

Don't Bet On It

There are many ways in which one can tell that our country's economy is experiencing a downturn. The increase in unemployment figures, the tightening of loan requirements, the proliferation of commercials telling us how to get out of paying our debts are just a few of the telltale signs of financial straits. Another is the increased attraction of "get rich quick" schemes. These are everywhere nowadays. On the radio, television and in print, promoters of these dreams of certain wealth are selling their wares, getting rich themselves on the money spent by those who can little afford it. As a society, we look down upon the charlatans who push these schemes. We consider them disreputable individuals. We pity those who are lured into their lairs of deceit. We can't understand how anyone could get caught in such obvious traps. Some in our society shake their heads in disgust at these unprincipled purveyors of empty promises, not realizing the irony of doing so while they busily scratch the numbers on their lottery tickets.

Yes, it's true. There is little if any difference between the immorality of the "get rich quick" hustlers and the lottery. Both promise a lot for a little. Both siphon money from those who can least afford it. Both provide winnings based on other people's losses. Neither adds anything to the moral character of the ones who participate in them.

The attitude that leads to one's playing the lottery lends itself to covetousness. In Luke 12:15 Jesus said, "Take heed, and beware of covetousness: for a man's life consisteth not in the abundance of the things which he possesseth." The word translated "covetousness" means "a greedy desire to have more." The word is rendered "greediness" in Ephesians 4:19. Covetousness is one of those sins that we are to put to death in our lives as Christians (Colossians 3:5). In fact, in that verse Paul associates covetousness with idolatry.

The attitude that leads to one's playing the lottery also defies the basic Bible principle of the need for mankind to work. Paul wrote, "And that ye study to be quiet, and to do your own business, and to work with your own hands, as we commanded you." (I Thessalonians 4:11). He also said, "For even when we were with you, this we commanded you, that if any would not work, neither should he eat." (II Thessalonians 3:10). There is no work involved in scratching off a lottery ticket. No skill is required and very little thought comes into play. The lottery does not encourage thrift nor does it encourage hard work. Instead, it portrays a picture of life on Easy Street. What it doesn't show is those lottery winners arriving on Easy Street in a vehicle funded by countless others who got nothing for their money.

Those are just a couple of thoughts regarding the unscriptural nature of the lottery. Now let's think about this subject from a logical standpoint. Have you ever put money into a vending machine only to have the machine "eat" your cash? If so, then you recall standing there waiting for the machine to return something of equal value to what you put into it. When it didn't cooperate, perhaps you slapped it, kicked it or shook it. If a phone number for the owner was on the machine, you probably called to ask for your money back. Isn't it strange that a person will put money into a machine and get upset because nothing comes out, but will then turn right around and continually buy little pieces of paper without thinking twice about how many times he or she has never seen any of that money returned to them?

Here's another illustration demonstrating the illogical nature of the lottery. Suppose a man came up and made you the following offer: "If you give me your money, I'll keep some of it, give some of it away, and maybe someday give it back to you." Would you take him up on his proposal? Suppose you asked, "What do you mean 'maybe someday' you'll give it back to me?" He would reply, "Well, I'll give you some odds for getting your money back. Let's say your odds of getting your money back are somewhere between one in five million and one in eighty million." Would you take him up on his offer? Most likely you'd think he was out of his mind; yet, if lottery tickets could talk, that's exactly the conversation they would have with each person who purchased one of them.

Trying to get something for little or nothing while hurting others in return is the lottery in a nutshell. We often hear people talk about what Jesus would do. It's difficult to imagine Him standing in a store vigorously scratching a lottery ticket.

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