

# The Christianity of Consumerism

*Rise & Shine, December 22<sup>nd</sup>*

## **Deuteronomy 14:22, 25-26**

*Set apart a tithe of all the yield of your seed that is brought in yearly from the field... then you may turn it into money. With the money secure in hand, go to the place that the Lord your God will choose; spend the money for whatever you wish—oxen, sheep, wine, strong drink, or whatever you desire. And you shall eat there in the presence of the Lord your God, you and your household rejoicing together.*

### **Questions:**

1. What part of Christmas in our society makes you the most upset?
  2. What part of Christmas in our society gives you the most joy?
  3. Have you ever tried to deny consumerism at Christmas? How did it change the holiday for you?
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*In the News*

## **Pope Francis fury: Vatican leader hits out at 'virus-like' Christmas culture**

Pope Francis issued the scathing assessment of the holiday season in a speech made at Mass at the Vatican on the first day of Advent, calling the mass consumption spending "a virus that attacks the faith at the roots" and adding that consumerism makes people place more emphasis on possessions that they own as opposed to their faith.

Then, in a sermon on the Sunday between Black Friday and Cyber Monday, the Pope added: "We must overcome the temptation that the meaning of life is accumulation." He also asked his fellow Catholic believers to "resist the dazzling lights of consumption, which will shine everywhere this month".

Francis added: "When you live for things, things are never enough, greed grows, other people become obstacles in a race."

Pope Francis had made a habit of warning against mass Christmas spending at this time of year, making a clear statement of anti-consumerism. He said last December that "trees, ornaments and lights are everywhere" to remind people

of the coming holidays, and the advertising and promotional “machine invites people to exchange more new gifts to surprise”.

He added: “But is this the holiday that God likes? What kind of Christmas would he want, what gifts and surprises?”

Decrying consumerism as part of the war on Christmas is not unique to the Pope. Many pastors will give sermons warning their congregants about the perils of secularizing the holiday. However, most churches also have dozens of everyday workers whose livelihood is either dependent on a strong holiday shopping season, or who personally benefit from the work that comes in December.

Entrepreneurs across the United States fill their shops with decorations and gifts that promote consumerism, but also can bring beauty and lift the spirit. Many people love shopping, and for the last eight weeks of the year there is a palpable buzz in stores as festive shoppers mine for holiday treasures with Christmas carols playing in the background.

The holiday shopping period is a crucial time for many small businesses, yet Christians are constantly reminded to push back against the use of Christmas as a marketing tool.

On the first Sunday of Advent, one pastor preached about the toxic consumer culture of Christmas. *“The hustle and bustle and shopping of Christmas is killing us. We are wasting money on things we don’t need. We are tired and exhausted. We have no joy, and we hate having to buy lists of worthless gifts for others. We fill our schedules with holiday parties that have nothing to do with Christ, and all the while we forget the reason for the season. We may enjoy this time of year, but God is not pleased — it bears no resemblance to the first Christmas and brings us no remembrance of his Son. It’s time we all made a big change. Stop worshipping stuff. Start worshipping Christ.”*

On the one hand, the consumer emphasis at Christmas often seems to crowd out Christ. On the other hand, this busy time of year enables small business owners to pay their workers, survive through the slow seasons of the year, and pay the bills for their own households. Many businesses simply wouldn’t make it if it weren’t for the heightened foot traffic and purchases during the Christmas season.

Admittedly, there is little biblical guidance on how (or whether) we should celebrate Christmas. But celebration regularly shows up on the pages of the Bible, from God rejoicing in his creation (Gen 1-2), to the various feasts he commanded for his people Israel (Lev 23), to the consummation of all things, in which God is planning not a church service, but a giant wedding banquet (Rev 19).

If we condemn spending during the season of Christ's birth, we are not necessarily being biblical. Congregation members who have shops or businesses that serve these ends should not be shamed. If eating and drinking can be done to the glory of God, as in the numerous festivals depicted in the Old Testament, so can spending and celebrating.

Regardless of the Christian's view on the consumerism, the Christmas shopping season will remain filled with hustle and bustle. Disgust with long shopping lines, bad traffic, and pressure in gift-buying can lead people to act badly. Workers in stores and restaurants often bear the brunt of our bad behavior. Christians, then, might spark the imagination of people to show grace, kindness, and generosity to workers. A warm smile, a kind word, or an outsized tip may serve as tangible expressions of Christ-like love.

While spending may not spell complicity with a consumeristic culture, many Christians are choosing to participate in "ethical consumerism." Every purchase we make is a vote. We not only buy products at a price, we also support businesses. Ethical consumerism means being conscious of what you choose to purchase and your role as a consumer in a world where that title is often unavoidable.

Trying to make a sound decision may seem tedious, especially when it's so easy to go on Amazon and complete all your holiday shopping in one go. Being an ethical consumer, however, does not mean researching every single product to find its exact origin, it just means being more aware of who you are giving your money to. Ethical consumerism can be as simple or as complex as your needs and choosing to simply be more aware of the decisions you make as a consumer is a great first step.

The Christmas season is filled with opportunities to worship king Jesus. It need not come at the expense of those who experience an economic bump as people, Christians or not, commemorate the year with celebrations, gift-

giving, and festivity. Our task, as the people of God, is to choose to enact these rituals with spiritual meaning, growing in our affection for God and others.

As you shop for gifts for each person on your list this year, know that you can not only bring joy to the person receiving the gift this season, but to those that you buy the gifts from, and to other shoppers along the way. And, when you try to do better on a larger scale, practicing ethical consumerism, this practice is itself, a gift.

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**Leviticus 23:1-2**

*The Lord spoke to Moses, saying: Speak to the people of Israel and say to them: These are the appointed festivals of the Lord that you shall proclaim as holy convocations, my appointed festivals.*

**Colossians 2:16-18**

*Therefore do not let anyone condemn you in matters of food and drink or of observing festivals, new moons, or sabbaths. These are only a shadow of what is to come, but the substance belongs to Christ. Do not let anyone disqualify you, insisting on self-abasement and worship of angels, dwelling on visions, puffed up without cause by a human way of thinking...*

**Romans 14:5-6**

*One person esteems one day as better than another, while another esteems all days alike. Each one should be fully convinced in his own mind. The one who observes the day, observes it in honor of the Lord. The one who eats, eats in honor of the Lord, since he gives thanks to God, while the one who abstains, abstains in honor of the Lord and gives thanks to God.*

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**Prayer for the Right Use of God's Gifts** (BCP p.827)

Almighty God, whose loving hand *has* given us all that we possess: Grant us grace that we may honor *you* with our substance, and, remembering the account which we must one day give, may be faithful stewards of *your* bounty, through Jesus Christ our Lord. *Amen.*