

## The Consequences Of Affluence

Sacrifice vs. Consumption

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Our stomachs are full, our wallets are full, and we are joyous and rejoicing—which is just the way that God intended for it to be here at the Feast. But that is not the way that God intended it to be all year round (as we see the world so desperately trying to do). Look at the consequences of our *pleasure dominated life*. Although Americans had fewer material goods, the number of Americans who said they are "very happy" peaked back in 1957. So today we are a very unhappy nation.

The December 10, 2000 *Charlotte Observer* newspaper carried an article by Kathy Bergen (of *The Chicago Tribune*) entitled "Richer, But Not Happier." The subtitle reads, "Today's Americans are finding that money is *not* everything." I would like to read just a few excerpts from that article. I think they are very eye opening, and also paint a good picture of our society.

The average size of a new home has expanded from 1,500 square feet to 2,190 square feet. The number of Americans taking cruises each year has risen from 500,000 to 6.5 million. The production of recreational vehicles has soared from 30,300 to 239,300. And the number of amusement parks has leaped 362 to 1,164. [Does that not paint a picture of our society?] We are attending more symphonies, concerts, plays and sporting events, buying more boats, and loading up on electronics (from cell phones, to computers, to video recorders and microwave ovens).

And the article does not say this, but on and on and on the list goes.

A growing body of research is reaching the conclusion that the country's unprecedented surge in affluence is not spawning a corresponding surge in contentment—personal or societal. Michael Cox, the chief economist at the Federal Reserve Bank of Dallas, asked this question: 'Every aspect of life is better, so it makes you

wonder—is it just human nature to complain, even when things are so good?'

Again, our society is painted so truly. Then, a few more excerpts from the article. The article goes on:

Looking at data from the post World War II years up through 1998, Robert E. Lane, professor emeritus of political science at Yale University, found 'A spirit of unhappiness and depression [this is an interesting word here] haunting advanced market democracies.'

So what he is saying is that there is a wrong spirit that no one can put their finger on. That is, no one in the *world* can; but we certainly can. This is the dark side of affluence. He points to a rising tide of clinical depression, increasing distrust of other people and institutions, an erosion of ties to family, friends, and community as the major cause of this problem. "We are no happier than we were when our incomes were one-third of what they are now, way back in 1948," he says.

What we have today is an affluent society with no thankfulness to God and not an ounce of willingness to sacrifice.

The time represented by the Feast of Tabernacles is a time of rejoicing, as we well know (and that is what we usually emphasize); but it is also a time of sacrifice. Not a time of unhappiness, depression, and greed—but a time of *genuine sacrifice* for each other. The first day of the Feast of Tabernacles is a day of sacrifice itself, even more so that the other days in the Feast of Tabernacles. The ancient Israelites were required to offer through the priesthood, on *each* of the seven days of the Feast, two rams, fourteen lambs, and a goat as a sin offering. And successively, on each of these days, a diminishing number of bullocks—thirteen on the first day, twelve on the second, and so on through the seventh day of the Feast of Tabernacles. No special offering of the earth's fruit was made. But you can see that ancient Israel thought of this Feast as a sacrificial feast, as well as a joyous one. They were constantly faced with those sacrifices every day.

Sacrifices symbolize that we owe everything to God. Absolutely *everything*—from the shirt on our backs to the food we eat, and on and on and on.

Because of our sin, we owe Him our lives. Because sacrifices could be abused, several times Old Testament writers (especially the prophets) warned against sacrifices being performed without that proper attitude. That is such a *key* when offering sacrifices. Not only was it a key for ancient Israel in offering their sacrifices, but also for us today. In offering our spiritual sacrifices, we have to have the *right attitude*.

**Proverbs 15:8** The sacrifice of the wicked is an abomination to the LORD, but the prayer of the upright is His delight.

Those who are doing righteously have the right attitude, and it is a delight to God when they offer up sacrifices to Him.

One of king Saul's chief mistakes occurred after being told to utterly destroy the Amalekites and all that they possessed. He spared the king of the Amalekites and allowed the Israelites to save the best of the sheep and cattle—(as his excuse went) he said—to sacrifice to the Lord. Then he was rebuked by the prophet Samuel. We will read that incident.

**I Samuel 15:17-21** So Samuel said, "When you were little in your own eyes, were you not the head of the tribes of Israel? And did not the LORD anoint you king over Israel? Now the LORD sent you on a mission, and said, 'Go, and utterly destroy the sinners, the Amalekites, and fight against them until they are consumed.' Why then did you not obey the voice of the LORD? Why did you swoop down on the spoil, and do evil in the sight of the LORD? And Saul said to Samuel, "But I have obeyed the voice of the LORD, and gone on the mission on which the LORD sent me, and brought back Agag king of Amalek; I have utterly destroyed the Amalekites. But the people took of the plunder, sheep and oxen, the best of the things which should have been utterly destroyed, to sacrifice to the LORD your God in Gilgal."

So their attitude was not right with God. It was of a rebellious attitude.

**I Samuel 15:22-23** So Samuel said, "Has the LORD as great delight in burnt offerings and sacrifices, as in obeying the voice of the LORD

? Behold, to obey is better than sacrifice, and to heed than the fat of rams. For rebellion is as the sin of witchcraft, and stubbornness is as iniquity and idolatry. Because you have rejected the word of the LORD, He has also rejected you from being king."

We can see how serious it is for someone to sacrifice anything to the Lord in a wrong attitude—in an attitude of rebellion—and not in obedience to God. Saul's attitude toward God was *casual* at best. He feared the people whom he ruled more than he feared God. As a result, his attitude was rebelliousness.

Hosea 6:6 tells us that God wants us to have the knowledge of God more than burnt offerings. So the fear of the Lord is the beginning of knowledge—and that knowledge is the knowledge that God has. It is the knowledge of God's way of life.

Burnt offerings and sacrifices were added to the Feast of Tabernacles later. That was after Israel showed that they were going to be a sinful people. God felt that it was necessary to add those. For the first time (in Leviticus 23:26-27), God temporarily imposed special burnt offerings on each of the seven days of the Feast of Tabernacles. When He initially revealed the Feast of Ingathering (or Tabernacles), God did not command any burnt offerings; but He did so later. This is seen in Exodus 23:16 and Exodus 34:22. The prophet Jeremiah makes this clear as well.

**Jeremiah 7:22-24** "For I did not speak to your fathers, or command them in the day that I brought them out of the land of Egypt, concerning burnt offerings or sacrifices. But this is what I commanded them, saying, 'Obey my voice, and I will be your God, and you shall be My people. And walk you in all the ways that I have commanded you, that it may be well with you.' Yet they did not obey or incline their ear, but followed the counsels and the dictates of their evil hearts, and went backward and not forward."

The Revised Standard Version has this in a little clearer way. It says: "For in the day that I brought them out of the land of Egypt, I did not speak to your fathers, or command them concerning burnt offering and sacrifices." It was only when the nations sinned again and again and again (in that first year after the Exodus) that God imposed the sacrifices of the law to remind them

of their sins, and to teach them that the coming Messiah would shed His blood for them as the ultimate sacrifice.

It was not until well into the fortieth year after the Exodus that God commanded Moses the additional sacrifices during the Feast of Tabernacles. That was for a special purpose. You can read that account in Numbers 29:12-34. Upon entering into the Promised Land, the Israelites were to offer burnt offerings, as I mentioned earlier—thirteen young bulls on the first day of the feast, and twelve on the second, eleven on the third, then ten, nine, eight, and so on until the seventh day of the Feast. That makes a total of seventy young bulls.

Now, why seventy? What is the significance of the number 70? To offer a young bull was not an ordinary sacrifice. It was an unusual sacrifice, in a sense. Leviticus 4:13-21 tells us that, when Israel as a nation sinned and sought forgiveness, a young bull was offered at that time. Ordinary citizens could offer lambs, goats, and doves; but it was the priesthood who had to offer the bulls.

Genesis 10 gives us an answer to the number 70 and where it comes from. The sons of Noah were three. The sons, grandsons, and later descendants (listed in Genesis 10 as progenitors of the tribes, or nations, that followed later) were sixty-seven. That adds up to a total of seventy about the time of the Tower of Babel.

It is interesting that the Jewish Talmud states: "To what do these seventy bullocks that were offered during the seven days of the festival correspond? To the seventy nations." A footnote in the Talmud says, "Seventy is the traditional number of Gentile nations. And the seventy bullocks are offered to make atonement for them."

Even Jesus' apostles at that time did not understand this great spiritual truth about those sacrifices, until God revealed His will through Peter at the time of the conversion of the uncircumcised Italian, Cornelius. That is recorded in Acts 10, as you will recall. When the other apostles and brethren heard Peter's account, they glorified God. They were very pleased and excited that the Gentiles would also have access to Christ's sacrifice.

**Acts 11:18** When they [the apostles] heard these things they held became silent, and they glorified God, saying, "Then has God also granted to the Gentiles repentance to life.a'

When this event in the history of the early church occurred, shock waves rushed through the church because it was such an unusual thing that they did not understand until that point. Remember that at Pentecost in AD 31, when so many people were speaking different languages, they were Jews and circumcised proselytes that we read of in Acts 2:5-10. There were no Gentiles there. (At least, not any uncircumcised Gentiles.) There were no uncircumcised Gentiles converted that day. And, at that time, all of God's feasts took on a greater meaning.

David, however, did understand this spiritual principle. Notice what he wrote in Psalms 51, after his sin with Bathsheba.

**Psalms 51:15-19** O Lord, open my lips; and my mouth shall show forth Your praise. For you do not desire sacrifice, or else would I give it; You do not delight in burnt offering. [Of course, he is talking here about physical sacrifices—the sacrifices of animals.] The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit, a broken and a contrite heart—these, O God, you will not despise. Do good in Your good pleasure to Zion; build you the walls of Jerusalem. Then you shall be pleased with the sacrifices of righteousness, with burnt offering and whole burnt offering; then shall they offer bullocks on Your altar.

In sharp contrast, this present society that we find ourselves in (especially here in the United States) is intoxicated with *affluence*. What a contrast this is to the sacrifices that the children of Israel saw during the Feast of Tabernacles. Instead of the people of this world sacrificing their lives in meek and humble service to others, they seek to accumulate material things. We see this daily on TV and in person (as we go into stores). And it is on and on and on—as far as what *a frenzy of buying* we have in this nation.

But what is affluence? Here is a definition for you. "It is an abundance of riches, wealth, and opulence. An affluent society is a milieu in which basic needs have been replaced with overabundance for comfortable living. In its extreme case, it is over-consumption."

"*Affluenza*" is a word that was coined on a television show in recent years, and many of you may recognize that word. But affluenza has attacked our society like a disease—with a vengeance. The term "affluenza" comes from that one-hour television special, which explored the high social and economic cost of our materialism and over-consumption in the United States. The host, Scott Simon, defined *affluenza* in three short definitions. I think you will find this very eye opening. And you will also see it as a direct description of our society. (1) The bloated, sluggish, and unfeeling that results from efforts to keep up with the Jones'. (2) An epidemic of stress, overwork, waste, and indebtedness caused by a dogged pursuit of "the American dream." And (3) an unsustainable addiction to economic growth.

Does that not sound like our society?

We all get caught up in affluence. I think we are all suffering, at least a little, from the disease of affluenza. So what I want to do right now is to give you a test. We are here in a "workshop." And I want to give you just a short test of questions. You do not even have to write anything down, because I am going to give you the answers right after the test. Hopefully, this will help you to see how involved we all are in this "affluenza"—this disease that this nation is involved in. This should help you to see the impact that it is having on *you*.

1. Which of the following is comparable to the size of a typical three-car garage?

- a. a basketball court
- b. a McDonald's restaurant
- c. an RV (i.e., a recreational vehicle)
- d. the average home in the 1950s

Some of you have already guessed. "d" is the answer. Many of today's three-car garages occupy 900 square feet—just about the average size of an entire home in the 1950s. On top of that, many people use the extra garage space to store things that they own and seldom use. How many things are in *our* garages that we have not used in the last two years? (Or, the last year?)

Let me give you a challenge. I challenge you to throw everything away that you have not used in the last two years—in your house and garage—except for things like maybe a camp stove that you might keep in case there is a power outage, or more practical things like that. (We do have a camp stove. And it may sit there for ten years and not be used. But, if we have a power outage, at least we will be able to heat some water or cook a meal.) You know, the things we commonly refer to as "junk."

2. How much of an average American's lifetime will be spent, on average, watching television commercials? (Just the commercials.)

- a. 6 months
- b. 3 months
- c. 1 year
- d. 1.5 years

The answer is "c"—one year. In contrast, Americans on average spend only 40 minutes a week playing with their children; and members of working couples talk with one another, on average, only 12 minutes a day. So many spend more time watching TV commercials than they do playing with their children or talking with their spouses.

3. (True or false.) Americans carry one billion dollars in personal debt—not including real estate and mortgages.

The answer is false. Americans carry one trillion dollars in *personal debt*—approximately \$4,000 for every man, woman, and child (not including real estate and mortgages). On average, Americans *save* only 4% of their income.



But in contrast, the Japanese save 16%. And we have been hearing statistics like that for many years.

4. In the industrialized world, where is the United States ranked in terms of its income equality between the rich and the poor (with the first being the most "income equal")? That is, how close are the salaries, or the incomes, of "the poor" as compared to "the very rich" in the industrialized world—and how does the United States rank?

- A. first
- B. fifth
- C. twelfth
- D. twenty-second

The answer is "d"—twenty-second. The income disparity between the rich and poor is *greatest* in the United States of all industrialized nations.

5. Since 1950, Americans alone have used more resources than:

- a. everyone who ever lived before them
- b. the combined Third World populations
- c. the Romans at the height of the Roman Empire
- d. all of the above

I imagine that you have already guessed. The answer is "d"—all of the above. Since 1950, Americans alone have used more resources than everyone who ever lived before them. Each American individual uses up 20 tons of basic raw materials annually. That is each individual!

Americans throw away 7 million cars a year, 2 million plastic bottles an hour, and enough aluminum cans annually to make 6,000 DC-10 airplanes. Is this nation suffering from *affluenza*?

6. America's total yearly waste would fill a convoy of garbage trucks long enough to

- a. wrap around the earth six times
- b. reach halfway to the moon
- c. connect the North and South poles
- d. build a bridge between North America and China

The answer is "a" and "b"—that is, wrap around the earth six times *and* reach halfway to the moon. Even though Americans comprise only 5% of the world's population, in 1996 we used nearly a third of its resources and produced almost half of its hazardous waste. The average North American consumes five times as much as the average Mexican, ten times as much as the average Chinese, and thirty times as much as the average Indian (from India).

7. Of the Americans who, in 1995, voluntarily cut back their consumption, what percentage said that they are happier as a result:

- a. 29 %
- b. 42 %
- c. 67 %
- d. 86 %

The answer, as you have probably guessed, is "d." 86% of Americans who voluntarily cut back on their consumption feel happier as a result. Only 9% said they were less happy. In 1996, 5% of the "baby boom" generation reported practicing a strong form of *voluntary simplicity*. So, in a very small segment of this society, there are people who are cutting back; and they are happier for it.

As a nation, we are richer but not happier (as the article said at the beginning). The bloated, sluggish, and unfeeling feeling of *affluenza* is dulling our minds and true happiness and contentment. We all are being caught up in this. We are all being very heavily influenced by it. Just look in your homes and see what you all you have which you really do not need, or would not have to have.

Here at the Feast of Tabernacles, we are to, yes, spend money on 'whatever our heart desires.' But that "desire" is not the desire of this world. It is not the desire of this nation—where anything our heart *lusts* (as the King James Version says; but that is "desires" as the New King James says). That desire should be one that includes sacrifice. That is, an attitude of sacrifice. Now I do not mean sacrifice in that you are giving up buying things that you desire. But it is *a changing of the mind*—of the type of "desire"—that God is looking for. The *desire of the heart* there is that we change our heart—so that we are not lusting after material things at the Feast.

It is wonderful and nice to buy things that we have always wanted, or that we have wanted during the whole Feast; but we have to be very careful that it does not become an obsession—because that is the wrong desire. And that is not a "desire" with sacrifice included. (We will talk about that a little later.)

What happens when pleasures are our chief aim? The ultimate *choice* in life lies between (1) pleasing oneself and (2) pleasing God. It is as simple as that. A world in which people's first aim is to please themselves is a battle ground for savagery, for division, for exhaustion, and for separating ourselves from God.

Gerald Celente of Trends Research Institute says: "We hear the same refrain all the time from people. 'I have no life. I get home at night—there's laundry and bills to pay. I'm exhausted. I go to sleep, I wake up; and the routine begins the next day all over again. People feel that their lives are this way.'"

**James 4:1-3** Where do wars and fights come from among you? Do they not come from your desires for pleasure that war in your members? You lust and do not have. You murder and covet and

cannot obtain. You fight and war. Yet you do not have because you do not ask. You ask and do not receive, because you ask amiss, that you may spend it on your pleasures.

That word "consume" here is a very interesting word. Even in our English language, its history is fascinating. It is really eye opening, in fact. This consuming is driven by lust, and it is devastating to our society—as we see today. Over-consumption has derogatorily affected our society, and the result is careless waste and selfish hoarding. In the 1800s, the word "consumption" meant to exhaust, pillage, or destroy. Even in the early 1900s, the disease tuberculosis was called "consumption." So we see a very negative aura around that word—at least, in our earlier history.

One-fifth of the world's population lives in *dire poverty*—slowly dying of hunger and disease. Millions of others desperately need more basic needs and material goods, just for their survival. We see these people (years ago in Ethiopia, and now in Somalia and other areas where people are starving) and their stomachs are extended. They do not even have a roof over their heads, or even clothing for their bodies.

Americans' *consume* and *waste* as a way of life. It has become the banner of our society. Over-consumption is the result of careless consumers who are self-centered and greedy. Does it not really get back to that? It gets back to sin.

In James 4:1-3, James is setting before God's people a basic question—whether our aim in life is to submit to the will of God *or* to gratify our own desires for pleasures of this world. He warns that if the over-mastering search for pleasure results in wars and battles, then we are wrong for thinking that way. The feverish search for pleasure issues in long drawn-out resentments (like wars, and sudden explosions of enmity) that are like battles. These are battles not only of the mind, but they are also battles that destroy life.

The root cause of this unceasing and bitter conflict is **desire**. Isn't it interesting that of the Ten Commandments, they end with the forbidding of *covetousness*, or wrong desire? God probably designed it in that way (last) so it'll stick in our minds. It is one of the hardest sins to recognize.

Our society tries to develop these wrong desires in people as early as they can. In this society, if a person is not converted, they do not have a chance against the barrage of advertising that we see. Look at how greed perverts advertising in our affluent society. Marketing companies are only interested in the market share, and nothing else. They do not care about our well being. They do not care if the products will kill us, or if they will save us.

These markets are determined by surveys, and research, and focus groups—and things like that. You will remember that, not too long ago, the United States Congress had to get involved in some of these marketing methods that we have in our society. The Congress of the United States has been investigating the moviemaker's targeting of eleven and twelve-year-olds with their "R" rated movies. They market them ahead of time to see if they will go to the "R" movies. It is intentional; and they are making their movies to try to attract that age group—because they know that it is an age group in which a very large number attends movies.

The moviemakers greedily market vices to children as a way of making money and as a way of promoting their immoral values and religious beliefs. If you look at the Disney movies, they are just full of New Age beliefs that they are promoting—and slowly changing the minds of our children to be able to "see" this New World religion that is coming. It is very subtle, but it is very much there. In the Disney movie "The Lion King," the song "The Circle of Life," for example, is as New Age as you can get, religiously.

Marketers are watching children shop and going into their bedrooms to find out what kinds of products children like. They say that using anti-social behavior to sell products to children is a "good" thing. They also speak of "capturing" and "owning" children—and that messages showing aggressive behavior are a "good" way to sell products to boys. So you can see the mentality of where they are coming from, and how they are trying to grab our children from us. The advertising in this affluent society is designed to pull us away from God. (Not just us, but they are starting with *our children* as early as possible.)

*The pleasure-dominated life has certain inevitable spiritual consequences.* We are going to look at four that James mentions there in James 4:1-3. *The*

*first consequence* is that it sets people at each other's throats—and not only in a physical way. You see wars between nations, where nations are constantly bickering. We see that very thing happening in Jerusalem today, between the Palestinians and the Israelis.

"Desires" are inherently "warring powers." James 4:1-3 does not mean that they war within a person (although that is partially true); but that they set people warring against each other. The basic desires are for the same things; and that is for money, for power, for prestige, for worldly possessions, and for gratification of bodily lusts. All of these things feed our desires and motivate us. James warns people of affluence and of God's coming judgment upon their greedy actions. In James 5, he speaks to the more wealthy and affluent.

**James 5:1-6** Come now, you rich, weep and howl for your miseries that are coming upon you! Your riches are corrupted, and your garments are moth-eaten. Your gold and silver are corroded, and their corrosion shall be a witness against you and will eat your flesh like fire. You have heaped treasure up for the last days. Indeed the wages of the laborers who mowed your fields, which you kept back by fraud, cry out; and the cries of the reapers have reached the ears of the Lord of Sabaoth. You have lived on the earth in pleasure and luxury; you have fattened your hearts as in a day of slaughter. You have condemned, you have murdered the just; he does not resist you.

So this is what we are seeing in our society today. It is the exact same thing going on. As is seen in our affluent society—when everyone is striving to possess the same things, life inevitably becomes a competitive arena where everybody is competing for things. That is what *keeping up with the Jones'* is. It is competing for the things that the Jones' already have.

You remember the Cabbage Patch dolls, back in the late 1970s or early '80s? There were women fighting each other for the last Cabbage Patch doll left on the shelf. There were injuries caused by it. This is the type of lust and desire that we are trying to avoid. We have to use God's Holy Spirit in order to do that, because we are constantly being bombarded with Beanie Babies, or similar things, and you can go on and on and on.

Look at the credit quandaries of today. This is a fine example of how it even pits people against each other. Eleven percent of teenagers have their own credit cards, and 40% use their parent's. That is one way of giving your child *affluenza*. Americans have more than one billion credit cards. Yet fewer than one-third of all Americans pay their balances off each month. In fact, the average card holder is \$2,700.00 in debt and is paying 16% interest. More Americans declared bankruptcy in 1997 than graduated from college. (That was 1.1 million.) So we see where our nation is going in that way. And arguments about money play a major role in 90% of divorce cases. So is affluenza affecting our nation?

Turn with me to II Timothy 3. The apostle Paul prophesied that covetous people and lovers of pleasure would appear to be a "good" people, in the end time. Although their attitudes are rotten to the core, they appear to be good on the surface.

**II Timothy 3:1-5** But know this, that in the last days perilous times will come: For men will be lovers of themselves, lovers of money, boasters, proud, blasphemers, disobedient to parents, unthankful [which is a banner of our affluent society], unholy, unloving, unforgiving, slanderers, without self-control, brutal, despisers of good, traitors, headstrong, haughty, lovers of pleasure rather than lovers of God, having a form of godliness but denying its power. And from such people turn away!

Here is a direct command for us to not get involved with the affluence—and the affluenza—which is affecting this society. We should be avoiding these things; and avoiding the commercials and enticements that are used by Satan to suck us in and pull us away from God.

Obedience to the craving for pleasure drives people apart, because it drives them to rivalry for the same things. Obedience to the will of God draws us together, because it requires sacrifice and submission. It is God's will that we *serve one another*, which is a spiritual sacrifice. And spiritual sacrifices are even more important during the Feast of Tabernacles than they are even during the rest of the year. We have a perfect opportunity to begin developing those to their height—as well as our spiritual gifts.

*The second consequence:* The craving for pleasure drives a person to wrong actions. This is another consequence that James mentions. Before a person can arrive at a wrong action, there must be the driving emotion of "desire" in his mind. He may restrain himself from the thing that the desire for pleasures insights him to do; but as long as that desire is in him mind, he is not safe. We have a desire for something, and we know that it is wrong, and we put it out of our mind (or we just hide it in the back of our mind, and do not quite get rid of it)—it will come back every time and suck us in.

For example, if you have always wanted the most expensive car, it can make us unhappy with the car that we do have—if you let that sit there and fester. It is part of that idea of *influenza*, that flu-like sickness that this nation has.

Turn with me to Galatians 5. You will recall the works of the flesh that are listed here; but we have a wonderful advantage—God's Spirit. It helps us to resist these wrong desires, but it does not make us immune to them. Here are some of those desires that we are to avoid.

**Galatians 5:16-21** I say then " Walk in the Spirit, and you shall not fulfill the lust of the flesh. For the flesh lusts against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh; and these are contrary to one another, so that you cannot do the things that you wish. But if you are led by the Spirit, you are not under [the penalty of] the law. Now the works of the flesh are evident, which are: adultery, fornication, uncleanness, lewdness, idolatry, sorcery, hatred, contentions, jealousies, outbursts of wrath, selfish ambitions, heresies, envy, murders, drunkenness, revelries, and the like; of the which I tell you beforehand, just as I also told you in time past, that those who do such things will not inherit the kingdom of God.

These things come from "desire." The desires develop in our mind; and before you know it, they become a strong desire that is driving us. And when that desire has become to full maturity, it becomes sin. The steps of the process are simple and terrible in the human mind. We allow ourselves to desire something. That thing begins to dominate our thoughts, and we find ourselves involuntarily thinking about it in our waking hours and dreaming of it when we sleep. It begins to be what is aptly called "a ruling passion." It



takes control over us. It could be anything. Satan knows exactly where our weaknesses are, and he knows where our desires are. So he can manipulate and use these things to get hold of us, if we are not careful.

Waste is also a crime of desire that leads to wrong action—which is another part of this second point. Let me give you an example. In the summer of 1999, Graham Gund started a third version of his new multimillion-dollar house in Cambridge, Massachusetts. He tore out the foundation for a second time, after deciding that he really wanted the house to look like the first version—which he had bulldozed eight months earlier (after it was nearly complete). Does he have *affluenza*? He has an extreme case of it!

*The third consequence* that James talks about is that the cravings for pleasure, in the end, shuts the door of prayer. If our prayers are simply for the things that will gratify our desires, they are essentially selfish; and, therefore, they are impossible for God to answer. The true "end" of prayer is to God, "Your will be done, not mine." The prayer of the person who is pleasure-dominated is, "My desires be satisfied." You can see the difference in attitudes there.

It is one of the grim facts of life that a selfish person can hardly even pray correctly. Here is a person who is very selfish and lets their desire run away with them; and they cannot pray in the proper and right way. Their minds are blinded. So we can really appreciate what God has done to open up our minds—giving us the Holy Spirit, and enabling us to pray with the right attitude. No one can ever pray correctly until he removes *self* from the center of his life, and puts God there. Remember what we read in James 4:3.

**James 4:3** You ask and and do not receive, because you ask amiss, that you may spend it on your pleasures.

So anytime our prayer is of a selfish motivation, it is not going to be answered. The New Testament is clear that this over-mastering "desire for pleasure" of this world is always a threatening danger to spiritual life. It is the cares and riches and pleasures of this life that combine to choke the good seed.

**Luke 8:14** "Now the ones that fell among thorns are those who, when they have heard, go out and are choked with cares, riches, and pleasures of this life, and bring no fruit to maturity."

Anyone who is caught up in this affluent society, and has the disease of affluenza, will not allow that seed to grow. We have seen many come into the church over the years, who have apparently allowed the affluence of society and the desires and pleasures of this society to kill that seed that maybe had gotten started in them.

*The fourth consequence* that James mentions is that the crazing for pleasure turns a person inward—making him selfish and self-centered. He gives less, helps less, cares less, and sacrifices less.

On CBS National News (on Monday, September 18, 2000), Dan Rather carried a story about generosity. The statistics that he used were very eye opening. He said, according to recent research, "The richer the state, the less the people gave to charities. And the poorer the state, the more the people gave." Massachusetts is the least "giving" state. Mississippi is the most "giving" state—according to the research. Mississippi is the poorest state in this country, and yet they give the most. Is that not eye opening?

When we are not affluent, we have less distraction from what is truly important; and we are able to more easily care about our fellow human beings. It seems that we are less likely to seek the things of God when we are affluent—when we have that "flu" of *affluenza*.

**Colossians 3:1-7** If then you were raised with Christ, seek those things which are above, where Christ is, sitting at the right hand of God. Set your mind on things above, not on things on the earth. For you died, and your life is hidden with Christ in God. When Christ who is our life appears, then you also will appear with Him in glory. Therefore put to death your members which are on the earth: fornication, uncleanness, passion, evil desire, and covetousness,

which is idolatry. Because of these things the wrath of God is coming upon the children of disobedience, in the which you yourselves once walked, when you lived in them.

Even God's people can be caught up in the attitude of affluenza and be pulled by the desires of this world. In fact, we are being caught up in that every day. We have to fight it every day.

**Titus 3:3** For we ourselves also were once foolish, disobedient, deceived, serving various lusts and pleasures, living in malice and envy, hateful and hating one another.

If you look at this society, we are even "hating" our children by the short amount of time that we spend with them. Look at the *leisure* in this nation, and you see how affluence makes us serve things. In 1958 only 4% of American homes had dishwashers. Now more than half do. Less than 1% had color televisions. Now 97% do. (And, along with that comes the commercials.) In addition to that, in the 1950s (when people were at the height of their happiness) there were no microwave ovens, VCRs, or personal computers. Now, 70% of Americans visit malls each week—more than attend churches and synagogues. On average, Americans shop 6 hours a week and spend only 40 minutes playing with their children. What an indictment of this nation that is! Is this nation being sickened by the disease of affluenza? It certainly is! And with this world being around us all the time, we easily get caught up in that.

Turn with me to Haggai 1. God warns us, through Haggai, that our ways result in our putting our income in bags with holes and neglecting the building of His church.

**Haggai 1:2-9** Thus speaks the LORD of hosts, saying: "This people says, 'The time has not come, the time that the LORD's house should be built.'" Then the word of the LORD came by Haggai the prophet, saying, "Is it time for you yourselves to dwell in your paneled [paneled walls of cedar and ivory] houses, and this temple [the house of God] lie in ruins?" Now therefore, thus says the LORD of hosts: "Consider your ways!" You have sown much, and bring in little; you eat, but you do not have enough; you drink, but you are

not filled with drink; you clothe yourselves, but no one is warm; and he who earns wages, earns wages to put it into a bag with holes". Thus says the LORD of hosts: "Consider your ways! Go up to the mountains and bring wood and build the temple; that I may take pleasure in it and be glorified," says the LORD. "You looked for much, but indeed it came to little; and when you brought it home, I blew it away. Why?" says the LORD of hosts." Because of My house that is in ruins, while every one of you runs to his own house."

That is, they spend every last dime they have on themselves and their own house—making it look as nice as they possibly can.

**Haggai 2:10-11** "Therefore the heavens above you withhold the dew, and the earth withholds its fruit. For I called for a drought on the land, and the mountains, on the grain and the new wine and the oil, on whatever the ground brings forth, on men and livestock and all the labor of your hands."

This is what we are beginning to see happen upon our affluent society now. God's wrath is beginning already to show on it—through drought, and disease. It seems like every week we read of another thing that they are doing with our food to make it inedible (whether it is genetic engineering, or the hormones and chemicals that they are adding). It goes on and on and on, with everything that we eat and drink. Recently we are hearing about milk, and how it causes lymphoma. It is really a shame. We do have to live in this society, but we certainly do not have to live the way of it—that way of "desire."

In Haggai, they were waiting for better leisure and better financial times to give of their time and their money. Yet they lived in what was becoming an affluent society; and they were becoming self-centered and comfortable in their temporary material things, as they let God's church deteriorate and stand in ruins.

I am certainly not accusing anyone here because as I point at all of you as part of this affluent society that we have, there certainly are three fingers pointing back at me. And I am embarrassed to say—as I studied and researched this sermon—that I am very guilty of many of these things. It hit

me hard. The reason that I am giving you all of these statistics is that I wanted to "hit you hard" too by how caught up in all of this *we* are.

We are temporary; but why pursue temporary things, when pursuit of God's way of life is *permanent* and *eternal*? We know that godly principle. We have heard it many times. On this subject, James had a truckload of knowledge to give us, through the inspiration of Jesus Christ. We are human beings, made of flesh. Our human existence is temporary. We are here today, gone tomorrow. And in James 4, James speaks of the uncertainty of life.

**James 4:13-14** Come now, you who say, "Today or tomorrow we will go into such and such a city, spend a year there, buy and sell, and make a profit" [So you see there an affluent society.]; whereas you do not know what will happen tomorrow. For what is your life? It is even a vapor that appears for a little time and then vanishes away.

So why do we get so caught up in buying these material things (and storing them in our garage, and never looking at them again—thinking that we are going to use them next week, when we have not used them in ten years)? We all get caught up in that!

In the Millennium, the whole world will understand their purpose for life and their human potential for eternity. They will understand that during this life we are *mortal heirs*—who may become *immortal inheritors* of the Kingdom of God. Today the world does not understand this; but they will, and we will be able to teach them. As the firstfruits in the Kingdom, we will teach physical human beings how to change their lustful desires into godly desires. That is, desires for the right things—not the things of the world. These right desires we are learning now, especially here at the Feast of Tabernacles. We are learning how to correctly spend our tithe—not with the lustful desires of this world, but with the godly desires.

We live temporary lives. All human beings are destined to die. Only by receiving the seed of eternal life, from God's Spirit, can a person hope to live forever. But if we are of the sickness of affluenza, we are going to choke that seed. So we have to fight it. I John 5:11 tells us that, as Christians, we have that eternal life abiding in us. These physical bodies of ours—with all of

their imperfections and their selfish desires, their weaknesses and their aches and pains—are only meant to last long enough for us to *qualify* for eternal life. They are not meant to go on for eternity.

The apostle Peter expressed this thought, when he realized that he was getting up in years and that the hour of his martyrdom was approaching (as Jesus had foretold). And so Peter was very "in tuned" with what he should have been thinking of at that time; and, no doubt, affluence and the desires of this world were not in his mind.

**II Peter 1:13-14** Yes, I think it is right, as long as I am in this tent, to stir you up by reminding you, knowing that shortly I must put off my tent, just as our Lord Jesus Christ showed me.

The Moffatt version gives verse 14 in a little clearer way. It says: "I know my tent must be folded up very soon, as indeed our Lord Jesus Christ has shown me." Peter realized that his time was short, and that his body was temporary. He did not want to be caught up in this world's desires. Rather, he wanted to be *focused* on godly things. He did not know exactly what day he would be martyred, or that he would die. Would it be tomorrow, or would it be a week from then? So constantly, day by day, he tried to *resist* those desires of the world.

In today's affluent society, people fret about the shape of their nose, the color of their hair, the wrinkles and creases that come with age. They spend their lives in anxious pursuit of more luxurious ways to pamper, clothe, shelter, and transport these "temporary dwellings" that we call our bodies. They miss the point entirely of why we are here on earth. They do not know what life is all about because they do not understand that we are merely pilgrims, preparing for an eternal inheritance. That is where our focus should be—on our eternal inheritance.

Does it really matter that you cannot afford to clothe and feed that body (that you are wearing) as you would like? That you have flat feet, or a bad back? Or that your "tent" is defective in some other way? I do not doubt that every single person here has some ailment or something wrong with their body. And even our teenagers have something "wrong" with their looks that they do not like (although that is only in their mind).

This is not to say that it does not matter that we take care of our bodies, because we should. God will not give us a city (or a nation) to rule in the Kingdom if we cannot take care of our own bodies in a right way. So we do have to take care of our health; but we cannot worry about buying luxurious things. Buying things in itself is not wrong. Buying something that you have always wanted and would like, is not wrong at all. But that attitude, that desire—is it a godly desire, or is it a lustful desire?

Our "tents" were not designed to last forever. They were only meant to last long enough to get us to our eternal inheritance. Then God will give us an eternal "house."

**II Corinthians 5:1** For we know that if our earthly house, this tent, is destroyed [as it is bound to be, no doubt], we have a building from God, a house . . .

That is, it is no longer a temporary tent or a temporary dwelling; but it is a permanent house from God—an eternal house.

**II Corinthians 5:1-4** . . . not made with hands, eternal in the heavens. For in this we groan, earnestly desiring to be clothed with our habitation which is from heaven, if indeed, having been clothed, we shall not be found naked. For we who are in this tent groan, being burdened, not because we want to be unclothed, but further clothed, that mortality may be swallowed up of [eternal] life.

If we overcome and endure to the end, we will be made immortal. We have no doubt of that. So let us not let *desire* get in the way. That is, the wrong false desire of *affluenza*.

Paul, who himself was a tentmaker by occupation, understood and preached the reason for which we were born into these physical bodies—these temporary bodies. He understood our potential and preached about it.

**Philippians 3:20-21** For our citizenship is in heaven; from which we also eagerly wait for the Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ, who shall transform our lowly body that it may be conformed to His

glorious body, according to the working by which He is able even to subdue all things to Himself.

That is what we have to look forward to, if we are able to resist the desires and pleasures of this affluent society. In a sense, we must inoculate ourselves with the Holy Spirit—or ask Jesus Christ to inoculate us with the Holy Spirit—so that we can resist that disease and germ of affluenza.

The purpose of human life is to become members of the God Family, as Jesus Christ is a member. If we seek first the Kingdom of God and His righteousness, then all these things will be added to us. But righteousness includes *sacrifice*, as I mentioned earlier—something that this affluent society knows absolutely nothing about. You can go to any mall and see the spending, and not see an ounce of sacrifice there—not even someone willing to get out of your way. In fact, you had better get out of their way (especially if it is a sale). That is what our society has come to.

The Kingdom of God will be marked by *spiritual sacrifice*. So also is the Feast of Tabernacles. We are to live a life of sacrifice by our physical and spiritual conduct, especially here at the Feast.

**Romans 12:1-2** I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that you present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable unto God, which is your reasonable service. And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, that you may prove what is that good and acceptable and perfect will of God.

It takes a *transforming of our minds*. It takes a *transforming of our attitudes*. It is a transforming *from* the lustful desire for the possessions of this world *to* a desire for godly things—for the very mind of God, and knowledge of how to use those things which He gives us. It is our reasonable service here at the Feast to present ourselves as living sacrifices for the use of our Creator. Hebrews 13 elaborates on this.

**Hebrews 13:15** Therefore by Him let us continually offer the sacrifice of praise to God, that is, the fruit of our lips, giving thanks to His name.



You see one of the sacrifices there, which we can offer up during the Feast.

**Hebrews 13:16** But do not forget to do good and to share, for with such sacrifices God is well pleased.

There are two more spiritual sacrifices that we can offer during the Feast. To "do good"—which encompasses righteousness. Anything that is righteous is good and is a spiritual sacrifice, in a sense. And to "share." So our fellowship and our sharing with one another is another spiritual sacrifice that we can offer up during the Feast of Tabernacles.

As the elect, we are to live the life of sacrifice now—by offering spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ—that the world will not be learning to offer up until the Millennium. But we have to learn these things now, so that we can teach individuals in the Millennium to be able to offer up those spiritual sacrifices. Under the New Covenant, the sacrifices are spiritual—our act of faith, using our spiritual gifts (which we learned about recently), prayer, praise, serving, thanksgiving, and righteousness in general. A life of sacrifice is diametrically opposite to a life of affluence.

Not one of the prophets of the Old Testament defined the length of Messiah's rule over the nations. They knew that there would be a coming spiritual harvest of human beings. They prophesied that the Gentiles would seek the Messiah. They knew that the Feast of Tabernacles pictured that coming day; but all they could say was that it would be fulfilled "in that day." They did not know when it was going to be, or how it would come about.

They knew that the Feast of Tabernacles is a time of both joy and sacrifice. I am not trying to parallel those burnt offerings with our spiritual sacrifices today; but I wanted to show you how it was very much in the forefront of the Israelites' minds that that was a time of not only rejoicing, but also a time of sacrificing.

Today, spiritually, it is a time of rejoicing and a time of spiritual sacrifices. Jesus' apostles asked Him if the time had come for the fulfillment of the Feast of Tabernacles—when the Kingdom would be restored to Israel. Every Jew knew the prophetic week ended with the seventh month of the year on

God's calendar. Moses and Peter were both inspired to compare a day to a thousand years with God. But it was not until Christ revealed to John, in the book of Revelation, that the picture became clear.

**Revelation 20:4-6** And I saw thrones, and they sat on them, and judgment was committed to them. Then I saw the souls of those who had been beheaded for their witness to Jesus and for the word of God, who had not worshipped the beast nor his image, and had not received his mark on their foreheads or on their hands. And they lived and reigned with Christ a thousand years. But the rest of the dead did not live again until the thousand years were finished. This is the first resurrection. Blessed and holy is he who has part in the first resurrection. Over such the second death has no power, but they shall be priests of God and of Christ, and shall reign with Him a thousand years.

The Feast of Tabernacles in the seventh month pictures the Millennial Sabbath. That is, the one thousand-year rest from sin, following six thousand years under the government of Satan—that government of Satan that was a very 'desirous' government for the pleasures of material goods. That satanic government has promoted attitudes of self-centeredness, covetousness, and greed. Satan's way of life is centered on *get*; and that has been the banner of our whole history, for six thousand years—that way of *get*.

But here at the Feast of Tabernacles, it is not a time of (or a way of) *get*. So we should not be always wondering, "Okay, what can I spend my money on next?"—as far as buying the desires of our heart that are lustful desires. But it should be "How can I most wisely use this tithe—which is God's—in the best possible way, with the right attitude, as a sacrifice?" It takes some work to think those things through. But, as I said earlier, it is not that we cannot buy material things and the desires of our heart. But we have to make our heart in the right "frame" and in sync with God.

Here is an example of how ridiculous *affluenza* (the flu-like disease of our nation) has gotten. I want this to just hang in your mind. The *New York Times* reported in April of 1999 that Burberry's had just introduced six new styles of trench coats for dogs and cats—ranging from \$65 (that's for those of us who are poor) to \$575. But that is not all. In July of 1990 the *New York*

*Times* feature pictured the Gucci dog bowl. You get a choice of black or clear, and it runs about \$750. Is this nation sick with affluenza? It sure is, and I do not want to be any part of it. But I have been guilty, and I have been sick with it—as you all have been.

The Kingdom of God and the Millennium will *not* have an affluent society that is bloated, sluggish, and unfeeling. There will be great prosperity, however, we are going to have to teach people how to correctly use that wealth. Otherwise it will go right into the same lustful desires that we have today.

In the Millennium, much of the wealth will be sent to Jerusalem—the headquarters of the spirit beings on earth. There will be an abundance of wealth that will not be kept by the righteous nations of the earth—at least, not entirely. The wealth will be freely offered to the church of God—to Zion. Even the Gentiles will bring wealth to Zion. In speaking to Zion in the Millennium, God inspired Isaiah in chapter 60 to describe the abundance that the Gentile nations will bring as offerings when they are living God's way. The Gentiles, as they are converted, will bring that abundance to Jerusalem. (That is a very encouraging set of scriptures.)

The attitude that God wants us to have here at the Feast is in stark contrast to the person described in the parable of the rich, affluent, fool in Luke 12. Christ said:

**Luke 12:15** "Take heed and beware of covetousness, for a man's life does not consist in the abundance of the things he possesses."

Remember that the rich fool had no place left to store his worldly possessions. So he was contemplating tearing down the barn that he had, to build other barns to carry all of his stores for the rest of his life. He was hoping that he could sit back, kick up his feet—eat, drink, and be merry—and not worry about another thing.

Is that not what this affluent society looks at, as being the American dream? I do not know how many times I have heard people on the radio tell the interviewers that they have retired and they are thirty-two years old. (Or, they have retired and they are in their forties.) There is just so much money

flowing, today, in our society that it gets our attention, does it not? You try hard not to let it; but we are all human, and we see these things—and we desire them. But we have to stop the desire of material things right away, when we have a wrong attitude in them.

A person who is yielding to God has the opportunity to sacrifice. Paul writes a very sincere admonishment, in Philippians 2, that Christ sets us an example of how we should sacrifice.

**Philippians 2:1-4** Therefore if there is any consolation in Christ, if any comfort of love, if any fellowship of the Spirit, if any affection and mercy, fulfill my joy by being like-minded, having the same love, being of one accord, of one mind. Let nothing be done through selfish ambition or conceit, but in lowliness of mind let each esteem others better than himself. Let each of you look out not only for his own interests, but also for the interests of others.

There is a *key* as to how we can have the right desires, and have the right spiritual sacrifices here at the Feast of Tabernacles. "Let every man also *look on the interests of others*."

**Philippians 2:5-8** Let this mind be in you, which was also in Christ Jesus, who, being in the form of God, did not consider it robbery to be equal with God, but made Himself of no reputation, taking the form of a bondservant, and coming in the likeness of men. And being found in appearance as a man, He humbled Himself and became obedient to the point of death, even the death of the cross.

Christ made the decision to sacrifice Himself. In order for us to "do unto others as we would have them do" to us, we must sacrifice too. This is a major aspect of what the training ground of the Feast of Tabernacles is all about. (Not just rejoicing.) The Spirit of God leads us to rejoice while we sacrifice in service *to God* and *to each other*.

So remember each other throughout the Feast. Serve and enjoy the fellowship. And rejoice—because God has given us a wonderful, wonderful

knowledge about what it is to have right desires at the Feast—and not to have that sickness which this world (and especially the United States) is so sick with. That is, the sickness of *affluenza*.