



# Celebration and Rejoicing: A “Consumption Tax” That Christians Can Live With!

*By Craig R. Dumont, Sr.*

**A**s we approach the holiday season, among many devout Christians there is an almost spontaneous outburst of joy because of what this time represents: blessings derived from God Himself (Thanksgiving), the birth of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ (Christmas), and the fact that all time revolves around Him (New Years Day, marking “The Year of our Lord”). We experience the euphoria that comes from feasting with family, singing joyful and reverent Christmas carols, and anticipating the delight and pleasure of giving gifts to close friends and family members. The opportunity to gather as a family to throw a celebration banquet where we eat and drink and make merry is embraced with vigorous gladness.

But even as we follow through with our celebrations and gift buying and giving there is a growing tendency to feel guilty about doing so. While this rejoicing seems to be an irrepressible part of man, especially the Christian, there are those who call for the repression of joy and celebration, the mutation or outright elimination of rejoicing. Specifically, we hear increasing calls for less “consumerism” or consumption. After all, the reasoning goes, to spend wealth on ourselves is not the “Christian” thing to do when there are so many hurting and needy people in the world. Plus, how can we sanction and sanctify, even during Christmas — or maybe especially during Christmas — consuming limited resources for such selfish and trivial reasons?

If you listen to some of our most visible and powerful leaders today you would think that any private and personal use of wealth or any public display of indulging in consuming a portion of that wealth is a great sin against humanity and the environment. Many well-meaning Christians, as well as ungodly pagans, are stepping up the campaign to create a utopian world where no one rejoices or celebrates until all poverty is alleviated, wealth and prosperity is equally distributed, and the earth returns to a supposedly pristine wholeness in which it’s resources remain unmolested and unexploited.

So what is a Christian to do? To whom is he to listen? Of course the answer to those questions must be that he turns to the Bible and listens to what God has declared is righteous and good. And it turns out that God wants His people to be a joyful and rejoicing

group, *and at proper times*, conspicuous consumers! In fact, He flat out commands rejoicing, consuming, and feasting before Him in order to please Him.

## The Rejoicing Tithe

To find the basis for this principle of rejoicing we need to start in Deuteronomy 14-16, which outlines several tithes (yes, several; there are three tithes that God requires, but we’ll cover that later), one of which is the rejoicing tithe.

Here are some highlights from Deuteronomy:

*You shall truly tithe all the increase of your grain that the field produces year by year. And you shall eat before the Lord your God, in the place where He chooses to make His name abide, the tithe of your grain and your new wine and your oil, of the firstborn of your herds and your flocks, that you may learn to fear the Lord your God always. But if the journey is too long for you, so that you are not able to carry the tithe, or if the place where the Lord your God chooses to put His name is too far from you, when the Lord your God has blessed you, then you shall exchange it for money, take the money in your hand, and go to the place which the Lord your God chooses. And you shall spend that money for whatever your heart desires: for oxen or sheep, for wine or strong drink, for whatever your heart desires; you shall eat there before the Lord your God, and you shall rejoice, you and your household. (Dt. 14:22-26)*

*All the firstborn males that come from your herd and your flock you shall sanctify to the Lord your God; you shall do no work with the firstborn of your herd, nor shear the firstborn of your flock. You and your household shall eat it before the Lord your God year by year in the place which the Lord chooses. (Dt.15:19-20)*

*You shall rejoice before the Lord your God . . . And you shall remember that you were a slave in Egypt, and you shall be careful to observe these statutes. You shall observe the Feast of Tabernacles*

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*seven days, when you have gathered from your threshing floor and from your winepress. And you shall rejoice in your feast, you and your son and your daughter, your male servant and your female servant and the Levite, the stranger and the fatherless and the widow, who are within your gates. (Dt.16:11-14)*

*Seven days you shall keep a sacred feast to the Lord your God in the place which the Lord chooses, because the Lord your God will bless you in all your produce and in all the work of your hands, so that you surely rejoice. (Dt. 16:15)*

## Conspicuous Consumption

Now, let's not miss a crucial command that establishes the rejoicing principle: God commands His people to "sanctify to the Lord your God" all the firstborn males from the herd and flock. In other words, set it aside for God. But what does God want it used for? He wants it used for the man or family that set it aside for God. God proclaims that it is a sacrifice to Him when He is obeyed and it is consumed. Now remember, this is not a small thing, but a full tithe each year. To put this in perspective, if you earn \$50,000 per year, this rejoicing tithe would amount to \$5,000. Can you imagine throwing a \$5,000 party? Now that's conspicuous consumption!

As Edward A. Powell, coauthor of *Tithing & Dominion* so aptly puts it, the tither:

*... and his household, plus the local Levite, stranger, and poor were to use this Tithe for rejoicing before the Lord (Deut. 16:13-15). The purpose of this rejoicing was "because the Lord thy God shall bless thee in all thine increase, and in all the works of thine hands" (vs. 15), to bring to remembrance the deliverance of Israel from the land of Egypt (Lev. 23:33-44), and to insure that "thou mayest learn to fear the Lord thy God always." (Deut. 14:23)*

*The emphasis of this Tithe is upon rejoicing. The passages in Scripture dealing with this [tithe] (Ex. 23:14-19; Lev. 23:33-44; Deut. 12:5-28; 14:22-27; 15:19-23; 16:13-15) required that it be used by the Israelites to praise the Lord with feasting and rejoicing. The Israelites were commanded by God to rejoice. They were given no option or choice in the matter. This [tithe] was God's money and He commanded that it be used solely for rejoicing before Him. "Ye shall rejoice before the Lord your God" (Deut. 12:12). "Thou shalt eat . . . before the Lord thy God, and thou shalt rejoice" (14:26). "Thou shalt rejoice in thy feast" (16:14). This Tithe was not a levitical or poor [tithe]. It was a [tithe] levied by God for the sole purpose of impressing upon the hearts and minds of all Israel the requirement that they were to be joyful.*

Now it's important for us to follow through on this principle that God has established and Powell does just that. He continues:

*In order to understand this legal requirement for joy, we must examine the provisions of this [tithe] in the light of its central theme of rejoicing. This [tithe] was not paid to any central authority, institution or organization. It was to be retained and used by the [tithe] payer. He was the steward of this Tithe of the Lord, and he could use it for "whatever thy soul lusteth after" (Deut. 14:26). The only restriction upon his use of these funds for his enjoyment was that they could not be used for violating the Word of God. For this reason, he could use it "for wine, or for strong drink, or for whatsoever thy soul desireth" (vs. 26).*

This is an incredibly powerful statement made by God about the life of His people. His people were to *rejoice* and *consume* for at least three reasons. It was to acknowledge that God had been the source of all their *past* prosperity, indeed, their entire livelihood. They could not feast and rejoice if they had nothing. This rejoicing tithe came out of each person's increase, so while they were rejoicing they were worshipping by offering up thanksgiving to the Lord.

Please understand a very important aspect of this principle. It must be done as worship and thanksgiving to the Lord if it is to be acceptable. Every act of obedience that brings an explicit blessing also means that disobedience brings a curse. Jesus tells us about the rich man who hoarded and consumed out of personal lust rather than thanksgiving and faith. Luke 12:16-21 says:

*The ground of a certain rich man yielded plentifully. And he thought within himself, saying, "What shall I do, since I have no room to store my crops?"*

*So he said, "I will do this: I will pull down my barns and build greater, and there I will store all my crops and my goods. And I will say to my soul, 'Soul, you have many goods laid up for many years; take your ease; eat, drink and be merry.'" But God said to him, "Fool! This night your soul will be required of you; then whose will those things be which you have provided?"*

*So is he who lays up treasure for himself, and is not rich toward God.*

Was there anything wrong with having barns overflowing? Absolutely not. In fact, it's something to be anticipated by those who obey God as He Himself promises in Malachi 3:10. "'Try Me now in this,' says the Lord of Hosts, 'If I will not open for you the windows of heaven and pour out for you such blessing that *there will not be room enough to receive it.*'" The rich man wasn't condemned because he was rich or because he had overflowing barns. The curse came because

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the rich man didn't wish to acknowledge God in thanksgiving or in the tithes, including the rejoicing tithe. He was also found to be a greedy and slothful steward, because while he had been called upon to use a *portion* of our wealth as a rejoicing tithe for our own pleasure, *this man had aspirations on using it all for his pleasure!* He was planning on robbing God! Jesus tells us he laid "up treasure for himself, and [was] not rich toward God." He had conceived robbery and was ungrateful to God and was cursed with a curse.

## The God of the Future

Possibly the most important reason for rejoicing and consuming was to show a faith in God for the future: "because the Lord thy God *shall bless thee* in all thine increase, and in all the works of thine hands." They were not to fear shortages and think in terms of limitation of resources, for they were serving the Lord God who "gave them the power to get wealth." They were to rejoice with the expectation that they would be even more prosperous in the days to come. The future of the believer was not to be feared, but to be eagerly anticipated. The future, because it was ordered and prepared by God, was going to be even greater in terms of resources and wealth. To hoard with fear was to deny that God's Word was true.

In fact, this faith concerning the future is uniquely Christian. The world says "Eat, drink and be merry, for tomorrow we die." Their consumption becomes a sacrament of death to the unbeliever as he doubts the God of the future and "he who doubts is condemned if he eats, because he does not eat from faith; for whatever is not from faith is sin." No wonder the Al Gores of the world are trying to manipulate people through guilt. It's because they truly feel the weight of sin every time they put food in their mouth.

The Christian, however, is filled with faith and unshakable confidence in God and expects future victory and blessings. He is serving Jehovah-Elohim; the Eternal Creator, and Jehovah-Jireh; the Lord will provide. The Christian comes with the faith that declares that God is a God of His Word, "for without faith it is impossible to please Him," and he comes before the Lord eating, drinking and rejoicing for he believes "that He is, and that He is a rewarder of them that diligently seek Him."

Rejoicing and consuming were also to impress upon the people of God that they served a God in whom they could and should rejoice in continually. They were to be happy and content, filled with peace that passes all understanding and full of joy unspeakable, full of glory. In other words, they were to be a people who looked forward to times of rejoicing and refreshing. There would be times of solemn assemblies when gross sin and iniquity called for it, but by and large, the normal life of those who served God was not one of self-deprivation, but on the contrary, one of godly consumption flowing from the prosperity He gave His covenant people. Why? Because the Israelites were once

slaves in Egypt, but now they were free. God had redeemed them and given them liberty, abundance and salvation. Christians, too, were once slaves to sin, bound up by the devil, the world, and the flesh, facing nothing but death and destruction, but are now set free in Jesus Christ, and promised life, life more abundant! If that doesn't call for feasting and celebrating I don't know what does. We should take many opportunities to remember the work of Christ on the cross and, in fact, we do this in principle each time we partake at the Lord's Table. We rejoice because we're at peace with God and have escaped His wrath through the atoning work of Christ and we know there is no shortage of grace and provision for every area of our life, whether yesterday, today, or tomorrow.

Understanding this principle of the rejoicing tithe is expressed at times such as Thanksgiving, Christmas, New Years Day, and Easter. It is also lived out in family vacations and in personal celebrations with our families such as birthdays and anniversaries, and even hosting friends and families in our homes. It is manifested in company picnics and parties and in church dinners.

The world thinks in terms of shortages, limitations, and fear of the future, so to use precious resources for personal pleasure and rejoicing is foolishness. Unfortunately, even some within Christian circles speak piously about self-deprivation and personal sacrifices that borders on anti-Christian Platonic dualism (the radical separation of the spirit realm from the material realm with the spirit being "good" and material things "bad"). But thanks be to God that all things are counted good and sanctified through Jesus Christ to those who place their faith and confidence in Him. We'll be called on to help the poor in God's time. We're called on to support the church on a regular basis. But we're also commanded to use a portion of our increase to *rejoice before the Lord*. So go ahead and set out an extravagant spread of food and wine and be a generous host of that party you want to throw! Celebrate without guilt or apprehension. "Spend that money for whatever your heart desires: for oxen or sheep, for wine or strong drink, for whatever your heart desires; you shall eat there before the Lord your God, and you shall rejoice, you and your household." May God bless you richly in your celebration.

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