



## Consumer Christianity

Message by Pastor Andrew Kulasingham 12<sup>th</sup> July 2020

### Scripture Reading: Acts 1:13-14

Consumer Christianity. That's what I want to challenge today. I believe the greatest hindrance to the concept "church in the community" is consumerism. So my question today to everyone is - "are you a consumer Christian or a passionate disciple?"

### When did we become consumers?

The word consumer is a description of a person "who purchases goods and services for personal use". It is derived from the Latin word "consumere" made up of two words, *con* (all together) and *sumere* (taken up). In early 13<sup>th</sup> century usage it meant "to use or take up resources". We still use the word that way when we say "a fire *consumed* everything in its path."

By the 19<sup>th</sup> century the word began to be used to describe all of us as users of goods and services. We were called consumers. Since the 19<sup>th</sup> Century we have been seen as users of resources. For marketing purposes this made great sense. Companies sought to discover their niche market and began targeting those users in advertising campaigns. We see it so blatantly and unashamedly used in online advertising. Companies like Google and Facebook use key words people search on Google, Facebook and Instagram to learn consumer habits and demands. This allows companies to position themselves to attract more customers to consume their products or services.

With the consumer came consumerism - "the promotion of the interests of consumers." Now the focus is to ensure customer satisfaction and maintain and grow customer base. This kind of mindset has unfortunately slowly crept into the church. I ask again: WHEN DID WE BECOME CONSUMERS? WHEN DID WE BECOME USERS OF PRODUCTS AND SERVICES

### When did the church become a service provider?

My follow-up question is somewhat in the same vein. When did the church become a service provider? With the focus on the consumer, the church then becomes a service provider. The church is pressured into focusing on how well we cater to the needs of our members. We end up responding to "consumer demand". What services does this church offer

that will cater for my needs and the needs of my family? We become consumer Christians. With the consumer mindset we see the church as a club where membership has its privileges.

Then little churches want to grow up and becoming big churches. We see the need to increase our “customer” base. Pastors and church leaders end up jumping from one conference to the next seeking answers on how to grow the church. The focus becomes bums on seats. We try to become mini Hillsong churches. We try and get a good band and get them to strike up some modern songs. We replace the old worn out pastor for a young vibrant one in his or her twenties. Maybe they will attract the younger crowd which makes the church vibrant and attractive.

Pastors try to be something they are not. They end up experiencing burn out and end up on the heap pile at the used parts dealership for worn out pastors for hire. We use them occasionally when our main staff need some downtime. To meet the needs of the consumer Christian the church ends up being a service provider.

A SELF FOCUSED, NAVEL-GAZING CHURCH WILL EVENTUALLY BECOME REDUNDANT AND “NON-ESSENTIAL”.

*“The Church is the only society that exists for the benefit of those who are not its members.” - William Temple, former Archbishop of Canterbury*

## BACK TO THE DRAWING BOARD

Let's read our text today Acts 1:13-14

Acts 1:13-14 (NKJV)

And when they had entered, they went up into the upper room where they were staying: Peter, James, John, and Andrew; Philip and Thomas; Bartholomew and Matthew; James the son of Alphaeus and Simon the Zealot; and Judas the son of James. These all continued with one accord in prayer and supplication, with the women and Mary the mother of Jesus, and with His brothers. These all continued with one accord in prayer and supplication, with the women and Mary the mother of Jesus, and with His brothers.

As we recognise the dangerous consumer environment we find ourselves navigating in, it is crucial we go back to the book of Acts and recover the characteristics of the Christians of the 1st century? We are not consumers. We are disciples. The church is not a service provider. She is the body of Christ. Acts 1:14 offers us the secret of what it is like to be a disciple of Christ and to be a New Testament church.

## THEY HAD ONE PASSION

The first thing we observe in the passage is that the disciples gathered in one accord. The phrase “one accord” is the Greek word – *homothymadon*. It is a combination of 2 root words – “*homos*” (“together”) and the word “*thymos*” (long passion). The word “*thymos*” is an interesting word. It means fierce passion that causes one to breath hard and it also has the

thought of offering sacrifice by fire. The apostle Luke was giving us the idea that these disciples were so consumed with one passion, burning with God desire as if they were burnt offerings at an altar of sacrifice. These men and women were definitely not consumers. They were disciples. Consumers seek for individual desires. Disciples embrace a singular mission – one passion.

## **THEY WERE INVESTED**

Not only were they passionate, they were also committed. These disciples were dedicated to one cause and they invested their lives in it. They were not just together with one passion, they were together investing their lives into this one passion.

*Not just shareholders but stakeholder*

Shareholders invest in order to get a return. Their behaviour is guided by the returns they get from their investments. A company's performance is critical to whether shareholders stay or go. They do not have a long term need for the business. If a business is not doing well, they sell and buy shares in other companies that are faring better.

Stakeholders on the other hand are those who are invested for the long haul and need the business to succeed. While shareholders are stakeholders but stakeholders like employees and contractors depend on the company's success for their success.

The disciples in the book of Acts were in it for the long haul. "These all continued with one accord in prayer and supplication". They were all together investing their time and resources passionately waiting in obedience for what Jesus had promised. The passage says they continued not just in prayer but also in supplication. The word supplication comes from the greek word "*deomai*" which means binding oneself. The passage gives us the idea that the disciples were all together with the same passion and bound themselves to the plan of God.

After resurrection, Jesus spent forty days with them teaching about the Kingdom of God. He told them to wait for the Holy Spirit and power. He gave them the command to GO. So they bound themselves to these things through prayer and supplication. These then were the characteristics of the disciples of the early church:

PASSION AND DEDICATION TO FULFIL GOD'S PLAN

## **THEY WERE GOING ABOUT THEIR FATHER'S BUSINESS**

Remember when Jesus was only a child and was in the temple conversing with the teachers of the law. His parents parents were frantically looking for him and when they found him his response was quite startling.

**Luke 2:49 (NKJV) And He said to them, "Why did you seek Me? Did you not know that I must be about My Father's business?"**

Jesus was only a child but he knew His Father's business. Do you know your Father's business? As a church do know our Father's business? As disciples we must be going about our Father's business. We are not consumers, we are disciples.

### *The prodigal son story*

The prodigal son story in Luke 15, gives us a clear understanding of what the Father's business is and the danger of not knowing the Father's business. The story is such a moving story of a son who had squandered all his inheritance and returned back to his father out of desperation. The Bible tells us that while he was still a "far way off", the father ran towards him, embraced him, covered him and restored him back to his status as a child (Luke 15:20-24). A great feast was thrown in the son's honour.

The eldest brother returns from the field to singing and dancing. Angered by the thought that the father was celebrating the return of a son whom he describes as one who has "devoured your livelihood with harlots", he refuses to enter the house. The father's response to the eldest son gives us the clear understanding of what the Father's business is all about.

*Luke 15:32 (NKJV) It was right that we should make merry and be glad, for your brother was dead and is alive again, and was lost and is found.*

Not the phrases "dead now alive" and "lost now found". That is our Father's business.

### **GOD IS IN THE BUSINESS OF THE LOST AND FOUND.**

How many of us are like the eldest son. Busy tending the "fields", thinking we are tending to the Father's business, while all along our Father is longing and waiting for the return of His lost sons and daughters. Look at these Scriptures that describe the Business of our Father.

*John 3:16-17 (NKJV) For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life. For God did not send His Son into the world to condemn the world, but that the world through Him might be saved.*

*Luke 19:10 (NKJV) for the Son of Man has come to seek and to save that which was lost."*

We recite these verses by heart but often we do not realise that this and only this is the Father's business. He is still seeking out the lost. He is still wanting to save the lost. He has abandoned all other for this one thing – to seek and save the lost.

The apostle Paul knew exactly what the Father required of him. In his opening remarks to the church in Rome he made this powerful statement.

*Romans 1:14-16 (NKJV) I am a debtor both to Greeks and to barbarians, both to wise and to unwise. So, as much as is in me, I am ready to preach the gospel to you who are in Rome also. For I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ, for it is the power of God to salvation for everyone who believes.*

Paul saw it as his obligation, his debt he owed to society. He had to share the Gospel. It was the only hope for the world. It was the vaccine, the cure – the power of God to salvation. I heard Bill Johnson say this and I haven't been able to shake it off. WE OWE THE WORLD AN ENCOUNTER WITH GOD.

Everyday I wake up to the presence of God. I experience Him in the Word and in prayer. He is real. He speaks to me. I also encounter Him when I gather in worship on Sundays. I encounter Him on our Friday Hour of Power meetings. I encounter Him in our men's group. I encounter Him daily and yet thousand upon thousands out there have never encountered our Saviour even once in their lives. I owe them an encounter with Jesus. You owe them an encounter with Jesus.

We are not consumers, we are disciples. If we want to shift from "Sunday Christians" to everyday Christians, then we need to go back to who we really are. We are disciples of Christ.

→ ONE PASSION – consumed, breathing hard with the fire, sacrificial fire to seek God's purpose on earth. His heart for the lost world. We are in the business of saving souls.

→ not just one passion – BUT INVESTMENT – invest our lives for this one cause. Our Father's business of saving the world.

I close with this Scripture as a warning to the Consumer Christian, and the Consumer Church. If we do not awaken to the reality of what God truly requires of us, we may hear these strong words spoken by the prophet Amos:

Amos 5:21-24 (NKJV) "I hate, I despise your feast days, And I do not savor your sacred assemblies. Though you offer Me burnt offerings and your grain offerings, I will not accept them, Nor will I regard your fattened peace offerings. Take away from Me the noise of your songs, For I will not hear the melody of your stringed instruments. But let justice run down like water, And righteousness like a mighty stream.

The Message Translation brings it closer to home

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But let justice run down like water,  
And righteousness like a mighty stream.

We are not consumers, we are disciples. As we move from "church on Sunday" to "church in the community" let's remember:

We are not Sunday Christians, we are everyday Christians. We are not consumer Christians, we are passionate and dedicated disciples.

- We burn with God passion for the lost world
- We are invested in the business of transforming our communities