



Black Friday Holiday Shopping Kick-off Overshadows True Meaning of Christmas

If anyone needed a demonstration that America has lost its spiritual bearings, “Black Friday,” which officially began this year at 8 p.m. Thanksgiving evening, provided ample proof. The Christmas shopping season, which used to causally begin the day after Thanksgiving, increasing its intensity over the next four weeks, has now become an end in itself for large segments of the population, not to mention the nation’s retail sector. Over time the focus of the Christmas season has shifted from the birth Christ and the joy of giving into a nearly non-stop frenzy of purchasing.



While one explanation has it that the term “Black Friday” was coined to indicate the day that many retail businesses finally turned a profit on the wings of shoppers’ runaway dollars, the phrase now appears to more aptly describe the moral depths to which millions descend in their desperate attempts to find meaning in an increasingly secularized holiday season.

As reported widely by the media, the really big winners in this year’s Black Friday extravaganza — along with its “Cyber Monday” aftermath — have been the nation’s retailers. According to the National Retail Federation (RTF), the source for many of the holiday retail statistics, a record 247 million individuals visited both retail stores and websites over the Thanksgiving holiday beginning Thursday and stretching through Sunday, spending an estimated \$59.1 billion. Some 35 million shoppers visited both websites and brick-and-mortar stores on Thanksgiving alone, as scores of retailers like Walmart, Sears, Target, and Shopko kicked off the shopping season on that holiday evening.

The shopping frenzy stretched into the next week as retail researchers expected “Cyber Monday” — when millions of shoppers take advantage of online deals — to break records as well. According to one research firm, comScore, Cyber Monday was expected to be the biggest online shopping day of the year for the third straight year, with U.S. shoppers slated to spend some \$1.5 billion — up 20 percent from last year.

The term “Cyber Monday” was coined in 2005 by a shopping trade group that noticed a spike in online shopping on the Monday after Thanksgiving, when people returned to work at offices with computers that enabled them to make online purchases. “People years ago didn’t have the kind of connectivity to shop online at their homes,” Vicki Cantrell of Shop.org told Fox News. “So when they went back to work after Thanksgiving they’d shop on the Monday after. Now they don’t need the work computer to be able to do that.”

As retailers have caught on to the online mania — and as the number of home computers, laptops, iPads, and smart phones with connectivity have skyrocketed — online holiday purchases have increased dramatically, as have the “deals” offered by online stores.



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Overall, predicts comScore, online spending will increase this year by some 17 percent to around \$43.4 billion, accounting for at least ten percent of total retail spending this Christmas season. All told, said the NRF, total retail sales for November and December could hit \$586.1 billion.

All of this is what Christmas — once a sacred holiday during which individuals, families, communities, and nations celebrated the birth of the Son of God who came to save people from their own sinfulness — has become, denigrating into a greed-fest defined by ad agencies and staged by America's giant retail machine.

One of the unintended, but unavoidable, byproducts of this Christmas highjacking has been a dramatic increase in aggression by shoppers competing with one another for holiday bargains. This year, as Walmart and other retailers around the nation stacked pallets of movies, TVs, games, smart phones, computers, and countless other items in every corner of their stores, long lines of restless, spring-loaded shoppers cued up hours before the official 8 p.m. Thursday night Black Friday kickoff. The resulting near-riot conditions were predictable as men, women, and children of all ages battled each other for their piece of holiday cheer.

In a Georgia Walmart, an alarming melee erupted as a long line of determined shoppers rushed a display of cellphones that offered unlimited usage plans. A YouTube video (posted at the end of this article) showed a nearly uncontrolled mob attacking the display and each other in an attempt to get one or more of the phones. The video showed a man who managed to snag one of the phones have it ripped from his hand, while other fought each other while they destroy the display.

At a Sears store in Texas, two men got into an argument as they waited in line to enter the store. One man pulled a gun (he had a carry permit) after the other slugged him in the face, and then fled the scene. The attacker will likely be charged with assault, while the man with the gun was cleared.

Similarly, two people were shot at a Walmart in Tallahassee, Florida, over a coveted parking spot during the retailer's Black Friday shopping riot. And in Kansas City, shoppers waiting to enter a Victoria's Secret lingerie store went berserk, shoving the doors open and ignoring the manager's pleas for calm.

While apparently no one was crushed to death or killed this year by surging crowds, as has happened during previous Black Fridays, the behavior and attitudes of both shoppers and retailers add to the serious concern of many that for an increasing number of Americans, Christmas has become little more than an extended greed fest, with no thought of the season's true import. Sadly, most churches and Christian leaders have turned a blind eye to the commercialized corruption of the holiday, simply focusing on their own celebration while allowing the world, by and large, to slip ever closer to their eternal destruction.

Some Christian ministries have actually gotten into the act, hosting their own Christianized "Cyber Monday" blowout specials, such as the one this author received via e-mail on the Monday after Thanksgiving advertising "our Super Christmas Savings on NEW items such as our new CD, *Inside of Us*, and favorite, classic ... books, CDs, and teaching sets. These will make great Christmas gifts!"

Reflecting on the Black Friday phenomenon, Baptist theologian and Baylor University professor [Roger Olson recently wondered](#): "What is America's real religion? Well, there's probably no single answer to that. But consumerism has to be right up there near the top of the options. It's a pagan religion that almost nobody acknowledges, but the ultimate commitment it gains from many people reveals its quasi-religious status."



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This lust to buy and accumulate things has become a god that even competes for the worship of those who call themselves Christians. Given the economic, moral, and spiritual challenges facing our nation both individually and collectively, the time is now for Americans to forsake this idol.

If there is any doubt about the seriousness of our need, the images of gunplay in a Walmart parking lot, and crazed shoppers assaulting one another over a cellphone in the retailer's inner sanctum, ought to be enough to shock many good Americans into realigning their hearts and minds with the true meaning of Christmas, and to pray to the One we worship in hopes that His mercy may yet turn our nation back to Him.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=nDpAkjD3wXo>

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