

Gambling: A Question Of Motive

Gambling
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It is estimated that gambling in the U.S. rivals alcoholism. Polls show that the majority of the “ordinary people” who play lotteries are the poor and less educated—those who can least afford to spend their money this way.

According to FOX News on Thursday morning:

Some lucky people in Arizona and Missouri will split the record estimated payout of \$587.5 million from the Powerball lottery

Tickets for Wednesday night's drawing were reportedly sold at a rate of 130,000 per minute.

Shortly after the drawing, the Powerball website temporarily crashed from the high volume of traffic.

Powerball estimated the odds of winning the jackpot at 1 in 175,223,510.

Many people claim to be playing the lottery or gambling so they can give the money to their church or to the need or to family members. Actually, God’s church cannot accept such tainted contributions. While this may seem like a good motive, the reality is that few use winnings for godly purposes.

Studies show that the vast majority of lottery winners are in an even worse situation a few years after winning a jackpot than they were before. Few, if any, truly give the money to a good cause.

Proverbs 13:11 (*New International Version*) Dishonest money dwindles away, but he who gathers money little by little makes it grow.

That is the proper way to accumulate money—little by little through hard work.

Even minimal amounts of wagering in whatever form carry with them the big question of motive. Gambling, by definition, is "the act or practice of betting; the act of playing a game and consciously risking money or other stakes on its outcome." As a game, it involves little or no effort—rather, chance and luck become the controlling factors. Today, calling gambling “gaming” has cleverly removed much of the societal stigma that once rightly plagued gambling.

The lure of effortless, fast profit is just another manifestation of greed. Herbert Armstrong clearly described the basic character problem that gambling in any form exploits. He wrote:

Coveting money and that which money will buy is merely the manner of manipulating Satan’s way of life—‘Get’ instead of ‘Give’—take and compete instead of cooperate—self-concern and self-gain with desire to win, instead of love toward God and love toward neighbor.

He had a way of putting things very concisely and clearly.

The basic problem behind gambling is the covetous idea of acquiring some material gain at the expense of someone else. The attitude is what is important. The attitude of greed and covetousness is sin—there is no way around that.

The tenth commandment is,

Exodus 20:17 You shall not covet . . . anything that is your neighbor's.

It is so important that the apostle Paul emphasizes this same thing:

Hebrews 13:5 Let your conduct be without covetousness; be content with such things as you have . . .

A simple test is to honestly evaluate whether our motive is one of get for self or to give and share with others.

Paul was inspired to write to Timothy a warning that many fail to listen to:

I Timothy 6:6-10 Now godliness with contentment is great gain. For we brought nothing into this world, and it is certain we can carry nothing out. And having food and clothing, with these we shall be content. But those who desire to be rich fall into temptation and a snare, and into many foolish and harmful lusts which drown men in destruction and perdition. For the love of money is a root of all kinds of evil, for which some have strayed from the faith in their greediness, and pierced themselves through with many sorrows.

Godly character must be used to properly gain and rightly use money. That's why the motive behind gambling is ungodly. The same motive of get for self destroys or prevents the building of God's own nature of give within us.

One subtle way that gambling is promoted is through the diversion of some of the intake to so-called "worthy causes." Gambling is often big business in religion. Church raffles, where money is staked in order to win more money, is common and seldom questioned by many religionists today.

Lotteries and raffles are the most common promoters of this deceiving scheme. Many charities and service groups have been receiving large sums of money through government lotteries. In the minds of many people, this is justification enough for gambling.

But let's consider two deceptive factors that are often overlooked. The first factor is that a certain percentage of the money collected never reaches the charitable causes at all. I remember reading years ago that United Way only sends 5% of the money they intake to charities. Promoters, ticket sellers, and winners all may legally take a cut of the money before the remainder is allocated to charities. God is clear that we should not neglect the needy, but that is what many of these charities do: They use the poor for their own gain.

King Solomon said,

Proverbs 28:27 He who gives to the poor will not lack, but he who hides his eyes will have many curses.

A primary selling point governments use to promote lotteries is that a percentage of the proceeds from ticket sales will go to worthy public causes.

Lotteries have become a stealthy way to heavily “tax” Americans, on which the Federal and state governments heavily depend. It was sold in the states as an added income for education. The lie against critics of lotteries goes this way: “But it’s for the children!” They play on your sentiments.

According to FOX News: “The Federal government takes 25% and the states take 50%” before the people see a dime. That’s 75% stolen immediately by government officials and the Internal Revenue Service.

They fail to emphasize that this does not mean the money will be added to existing budgets. In reality, it will reduce the amount the government has to allocate from its overall budget to the particular area. So the budget for education, for example, often remains virtually the same as before the lottery was introduced.

More importantly, the second deceptive factor is that the real reason for giving must be seriously and genuinely considered. Worthy causes have been with us for a long time. Experience has shown that supporting gambling for a supposedly altruistic motive is usually just a false excuse for letting greed control us.

Gambling violates God's legitimate laws of obtaining money. There is the law of labor, the law of exchange, and the law of love. In contrast, gambling expresses the mentality of trying to get something for nothing.

The apostle Paul says,

Ephesians 4:28 Let him who stole steal no longer, but rather let him labor, working with his hands what is good, that he may have something to give him who has need.

One principle gambling stifles is the character trait of productive effort. Personal character growth necessitates personal effort. Jesus taught through the parable of the pounds in Luke 19 and the parable of the talents in Matthew 25 God’s way of developing and increasing those things entrusted to us.

In Luke 19:15, for example, spiritual growth is compared to the proper use of money that was “gained by trading.” Those who had produced wisely were rewarded.

Whether considered physically or spiritually, the unmistakable lesson is that character gain necessitates personal effort. In contrast, gambling teaches us to rely on “blind luck” to acquire increase and encourages the entitlement mentality. There is no guarantee on investment, just enormous odds against any return at all.

For every sensational story about the world’s latest instant millionaire, there are millions of unheralded losers who will never recover their lost wagers in an entire lifetime.

Far worse, the selfish motive of get, the attitude of gain at someone else's expense, blocks the spiritual character growth needed to be in God's Kingdom. To gamble on what the world has to offer is pure foolishness. It involves vain and tragic waste and it produces bad fruit. Corruption and crime are products of gambling. Anytime you hear of a gambling center, you know syndicated corruption is rampant.

We have the responsibility to glorify God with good fruit in our lives. In no way does the covetous way of gambling accomplish this. It's far better to direct our hopes and efforts at acquiring the true riches of the soon-coming Kingdom of God, seeking it before all else.