God has given), you must put your ultimate and true treasure in Heaven by giving your life in service to God and focusing on obeying Him (Matthew 6:19-24, 33; Luke 12:16-21).

Materialism is a deceitful and deeply flawed human philosophy. Sadly, all or some of this philosophy has impacted many. However, if you accept God's words as truth, He will deliver you from materialism so that you can find your true value and purpose in God rather than in material things!

Discipleship Questions

(2 Timothy 3:16-17)

Teaching: What did you learn from this lesson?

Rebuking: What are some ways this lesson challenges you to live differently?

Correcting: How does this lesson help you make positive changes for Christ?

Training & Equipping: How can you apply this lesson to be useful in God's service?