

Should Christians Play the Lottery?

By Robert C. Veil, Jr.

I had a beloved uncle who used to joke that if he ever won the lottery, he would tell people that he found the ticket in the church parking lot! Like most members of the church, he knew there was something questionable about playing the lottery. The mere fact that this question continues to come up, and people continue to ask whether it is right to play the lottery, should tell us something.

The only serious defense of playing the lottery which I have heard Christians make is that the funds are used for good purposes. We are told that the proceeds of governmental lotteries go to feed the hungry, provide education, supply healthcare, and a host of other commendable causes. To those who say this, I wonder if you have ever considered the logical implications of your argument. Did you know that when you buy a pack of cigarettes, a percentage of the proceeds is used to provide education against smoking? When you purchase liquor, the taxes on that product are used to provide numerous worthwhile services. So, can we really determine whether a thing is right by the way some of the proceeds are used?

When I was engaged in an active legal practice, I was often invited to buy tickets to various fundraisers, raffles, and social activities, a component of which was the consumption of alcohol. I was usually assured that the proceeds would be used for some worthwhile endeavor, such as providing scholarships, etc. But I realized that if I wanted to support such endeavors, I could do so without participating in the beer fests and raffles. I could simply donate to the worthwhile causes directly, or, better yet, I could give the money to my local congregation, which could then use the funds in many worthwhile ways, thus giving the credit entirely to Christ and his church.

Lotteries are a form of gambling, which have become quite popular in modern America. The national news was recently preoccupied with a record-breaking lottery winner in the amount of \$1.6 Billion. Such stories interest many others in playing, and they draw in more participants. Unfortunately, studies show that most of the players are those who can least afford to buy tickets, including many who are neglecting their other obligations, such as the payment of debts and child support. Lottery promoters don't usually tell people just how tiny the chances of winning actually are, or the tragic stories of what has become of many past winners.

Gambling is a worldly activity which appeals to "the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life," (1 Jn. 2:16). It encourages a person to forsake biblical principles of honest and ethical work (cf. Eph. 4:28), in the hopes of "getting rich quick" at the expense of others. It furthers the deception that I can get something of value for nothing.

Gambling can appeal to a person's addictive nature, and playing the lottery can be extremely addictive. It is reported that the poorest Americans buy lottery tickets more than twice a month, funding a gambling industry which now brings in over \$68 Billion annually. I would not encourage a person to buy a lottery ticket any more than I would encourage them to buy a bottle of beer. I am concerned and fearful about promoting conduct which is addictive and ultimately self-destructive.

The chances of winning the national lottery jackpot are currently less than 1 in 175,000,000. Your chances of being struck and killed by lightning are more than 175 times better than that. To put it another way, try searching for a certified financial planner

who would advise you to invest in the lottery. You better have a long time to search!

If you have some money with which you are considering buying a lottery ticket, think about what God could do with that money instead. Consider how you might use that money to help someone else, even if it's just the giving of "a cup of cold water." In comparing which would be the better use of the money, recall that Jesus said, "Whosoever shall give to drink unto one of these little ones a cup of cold water only, in the name of a disciple, verily I say unto you he shall in no wise lose his reward," (Mt. 10:42). You see, Jesus notices what we do with our money, whether we buy a lottery ticket or a cup of cold water. The reward for the latter is sure.

Finally, try to view the lottery question as God views it. Try to envision the value in promoting honest work and good stewardship, as opposed to entertaining ourselves, wasting our money, or funding ungodly causes. Christian, God has put that money in your hand. Be careful what you do with it!