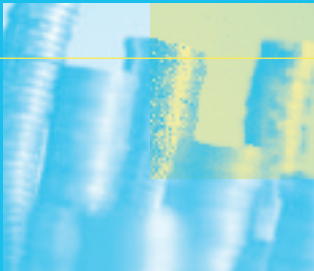
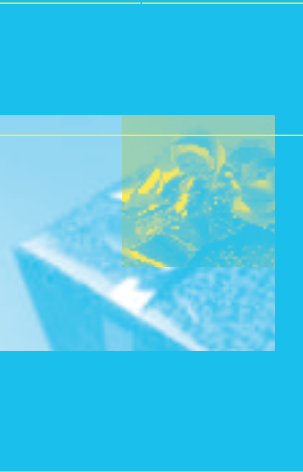


Challenging Issues



materialism



One of a series of study guides to help Christians think through difficult issues in a helpful and informative way



Challenging Issues

Materialism

Having, Getting and Spending

**A Bible Study produced by
The Social Issues and Resources Committee
of the
Presbyterian Church in Ireland**

Foreword

This is one of a series of studies on Challenging Issues facing Christians today. It is written with the conviction that God's Word, the Bible, is relevant and needs to be studied and applied sensitively.

Our hope is that this series will help Christians to think through these difficult issues in a helpful and informative way.

Robert Liddle

Convener of the Social Issues and Resources Committee

Other studies in the Challenging Issues Series:

Disability

Homosexuality

The Family

Manhood

Available from the Board of Social Witness, Church House, Belfast BT1 6DW.

Introduction

What is it to be a successful and happy human being? So often for our early 2000s culture the answer seems to depend on what we own and what we can afford to buy from the labels on our clothes to the kind of alloy wheels on our cars. Indeed we have been told that the very economic stability of our society depends on our willingness to keep on shopping. However can Christians really be comfortable with the idea that 'money is the basic engine of human action, that the end of life is to buy goods'. Yet we live as part of a wider culture that seems to consider the meaning of life in terms of the things we can own and the power that comes from having money to spend. It is taken for granted that security is all about possessing a house that is steadily rising in value or buying into a reliable pension fund and the most important hopes we have for our children centre on success in their education and gaining a lucrative and secure career. All too often we accept these assumptions so that our Christian lives aren't really very different from those of our secular neighbours. Economically we just fit into society around us and all too often that society standards are challenged more by the critique of New Age or pagan environmentalists than the lifestyle of the Christian Church.

What changes would it make in our lives if we sincerely applied the values of Jesus to the possessions we own, the things we work to get and the way we spend the money we earn? We hope that prayerful thought about the references below will lead us to consider ways in which our attitudes to owning things, getting more and spending money need to change if we are to be the challenging presence that Jesus Christ has called us to be in this world.

Exploring the Biblical Material

Money can become an idol competing with God
(Luke 16:12-13)

The love of money is the root of all evils
(1 Tim 6:10, cf Mk 4:19)

Money is not to be hoarded for its own sake [lack of faith, status]
(Mt. 6:19-21, Lk. 12:16-21, James 5:3)

It is sinful to equate human status with material wealth
(James 2: 1-6, Lk 12:15)

It is hard for a rich man to enter the kingdom of heaven
(Mt. 19:23, 24, Lk 16:19 ff)

'Sell your possessions and give to the poor'
(Lk 12:33, 2 Cor 9:9,10 ref. Ps. 112:9)

'Use worldly wealth to gain friends for yourselves'
(Lk 16: 9, 11,12, 2 Cor 9:11)

What we have is not really ours anyway - it belongs to God
(Deut 8:17, Ps. 24:1, Lev 25:23)

On the basis of this Biblical Material consider the following questions:

Personal Issues

1

- a. Are there important differences between our society and that of the Bible? Does this mean there are certain things we 'must have' in order to function properly in the society where we live?
- b. How far could we 'sell all our possessions'.

2

- a. Have Christians the repeated responsibility to ask why they continue to have the things they own or buy the things they do? E.g. is our house or car a symbol of success or status/ purchased because it is what we need/ owned because it gives us pleasure/ bought with a view to using it for Christian witness or service?
- b. Why are we prepared to spend so much on 'designer' items?

How far is spending money on insurance to be equated with lack of faith?

Q
3

- a. How do we 'sell our possessions and give to the poor'?
- b. Who are the poor in our society?
- c. How can we responsibly transfer wealth to poor societies in other parts of the world?

Q
4

- a. Why is it hard for a rich man to enter the kingdom of heaven?
- b. It is equally hard for members of a rich society like our own?

Global Issues

5

Wealth confers power. If we 'use our worldly wealth to gain friends for ourselves' by giving aid or funding development can we avoid the danger of paternalism or forcing our standards and assumptions on other cultures?

6

Other people depend for their livelihoods on our requirement for their goods and services. How far should the Christian community be thinking through the kind of markets they should support and encourage, taking into account issues like waste, conditions of employment, the environment and ideas as to what is worthwhile and valuable?

Church Issues

7

- a. How far should the church as a whole organise itself into an 'alternative society' living out different values in our pattern of spending, ownership and general use of money from the world around us?
- b. Why do we find such an idea so difficult?

8

How do we take all of this on board without 'depriving man of all his senses and reducing him to a block' (John Calvin)

For additional reading

Here is a selection of books from a large number available in Christian bookshops.

Foster, Richard.

Freedom of Simplicity.

San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1981.

Schneider, John.

Godly Materialism: Rethinking Money and Possessions.

Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1994.

Sider, Ronald.

Rich Christians in an Age of Hunger.

Dallas: Word, 1990.

Higginson, Richard

Questions of Business Life.

Paternoster 2002

Grove Booklets on Ethics:

E131: Consumerism

Author: Julie Kelly ISBN: 1 85174 543 2

E113: Fair Trade as Christian Mission

Author: Chris Sugden ISBN: 1 85174 399 5

New Dictionary of Christian Ethics and Pastoral Theology (IVP 1995).

Article on Economic Ethics with related references.

For help with debt issues

Parsons, Robb.	The Money Secret. Hodder & Stoughton, 2005
Clarke, Katie	The Money Secret Workbook. Edt. Jon Mason. Copyright www.themoneysecret.info 2005
National Debtline	Tel. 0808 808 4000 www.nationaldebtline.co.uk
Consumer Credit Counselling Service	Tel. 0800 138 1111 www.cccs.co.uk
Citizens Advice Bureaux	Local numbers listed in telephone directory. www.adviceguide.org.uk

Information on World Poverty Issues

Tearfund: Ireland	Rose House, 2 Derryvolgie Avenue, Belfast, BT9 6FL Tel. 028 9068 2828 Fax.028 9068 2829 www.tearfund.org
Christian Aid Northern Ireland	30 Wellington Park, Belfast BT9 6DL Tel. 028 9038 1204 Fax: 028 9038 1737 www.christian-aid.org.uk
Make Poverty History	C/O BOND, Regent's Wharf, 8 All Saint's Street, London N1 9RL www.makepovertyhistory.org

PCI Counselling

Confidential counselling and support Tel: 028 9261 0586

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