

The Lottery: A Ticket To Nowhere

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INTRO: WHAT'S A LOTTERY?

A lottery is buying a chance to win a lot of money. (Of course, that chance is about 54 million to 1. You're more likely to be struck by lightning 6 times over the course of your life than win the lottery.)

The Lottery **IS** gambling. Class III gaming, just like casinos (roulette, slots, craps, etc.). Legalizing the lottery opens the door for the big casinos (not just Indian Gaming centers).

The Lottery is gambling. What is gambling? Gambling is nothing more than "payment for a chance to take from others."

That's what gambling is. One winner takes from many losers. The winner does not earn the prize and has not done a thing to deserve it as a reward. The loser doesn't make a voluntary gift to the winner. All involved have agreed to steal from one another.

The lottery is no different. It is theft by agreement, and it is a ticket to nowhere.

Before we discuss the Biblical view of gambling, there is one specific Biblical concept of finance that you first need to embrace. One of the reasons that there's so much misunderstanding about the Bible's teaching on the subject is because people can't seem to wrap their minds around one simple concept: God owns everything. The Bible speaks it very clearly in Psalms when it says, "The earth is the Lord's, and the fullness thereof." That means he owns the earth and everything on it. Unfortunately, most people—even Christians—are of the mindset, "this is **MY MONEY**, and I'll do whatever the heck I want with it." God has specific plans for the money he's given us to manage, and gambling does not fit into that plan. (We'll talk more about this in a few minutes.) If you can't embrace this simple concept of ownership, then you might as well pack it up right now, because you're blind, and none of the rest of this will make any sense to you.

The Bible has a lot to say about gambling. Biblical faith does not tolerate, does not even recognize the existence of "chance" or "luck." For a Christian, there is no such thing as chance or luck, only God's providence.

As you read the Old Testament, you find that the children of Israel did not fall into the addiction of gambling until you get all the way to the book of Isaiah. In that book, the prophet Isaiah preaches against those whom the Lord says in Isaiah 65:11 (RSV), "Forsake the Lord, who forsake my holy mountain, who set a table for 'Fortune' and fill cups of mixed wine for 'Destiny.'" "Fortune" and "Destiny" were pagan gods of fate who served as symbols of good luck and bad luck. Isaiah's protest was against those who trusted in false gods of luck instead of trusting in God, himself.

Would you believe that still happens today, even among Christians? You see, anything that comes between you and a harmonious relationship with God is your god, whether that god is your job, family, sports, television, drugs, alcohol, sex, or even a gaming chip. Anything that comes between you and God is your god, just as 'Chance' became god for those Israelites that Isaiah rebuked.

Gambling is a god that would have you go against the principles set for us by the one true God in His holy word.

By indulging in gambling, the first principle you violate is that of...

I. LOYALTY

Acceptance of the sovereign rule of God increases our loyalty to Him and rejects the tendency toward materialism.

Gambling elevates the desire for material wealth to a dominant place in your life. This desire is in direct conflict with Jesus' teaching that we cannot love both God and money.

Our preoccupation with wealth--with "getting rich quick" or "getting something for nothing"--ignores the Bible's warnings against greed. The Bible teaches us in 1 Timothy 6:10, "The love of money is the root of all evil." Even the moderate, small-time gamblers and the occasional bettors contribute to the pattern of greed in our world.

In Luke 12:15, Jesus said to "beware covetousness, for a man's life does not consist in the abundance of things he possesses."

In our society, the desire for wealth wrecks many homes and shatters many lives.

Behind all the arguments for legalizing the lottery, or any form of gambling, lies the self-interest of the pro-gambling groups. The main motive is always monetary gain.

The people who want the lottery have little or no regard for moral or social consequences. They don't care about the negative impact on our state economy caused by problem gamblers who fail to pay off debts, write bad checks, and move into fraud and bankruptcy. (For every dollar that states take in from gambling, they pay three to social agencies and the justice system.) They don't care about the increased law enforcement costs necessary because our crime rate will double. (75% of all compulsive gamblers commit a felony to support their habit.)

They don't care that organized gambling and organized crime go hand-in-hand. They don't care that our young people are as much as eight times more likely to become gambling addicts as we are. No, they don't care that they'll be ruining lives and corrupting an entire generation. Oh, they may try to make you think they do.

The so-called economic benefits that supposedly come with a policy of legalized gambling come to only a small few. In fact, I cannot state it any more clearly than Steve Wynn. Steve Wynn is the owner of the second-most successful gambling resort in the world, Mirage Resorts, Inc. He said, "The only way to make money in a casino is to buy one."

I realize that the subject here is not casino gambling, but the lottery. You must realize that just as cigarettes, alcohol and marijuana are gateways to even harder drugs, the lottery is a gateway to other forms of gambling.

So what does the Lottery promise for Oklahoma? More money for education? The state of California legalized the lottery in 1985. Now, for every \$5 the lottery gives to their schools, the state takes away \$4. In the process, they've created over 7 million teen gambler, 43% of whom prefer the lottery.

If past promises are any indicators of what we can expect, then schools won't receive what they've been promised. In 1982 when Oklahoma legalized pari-mutuel gambling, the state was promised \$200 million a year. It got less than 3% of that.

Gambling is nothing more than big business built on greed, greed on the part of those few who have commercial interests, which would pay off for them.

They haven't stopped to consider the price for their greed. Our society suffers losses in wrecked lives, misappropriated funds, wasted paychecks, rising crime rates, and undermined family life because of gambling.

Loyalty and obedience to God supercedes our loyalty to false gods like fate, chance, or "Lady Luck." As Christians, the issues of our lives are settled by the providence of God, not the roll of the dice, the turn of a card, or the drop of a coin in the one-armed bandit.

By indulging in gambling, the second principle you violate is that of..

II. LOVE

The central moral imperative of the Holy Bible is love--love of God and love of neighbor. Matt. 22:37 tells us to "Love the Lord your God with all your heart, soul, and mind." Then, in verse 39 it says, "Love your neighbor as yourself."

Jesus' command to love others leads us to seek the welfare and the interest of others. It does not lead us to luxury of self-interest at the exclusion of someone else's needs. Love does not tolerate denial of love and aid to those who so desperately need it. And love does not engage in actions that mistreat or exploit others.

And, let me tell you something. There are not many things in this world that are more exploitative than gambling. Gambling backers will tell you the same lies they told you in 1994. "It's just a form of painless taxation." Well, it's not painless for a family whose father gambles away his paycheck or whose mother blows the grocery money. It's not

painless to the compulsive gambler who first got hooked playing black jack. It isn't painless to the young person who has no future because he thought hard work and education weren't necessary, who thought he'd strike it rich gambling. It certainly wasn't painless for the husband of Mary Ann Heath. His wife murdered him for the insurance money to support her bingo addiction.

It is a statistical fact that the people who are spending the most money on the lottery are those living below poverty level; those who can least afford it.

My brother lives in Temple, Texas, a city that like many others, has a "WIC" center, a place to help single mothers and underprivileged families survive in a harsh world. Unfortunately, the WIC center in Temple sells lotto tickets. Where is the compassion in that?

We can't allow ourselves to sit on our hands and do nothing while people throw away all their money on gambling instead of things they really need, things like food, heat for their homes, and clothing for their children.

What does gambling or the lottery do to our compassion and concern for others? God's principle of love is violated when personal pleasure and profit are gained through another person's pain and loss.

Love requires that we recognize and attempt to meet the needs of others. Love's work is always to build up, never to tear down.

Indulging in gambling also violates a third of God's principles, the principle of...

III. LIBERALITY

...Or stewardship--liberality in our giving back to God. Gambling is contrary to God's guidelines concerning property and its uses. Wealth and economic goods are not, in and of themselves, evil. But, they can reflect sin in our lives if we acquire them in covetousness and use them without acknowledging God's purpose for them.

As we find in the Bible, property and goods are provided by our trust in a gracious God who supplies all of our needs. The scriptures teach us, though, that ultimately, all things belong to God. Both Psalm 24:1 and 1 Corinthians 10:26 remind us, "The earth is the Lord's and the fullness thereof." The Lord, himself, reiterates that thought in Psalm 50:12, saying, "For the world is mine, and the fullness thereof."

We have to keep in mind the fact that all of our material possessions are God's and should be used for his glory. There is scripture throughout the New Testament that indicates specific uses for the money that God has given us. God's word tells us money is to be used to buy lottery tickets, right? Wrong. It teaches us that money is to be used to provide for our basic needs, to support our families, to contribute to the Lord's work, to meet human needs, to give to the poor, and, of course, to pay taxes.

If you study the scriptures, nowhere will you find a commandment for you to gamble God's money away. On the contrary, the scriptures teach us to use God's money very wisely.

Particularly contemptible to God are the attempts to gain money or property through dishonest or exploitative practices. Anyone who's ever read or heard the Ten Commandments knows that the Bible condemns stealing. Think back. How did we define gambling? Theft by agreement. If you'll read James 5:1-4, you'll see how strongly God condemns the accumulation of wealth through the exploitation of others. Luke 10:7, however, sings the praises of honest work and honest wages. It says, "The laborer is worthy of his hire."

Rest assured, when we seek monetary gain through any means other than what God intended, he will deal sharply with us.

This brings us to our fourth point. Indulging in gambling also violates God's fourth principle, the principle of...

IV. LABOR

Within the Biblical view of labor, there is no room for gambling. It's in the book of Exodus that we first learn the importance of the work ethic. Exodus 20:9 says, "Six days shalt thou labor and do all thy work." Of course, we're then reminded to keep the seventh day holy unto God.

Ephesians 4:28 also says, "Let him that stole, steal no more, but rather let him labor." And, the apostle Paul in 2 Thessalonians 3 also reminds us that if we don't work, we shouldn't eat. No one has the right to "sponge" off others, to get something for nothing. Paul felt that idleness was a form of irreverence because it went against God's way of caring for one's household. He told Timothy in 1 Timothy 5:8, "If any provide not for his own, and especially not for those of his own house, he has denied the faith, and is worse than an unbeliever."

Work has great value in God's eyes. It affords us the opportunity of sustaining our lives and supporting our dependants. It allows us to be creative and to share in God's activity in the world.

When you look at things that way, you also realize that the type of job you have must agree with God's will and purpose and must form a part of the world's needed work.

It's through work that we're able to express ourselves. Work reveals our inner self, and it adds to our personal fulfillment and self-respect, two things we'll never experience with the gambler's get-rich-quick-something-for-nothing attitude.

Not only does gambling violate God's principles of loyalty, love, liberality, and labor, but it also violates the principle of...

V. LEADERSHIP

Biblical teachings urge that we wisely use our freedom and influence for God's glory. We are urged to "abstain from all appearance of evil" in Thessalonians 5:22 and to "hate what is evil" in Romans 12:9. We're also encouraged to work faithfully as our Lord, himself, who "went about doing good," as the scripture says.

Our actions as Christians are to be disciplined toward the moral and spiritual welfare of those around us who haven't yet come to a saving knowledge of Christ, those who don't know that he died for them. Paul told the church at Corinth in 1 Corinthians 10:31 to "do all to the glory of God."

Our leadership and influence as Christians is to be exerted in an aggressive, yet positive fashion for the building of a world in which our fellow man can be protected from evil.

Leadership is not something to be hidden. Influence is not something to be hoarded. They are to be used for the furthering of Christian values and of the gospel of Jesus Christ. James 4:17 says, "To him that knoweth to do good, and doeth it not, it is sin."

It is our responsibility as children of God to set the proper example for the world, to abstain from that which is not Christ-like, to reject that which is morally wrong, to walk our talk, to live what we say we believe.

My dad has a saying, and I find that the more I use it, the more I like it, and the more I believe it. The saying goes, "What you do is what you really believe, and everything else is just religious talk."

The Lottery issue will be coming to a head sooner than you think. It's time for Christians all over Oklahoma to stop sitting within the four walls of the church, twiddling their thumbs, looking through rose-colored stained glass windows, thinking all's right with the world and to stand up and show the world what we really do believe, for a change...to show the world that we really do believe in God's principles of loyalty, love, liberality, labor, and leadership, to be a force for positive change in our world for God's glory.

Have you ever been out driving on the interstate and gotten behind two cars, side by side, who had matched speed with one another? It's really easy to get aggravated and frustrated because you don't have a clear path around either one of them.

We were driving to work one morning when the same thing happened. There was an eighteen-wheeler in the right lane, and a classic Ford mustang in the left. I don't know how much you know about those classic mustangs, but they have some "get-up-and-go." However, the woman who was driving it, drove it like its "'get-up-and-go' got up and went." I started thinking about those bumper stickers you see on the backs of so many cars that say, "Idiots drive slow in the fast lane," and I made comment to that fact. My sister, probably realizing that I needed a dose of humility, reminded me that the mustang blocking the fast lane was, in fact, driving the legal speed limit.

You see, I had been wanting to go faster than that. I had wanted to break the law. Well, I was still perturbed that the lady in the mustang was holding up traffic, but I realized that I didn't have any right to be. I didn't have any right to think that lady was an idiot.

But, you know something? When we, as believers in Christ, live according to God's laws and principles and the teachings we find in His word, that's just exactly the way the world looks at us. The world thinks that we're a bunch of idiots, driving slow in the fast lane. They think we're in the way. The world says, "we're in the 21st century, and it's time for you Christians to stop slowing the wheels of progress and get with the program!"

To be honest, we probably are in the their way when it comes to moral issues like drugs, alcohol, sex, aids, abortion, and gambling. And you know something else? The moment we step out of the world's way is the moment we disregard God's principles for living. You see, when it comes to immorality in our world, it's our job to not only slow the wheels of progress, but to completely deflate them.

God's principles for living are not to be taken lightly. God's commands are absolute. It's all black and white. There is no gray area. What's right is right, and what's wrong is wrong, and it's always going to be that way. To God, sin has no degree. Sin is simply sin.

I get so tired of Christians using Philippians 4:5 as license to do whatever they want. It says, "Let your moderation be known unto all men." People read that and think, "Alright! That means social drinking is okay, as long as I don't get drunk. Marge, get out the margarita mix!" Wrong. If you go back and study the original Greek text, you'll find that the word moderation is more accurately translated, "gentleness" or "self-control."

So you see, there is no such thing as moderation when it comes to sin. We can't say that drinking whiskey is bad, but it's okay to chug a few beers with our buddies. We can't say that playing roulette at the Desert Sands in Las Vegas is bad, but popping a few quarters into the slot machine is okay. There is a Greek word for that sort of thinking. "Baloney!" Sin is sin.

God's truth is absolute.

Gambling contributes nothing to the common good. It undermines moral values, mocks the work ethic, finances crime, robs children, enslaves its addicts, and basically poisons everything it touches.

If you support the lottery, you'll be just like the guy who packed his bags, put on his traveling clothes, hurriedly drove to the train station, and hastily boarded the train. The conductor appeared, and the man said, "Are you here to take my ticket?" The conductor replied, "I suppose, but this car ain't hooked up to anything that's going anywhere." The lottery is the same way. It is nothing but a ride to nowhere.

Let me close by saying this. I understand how easy it is to buy into this "get-rich-quick-something-for-nothing" philosophy of materialism that is so popular in America. Let's be honest. How many of us have seen those Publisher's Clearing House winners on TV, have seen the elderly woman with the ten million dollar check say, "thank you, Jesus!" and think to ourselves, "I order their magazines all the time. How come I'm never the one who gets the big check?"

The only "something for nothing" in this world that is truly genuine is the eternal life we're given through Jesus Christ. It's like the chorus we sometimes sing in church, "He paid a debt he did not owe. I owed a debt I could not pay." Romans 6:23 says, "The wages of sin is death (meaning spiritual death, eternal separation from God in hell), but the free gift of God is eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord."

The wages of sin is death. That's a debt we owe, but can't pay. But, thanks to Jesus' death on the cross for us and his resurrection, we don't have to. The price for our sin has already been paid.