Advertisements are everywhere. They beckon from the pages of newspapers. They adorn the sides of highways. They flash enticingly on television screens. They send us a message of hope, because everything we need for our enjoyment is richly provided at our local retailer. True satisfaction is just a few well-spent dollars away.

That is the message most marketers want us to believe. But that is not what Christ wants us to believe. Instead, He has called us to a different life, a life of dependency upon Him and devotion to Him. Christians in the business world face the challenge of using marketing methods that are in harmony with Christ’s teachings. Fortunately, there are many passages in Scripture that guide us with instructions concerning the ethics of marketing.

Christ says that we are not to let material wealth be our goal in life. In Matthew chapter 6, He provides us with instructions on how we ought to relate to money. Matthew 6:19-21 reads:

Do not lay up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust destroy and where thieves break in and steal, but lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust destroys and where thieves do not break in and steal. For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.

Defining real needs is a huge challenge, as the common practice among advertisers is to bombard consumers with a humanistic worldview that emphasizes egocentricity. Consumers are constantly told, “You need our product” for pleasure, for popularity, for the satiation of practically any human desire. They are told that they deserve the contentment possessions bring. Failing to see another God to turn to, many people fall for this trap, believing that this life is all there is. But again, Jesus says, “Lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven.” As Christians we need to be active in promoting this truth that there is a God greater than riches, and that He is our reason for existing.

In striving to meet consumer wants, marketers become experts in anticipating the way people think. Knowing that everyone has fears and insecurities, they play off these consumer feelings and promote their products as being essential elements to increase a person’s self-worth. But Christians know that Christ teaches otherwise. He says in Matthew 6:25, “Therefore I tell you, do not be anxious about your life, what you will eat or what you will drink, nor about your body, what you will put on. Is not life more than food, and the body more than clothing?” The Christian who puts this teaching into practice will not try to mold a customer’s feelings, but rather encourage him to spend his own money wisely on what he needs.
When deciding how to use money wisely, it is important to understand that money is merely a tool that God has given us to fulfill the work He gives us. Luke 18:18-30 narrates the account of a rich man who asks Jesus, “Good Teacher, what must I do to inherit eternal life” (Luke. 18:18)? When Jesus tells him that he must keep the commandments, the man replies, saying he has already kept them. And Jesus answers him in verse 22, “One thing you still lack. Sell all that you have and distribute to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven; and come, follow me.”

In the marketplace, Christians should make it a priority to use their own wealth to help the needy. James 1:27 says, “Religion that is pure and undefiled before God, the Father, is this: to visit orphans and widows in their affliction, and to keep oneself unstained from the world.” Our religion needs to shine through every area of our lives. Therefore, when we do marketing, we should live our lives sacrificially, looking out for the needs of those who are less fortunate.

After Jesus commanded the rich man to be willing to part with his wealth, the rich man walked away sad. It is regrettable that though he had the wisdom to ask Jesus such an important question, he lacked the courage to listen to the answer. As much as he desired the inheritance of eternal life, he would rather hold onto the things he already had, the things he had worked for all his life. We as Christians must avoid this error when we do business, realizing that all the wealth we accumulate is a blessing from God, and it is to be used as such to bless others.
Christ teaches in Luke 16:13, “No servant can serve two masters, for either he will hate the one and love the other, or he will be devoted to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and money.” It can be very easy to prioritize money to the point where it replaces God in our thoughts. A biblical example of this is found in Acts 5:1-11. Ananias and Sapphira sold a piece of land and gave a portion of the profit to the church, claiming that they had given away all of it. More than anything else, they desired fortune and a reputation but instead, they faced God’s wrath and judgment as He struck them both dead. In these early stages of the church’s growth, God wanted to make unmistakably clear that He will not allow money to take His place in our lives.

However, when we try to use our money for the sake of God’s Kingdom, we need to be careful not to turn the Kingdom into a goldmine. This is what happened in John 2:13-17, when people were using the temple as a place of commerce. This is the only instance recorded in which Jesus actually used violence to make His point. Making a whip out of cords, He furiously drove out the animals being sold and chased away the marketers, saying, “Take these things away; do not make my Father’s house a house of trade” (Jn. 2:16). The people had failed to draw a distinct line between God’s Kingdom and the things of this world. 1 John 2:15-17 warns us against loving the things of this world – “the desires of the flesh and the desires of the eyes and pride in possessions” (1 Jn. 2:16). The temple marketers had replaced worship with worldliness, and had thus made a false god out of their business enterprises. We can fall into the same trap if we advertise businesses as being profitable for God’s work, when the profit is really for ourselves.

1 Timothy 6:17 says that God “richly provides us with everything to enjoy.” God certainly intends for us to enjoy life. Therefore we must keep in mind that everything good, including our money, is a gift from God, and we must handle it as though it all belongs to Him. As ambassadors for Christ, we must engage in fair and honest dealing. And lastly, the apostle Paul exhorts us in Philippians 4:8, “Finally, brothers, whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is just, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is commendable, if there is anything worthy of praise, think about these things.” In marketing, we need to make sure that our focus is on things that are pleasing to God. Keeping this principle in mind, we shall not go wrong.

Works Cited

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