Should Christians Boycott? 6 Points To Consider

Ben Giselbach
March 14, 2017

There are some businesses that I go out of my way to avoid: Target, Hardees, Disney, among others.

That could change. They could change. I could change. But for now, I don’t economically support them. To do so just makes me, personally, feel icky.

I am not saying you must avoid these businesses. If you patronize them, I promise not to give you a condescending glance.

All I’m saying is that I, personally, don’t want to give those businesses my money. It’s a choice I’ve made for myself – and you get to make the choice for yourself.

So what brought me to this point?
When deciding whether to participate in a boycott, I usually look to the principle described in 1 Corinthians 10:27-29, where Paul writes:

If one of the unbelievers invites you to dinner and you are disposed to go, eat whatever is set before you without raising any question on the ground of conscience. But if someone says to you, “This has been offered in sacrifice,” then do not eat it, for the sake of the one who informed you, and for the sake of conscience— I do not mean your conscience, but his.

In this passage, Paul says you can associate with pagans and unbelievers. (Jesus taught the same thing, cf. Mark 2:17; John 17:15.) If an unbeliever invites you to dinner, then you can go – you don’t even have to ask any questions about what the food represents. Likewise, hundreds of companies and organizations are advertising and inviting me to engage in business with them. And I want to know as little about these businesses (and organizations and actors and musicians) as possible, because (a) I don’t care, and (b) I know if I know more about them, there’s a good chance I will be disgusted by the sin they support. In this way, ignorance is bliss.

But then Paul says that if the host or someone else present at the dinner party openly declares, “We are eating this meat as a celebration of our idolatry” that changes things. If the Christian were to eat that particular meat in that setting, it would be interpreted by those watching as an endorsement of a false god. Similarly I think, if a company or organization goes out of its way to boast about their support of something that the Bible says is wicked (engaging in high-profile interviews with the media or paying millions of dollars to advertise), they intend for their product to become a mascot of that which is wrong.

Target wants to be known for its celebration of homosexuality and gender identity disorder, launching ad campaigns, clothing lines, and press releases. Hardee’s is frequently launching highly sensual and pornographic ad campaigns full of innuendo, clearly messaging that they want their food to symbolize lust and sexualization. Disney is proactively attempting to normalize homosexuality for our children by introducing gay characters in their children’s’ TV programs, and – most recently – their director of their latest movie boasting that there will be an “exclusively gay moment in a Disney movie.”

It’s not just that Target, Hardee’s, and Disney have wicked policies. Countless other companies and organizations do too (which is to be expected from unbelievers). We expect
secular companies to endorse sin. I can’t boycott everything. But some companies want their products and services to be symbolic of the very wickedness that crucified Jesus on the cross, and they have come knocking on my door to tell me about it.

Once again, this is just me. I’m not saying you have to boycott these companies. I’m not here to wage a culture war or start a fight. I’m just here to maintain a clear conscience and not send the wrong message about what I support. And this is all I’m trying to do.

There are varying opinions about whether or not Christians should participate in boycotts. Consider the following points:

1. Boycotts sometimes work.

Sometimes they flop. But if they are organized and large enough, they can be effective. Would anyone argue that the Montgomery Bus Boycott of 1955 was fruitless? Money talks.

2. Christians are allowed to speak up, too.

Why must Christians remain silent while secularists dictate corporate and social policy? Shouldn’t Christians have an equal voice? Isn’t this a pluralistic society?

Some say, “Christians should be more concerned about changing hearts, not policies.” Of course, there is truth to this – a successful boycott against a company only puts a Band-Aid on a much bigger problem. At the same time, Christians have a moral obligation to support matters that will better the lives of our fellow man. If we really believe God’s moral laws were ultimately for mankind’s good and happiness (cf. Deut. 10:13), then love for our neighbor (Mark 12:30-31) demands that we support policies that will be for the betterment of our neighbor. Those who argue Christians should never try to influence corporate or social policy are betraying a lack of faith in the true goodness of God’s law.

This principle remains the same: the more society conforms to the law of God (even if just on the surface), the greater human flourishing will be.

3. Follow your gut.

At what point do you decide to boycott a company? The “line in the sand” is almost always ambiguous. Often the best thing to do is follow your gut feeling about a company. God gave
you a conscience (Rom. 2:15; Titus 1:15; Jas. 4:17; 1 Pet. 3:16, etc.), so use it.

I know it’s impossible to be 100% consistent with the companies I boycott. But consistency isn’t the end-goal – the focus is on the protection of conscience. All Christians need to have scruples about certain things. And no one should economically support that which hurts their conscience.

4. Don’t bind your opinions about boycotts on others.

Christians cannot support wickedness (Rom. 1:31). But merely doing business with a company or organization with evil principles doesn’t necessarily mean you are endorsing that company.

For that matter, boycotting is almost entirely a personal judgment call. The Bible doesn’t always speak to the subject of boycotting. Thus, you have no right to expect other Christians to participate in your boycott. They might not see things the same way you do.

On the other hand, there are few things more inappropriate than shaming another Christian because he/she is boycotting a company out of conscience. Don’t mock your brother of sister just because they have scruples that you don’t.

5. Christians are commanded to support other Christians.

Passages like Galatians 6:10 and Hebrews 6:10 teach that we are to do good to all men, “especially those of the household of faith.” Christians give one another preferential treatment. Thus, if at all possible, I prefer to help fellow Christians and their businesses. If that is not possible, by extension, I prefer to support people and business that identify more closely with Biblical principles.

6. Don’t just be known for what you are against.

It is easy to get worked up about boycotts and share your righteous indignation on social media. But be careful you don’t become known as the “stick in the mud” person. While Christians should always be against sin, we should primarily be known by our good deeds (1 Pet. 2:12) and our love for that which is encouraging (Phil. 4:8).
Your comments are welcome and encouraged, even if they are in disagreement. However, please keep your comments relevant to the article. For my full comment policy, click here.