



"The most effectual means of securing the continuance of our civil and religious liberties is always to remember with reverence and gratitude the Source from which they flow."

—John Jay

28-Nov-08

A Telling Juxtaposition

The fourth Thursday in November, the holiday Americans call Thanksgiving Day, is always followed by an unofficial shopping holiday known as "Black Friday." It is also the unofficial beginning of the [Christmas](#) shopping season, although we realize with chagrin that, these days, retailers are already advertising in the Christmas theme at [Halloween](#), a month earlier. Like the recent Presidential campaign, candidates for the public's holiday spending are getting out of the gate sooner every year in order to squeeze out the competition.

The term "Black Friday" sounds ominous, and it should. Originally, the name was coined in Philadelphia due to the massive vehicle and pedestrian traffic headaches that the rush to the malls and stores caused. Here in Charlotte, in addition to traffic conditions being broadcast on the radio every ten minutes, the announcers also notify drivers about how full the four major malls' parking lots are: "For those of you headed to Carolina Place this morning, the lots there are currently 90% full. There are no empty spaces at South Park Mall."

Every year, too, we hear news reports of die-hard shoppers camping out in line for the latest and greatest gismo that every child (or more often, adult, who has plans to put it up for sale at an inflated price on eBay) must have. Hundreds of people show up at Wal-Mart or a big box store, each hoping to get his hands on one of the few dozen of this year's Elmo dolls or whiz-bang game systems that the store has stocked for the Big Event Sale. Unless the guy who is first in line is a former college linebacker, he stands

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about a 75% chance of being pushed aside and/or trampled as the store's doors open for business, usually at some ungodly hour in the morning—or maybe even midnight.

In this year's Black Friday rush to consume, the New York *Daily News* reports that a Wal-Mart employee on Long Island was trampled and killed by a human stampede. A co-worker stated, "He was bum-rushed by 200 people. They took the doors off the hinges. He was trampled and killed in front of me. They took me down too. . . . I literally had to fight people off my back." While emergency workers tried valiantly to save the 34-year-old man's life, impatient shoppers flowed past them into the store, and only a few stopped or even seemed to notice that a human being's life was draining away. A disgusted onlooker commented on the crowd, "They're savages. It's sad. It's terrible."

To most retailers, the meaning of Black Friday has nothing to do with traffic congestion and everything to do with profits. They [hope](#) that this day will see their ledgers' bottom lines turn from red to black, since most of them depend on heavy Christmas sales to tip their books into positive territory. This year-end surge of income is the main reason why stores hawk their Christmas goodies earlier each year, for the earlier they make their profits, the more likely they are to have a banner year. They certainly do not want to have to depend on the Christmas Eve rush—or worse, after-Christmas clearance sales—to post a profit for the year.

From a spiritual point of view, the juxtaposition of Thanksgiving and Black Friday is significant. U.S. Presidents, beginning with its first, George Washington, have set aside this Thursday as a day of national thanksgiving and [prayer](#) to [God](#) for the wonderful bounty and favor that He has graciously bestowed upon America. Citizens are encouraged to take time to count their blessings and consider how much God has blessed them and this nation throughout its history. Each family or group devours a sumptuous feast that represents the best produce of the land. It is also family time, the one national holiday that brings families together without the burden of expected gifts and manufactured merriment.

Yet, the next day is almost entirely given over to consumerism, a day of unbridled, almost carnivorous acquisition. People prepare and gear up for it as if it were a sports competition: getting up early, putting on their best tennis shoes, donning their comfortable clothes, scheduling the day's stops, assigning certain purchases to various family members, synchronizing their cell phones, and checking the loads of their wallets and purses for the monetary firepower that they will need to win the day. Tempers flare over traffic snarls, and like hungry sharks, drivers circle the parking lots in search empty parking spaces. In the stores, people argue over their places in line and even tussle in the aisles over merchandise.

How soon the gratitude and humility of Thanksgiving disappears! One day we acknowledge the loving [kindness](#) of our Creator, and the next we engage in no-hold-barred materialism! It is a telling indication of the spiritual status of the average American.

However, it should come as no surprise. In reality, today's Thanksgiving has almost completely lost its spiritual overtones; it is in most respects another secular holiday. It is a time of near-gluttony and overindulgence, a day of parades sponsored by retail stores and of football games marred by countless commercials. In essence, Thanksgiving has become merely a day of consumption, a benign precursor to Black Friday's commercial consumption. Very few celebrate Thanksgiving in the grateful spirit of Washington's original decree or [Abraham](#) Lincoln's Civil War proclamation 74 years later.

The emphasis on consumption tells us that Americans do not want to *give* thanks but *get* things. The whole culture has become self-indulgent, and this insatiable desire for more blinds the people to their obligations to God and to each other. [Jesus](#) confronted this attitude in the Pharisees' ritualism: "Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you cleanse the outside of the cup and dish, but inside they are full of extortion and self-indulgence" ([Matthew 23:25](#)). In other words, they made a show of rectitude and charity, but in [truth](#), they were only interested in the advantages such piety outward would give them. Jesus pronounced woe upon them for this, and He would certainly judge America's profligate greed in the same way.

As Christians—andespecially in tough economic times like these—we must live counter to the trends of this society. We need to give thanks to God for everything ([Thessalonians 5:18](#)) and focus on living the give way, the way of outgoing concern, as God does.

- Richard T. Ritenbaugh

From the Archives: Featured Sermon

[The Secret Sin Everyone Commits](#)

by Martin G. Collins

Martin Collins emphasizes that we all have a hidden flaw: covert self-righteousness. God did not give the Israelites possession of land because of their righteousness, but because of Gentile wickedness. Isaiah compares all self-generated righteousness to filthy rags. Self-righteous people tend to 1) trust in their own heart, 2) are wise in their

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own eyes, 3) justify themselves, 4) despise or disregard others, and 5) judge or condemn others. Self-righteous wisdom manifests itself in bitter envy, self-seeking, boasting, and fanaticism, as opposed to godly wisdom that is pure, peaceable, gentle, etc. Self-righteousness could be considered the self-absorbed "me" when giving advice, while also showing dissatisfaction of other people's inadequacies. Satanically inspired, idolatrous self-righteousness destroys relationships with God and others and displaces true righteousness emanating from God.

From the Archives: Featured Article

[Thanksgiving](#)

by Staff

Americans and Canadians enjoy their Thanksgiving celebrations—maybetoo much in some cases! This article explores why we should be thankful, how much we have to be thankful for, and how we can give God our thanks.

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