

XXX. Timeless Truth for Timely Topics in Biblical Perspective

What Does the Bible Say?

“Powerball and State Gambling”

Selected Texts

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I will be doing a little bit of a distillation from selected texts in order to address what the Bible says about the Christian mind applied to the matter of Powerball and the industry of state gambling. I was going to start my series on the Christian mind in this study but because of the recent powerball situation and all the questions I received concerning this I decided to deal with this issue applying what the Christian mind would do in this matter. This has also come about in light of what is happening in the state right now which was once defeated in 1999 or 2000 on the state initiative of gambling. People have asked me what I would do with Powerball winnings but I think you need to ask yourself what is the state doing in the industry of gambling. Secondly, you need to ask yourself why you're drawn to this. What happens to people who do win it? That has been studied and documented. I'm going to try and address this now but I feel I will need to address this again if our state leadership continues to push this again for this is a direction that our state must not, should not and God willing will not go.

This past week the Powerball reach 1.4 billion and I realized I was going to have to speak to this not only because of the questions I received but when one of my elders came to me to ask me to pray over his lottery numbers. Seriously that last part about the elder was a joke. Before I read the passages of Scriptures that will be used as a distillation to deal with it there is another reason I wanted to deal with this. I recently had to go to Atlanta to deal with some denominational issues and my wife was with me. As we crossed the border from Alabama into Georgia I usually like to stop at a certain restaurant for lunch near a gas station and this time the parking lot was just overflowing. Then I saw this really long line coming out of this convenient store of this gas station that wrapped around and went down the highway. I thought I'm not going to stand in line that long for a subway sandwich so you see how out of touch with reality I was. My wife said “They are not in line for a subway. That's the powerball line.”

Then I profiled the line and looked at the unbelievable interest that was displayed here. I was trying to imagine that many people lined up to come into worship on a Sunday. I really thought through this and realized I needed to speak to this with all the questions I received on it, the fascination with it and the fact that it will not stop. In fact it will be heightened by the government and our own state is facing this again.

I'd like to start by looking at Proverbs which is the book of divinely ordained common sense. I will read through a number of texts and then I'll walk us through them as I deal with this issue. I believe these are appropriate and relevant texts that we need to look at. Here is some Divine wisdom given to us in the book of Proverbs. Proverbs 13:11 says *[11] Wealth gained hastily (or by fraud) will dwindle, but whoever gathers little by little will increase it.* So here is one who finds a way by fraud or without work to gain as much as they can as quickly as they can will diminish but those who gather little by little there is something in the gathering process that actually causes an appropriate increase of it.

Now let's look at Proverbs 20 which is a passage that shows us how we are to see it. Proverbs 20:21 says *[21] An inheritance gained hastily in the beginning will not be blessed in the end.* There is that principle of diminishing in the hastily gathered accumulation of wealth,

particularly apart from work in some scheme. Proverbs 23:4–5 says [4] *Do not toil to acquire wealth; be discerning enough to desist. [5] When your eyes light on it, it is gone, for suddenly it sprouts wings, flying like an eagle toward heaven.* He is not saying don't seek to get wealth without work but He is saying, don't work to get wealth.

That is one of the ingenious dynamics of Christianity upon the free enterprise system. Without Christianity it becomes the acquisition of wealth and the consumption of wealth but with Christianity it is no longer working to acquire wealth but working to create wealth which creates work for others. It's not saying not to work but it is saying don't work for wealth. What you do is work to create wealth. If you work for wealth then it will soon fly away from you because the very thing that causes you to want to consume the wealth will be the Achilles heel whereby people will take your wealth from you, whether it's by advertising, marketing or false promises.

Now let's look at Ecclesiastes which comes to us from the authorship of King Solomon. Ecclesiastes 5:10–12 says [10] *He who loves money will not be satisfied with money, nor he who loves wealth with his income; this also is vanity. [11] When goods increase, they increase who eat them, and what advantage has their owner but to see them with his eyes? [12] Sweet is the sleep of a laborer, whether he eats little or much, but the full stomach of the rich will not let him sleep.* If you're working for wealth there will never be enough zeroes in the bank account for you. It will elusive and you'll think it's not enough. With this in mind let's look at I Timothy 6. I believe under the influence of the Holy Spirit it was the Ecclesiastes 5 text that was upon the mind of the Apostle Paul when we see what he writes in I Timothy 6.

I Timothy 6:10 says [10] *For the love of money is a root of all kinds of evils. It is through this craving that some have wandered away from the faith and pierced themselves with many pangs.* It does not say money is the root but the love of money is the root of evil. Money is amoral. It's not moral or immoral. So I'm not overwhelmed by how much or little of it you have. I'm more concerned about two things – does it have you and how and why did you get what you have. The how and why will determine what you do with what you have and whether what you have or not has you.

I received a call one time from a lady from another congregation. She said her pastor was talking about people with money and how some had too much money and that they should have less money but basically it was about how much money one had. I said to her "I'm not really concerned about how much you have but does it have you and how and why you got it and therefore how you use it. What I would ask a pastor who says you're sinful in how much you have is, what amount of money is righteous." Another called me and said "You're house is too big and if you have a big house you're in sin." I said "Go ask that pastor what the square footage of a house that is holy." I'm not trying to diminish any conviction if you're living beyond your mean or if you're worshipping a house or not for that's another issue but that's where we become legalistic when we think we can put a metric to it that makes us holy or not. I also ask what they were doing with the house and why they had it or is it using you. That is what these things are pointing us to.

I wish I could tell a certain amount makes you holy but even someone with a large amount can covet as much as someone with a lot less. That is just a fact. This is a heart issue. It is not the amoral thing but it has to do with what your heart relationship is with that thing. Anything above or in place of or alongside your allegiance, devotion and trusting in Christ is sinful. Now I'd like to look at Hebrews 13 and then I'll walk through some things with you.

This gives us a series of commands to the Christians but this is what it says at the conclusion of these commands.

Hebrews 13:5 says [5] *Keep your life free from love of money, and be content with what you have, for he has said, "I will never leave you nor forsake you."* In other words, the presence of Christ ought to give you contentment no matter what your station in life and therefore your trust no matter what your station in life is in Christ. Matthew 6:24 says [24] *"No one can serve two masters, for either he will hate the one and love the other, or he will be devoted to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and money."* We cannot serve God and mammon. Satan in promoting the sovereign self loves to give you two traps of the state as the enforcer of the secular narcissistic humanist religion and two, money as the currency of life. In other words, the narcissist would say not that they learned to love but that they learn to love money and that will somehow be the factor of satisfaction in their life.

Another thing I'd like to address is the question of casting lots in the Bible and how people think this is ordained gambling. This is not ordained gambling. There are only two times that lots are cast in the Bible. One is when people didn't believe what God has promised and they tried to be diviners of wisdom apart from the revealed wisdom of God. The second time is when God ordained the casting of lots to communicate His sovereign choice that He had already made. It is certainly not the affirmation of gambling. I'm not going to be talking about gambling in its private arrangements but what I want to do in this study is answer two questions.

Why is the state involved or proposed to be involved in the industry of gambling? One state governor said the mob has control of gambling so why don't we take control of it and then we can tax it? The mob with its corruption is now in control of gambling and so why doesn't the government replace the mob and get its own corruption in gambling. That is moral deficit leadership if I've ever heard it in my entire life. Why would the state be involved and promote the industry of gambling? Secondly, why should I ever be involved in it personally? What would God's Word say to me and my motivations in that regard?

A joke that came from this was that the devil has had this money long enough so if I win then God gets the money. I have news for you, that is terrible theology because God has all the money anyway. He is sovereign over all of it. There may be usurpers out there but God is sovereign over all. He can empty all the bank accounts of every tycoon that has ever lived and does it quite regularly. God doesn't need me to win a lottery to rescue money from the devil to give to Him. Secondly, if you came to me with that money and wanted to contribute it to the church I would tell you I wouldn't want it but I would tell you who you could give it to and that is the people you just took it from and I will take you to the people you just took it from. I want you to meet them and then you ask them if you should be the recipient of their money given the conditions they live in and the delusions that cause them to deposit money in a scheme that you now have control of. Sometimes the Lord is leading you and sometimes you are leading yourself but that's what I would do. I'll be happy to share more with you privately if you so choose.

In other words, why are you involved in this, why would you seek to have it and seek some moral high ground that you will give some to the church? First let me address why the government is involved in this. I know many of you have a Biblical world and life view that is increasing in a Christian mind to understand the Biblical role of a government. It has basically four things to do. One is to defend its citizens. Two it is to promote righteousness. Three it is to punish evil. Four it is to contribute to the general welfare. Those are the four things that our founding fathers built into the constitution beyond that you don't want to give anything else to a government because once you give that to them they need more authority and once they need

more authority they have more power. Once they have more power they are going to need more money.

The reason why we have state lottery systems and Powerball (the combining of states lotteries) is because the government size is beyond what it ought to be. Its scope is larger than it should be. Its span of reach is beyond what it ought to be. Whenever you increase the size, scope and span of a government then you have increased the cost of government. When you have increased the cost of a government then you have to find a way to resource it. So that brings us to point two.

Why then get into gambling? There is a lack of resources. They don't feel they can get any more money out of a tax proposal so they go to gambling which puts the lipstick on the pig by telling everybody that we'll give it to education because who is against education? That is usually the way it is sold. Go take a look where the money ends up and how little of it ends up in education. The money begins to diminish and the education that is built upon it requires them another way to get more gambling to replenish the diminishing. Once the surge goes down they have to find a way to attract you back to the lottery. They market it in different ways to get you back into buying into it. This re-attracts and re-energizes everyone until their interest diminishes again and the cycle begins again.

In other words, the government is too large. It costs too much because of its size, scope and span. They know they cannot pass the taxes to keep the size of the government and that brings me to a third reason for gambling. It is a betrayal of leadership for governments to be led into the gambling industry. What should the leadership do? They should cut down on the size of government so they don't need as much money or increase the taxes or some combination of the two but the answer is gambling which is simply a regressive tax. We desperately need leaders not just with physical courage and competencies but moral courage to audit the government and say 'the government doesn't need to be doing that.'

That takes courage to do that because it will probably cost you an election. The reason they may lose an election is people want leaders with moral courage but when they diminish a program that we're involved with then we don't want it. We don't have the moral courage to say to them, even though it will cost us, 'do it because it needs to be done.' If that audit or refinement needs to take place then do it. So the moral deficit of the electorate and the lack of moral courage in the leadership never deals with the scope and size of government but doesn't want to impose the taxes necessary for that government. So the way out is gambling.

Who is going to be drawn to this money but those who don't have it and think the answer to life is in the money. Then when it begins to dissipate we'll make the pot bigger by bringing states in together. We'll create strategies to draw people in whereby they'll start talking about it, be engaged in it and think why not a couple of tickets to be involved in it, instead of refusing to audit the government in what it is doing to bring it within a proper tax base and then us refusing to have the moral courage to support them in what they do. So when the returns begin to diminish the government finds a way to reenact our interest in and response to it. They cycle begins again with higher stakes to attract more people.

Then they will do branding where they say this is just a game. Do you think the word Powerball wasn't selected thoughtfully? It's just a game so just spend a few bucks on it. Let me tell you what that game is doing. I'm going to quote from James Bowling and the Acton Institute about the lure that the government puts out and the remarketing of it and then the hiring of the advertising agencies to get people back involved in it. I will speak in terms of my city.

You won't see advertising in Mountain Brook but I'll take you to the neighborhoods where you'll see it. It not only has diminishing returns but it has debilitating consequences.

The number one yearly income bracket that buys the most Powerball lottery tickets are those who are making \$20,000 to \$25,000 annually and not only by number but by amount of money. After I ordered my subway sandwich I went over and got my coffee because I think this place has the best coffee on I-20 between Birmingham and Atlanta, I was listening to the conversation. I looked at the line of people and saw someone who clearly had to be hand-to-mouth buy \$45 worth of Powerball tickets. The average purchase of tickets from those in this salary category is \$45 a person. In other words, the guy I saw hit the average. I was astounded by the \$45 and heartbroken to watch it. The second largest category is those who make \$30,000 annually. Those making this amount spend about \$28 per person on tickets. The poll actually bore out in my anecdotal study in that place this last week. So the least able are the ones that are targeted, marketed and branded for.

The other diminishing return is the dignity of work is undermined. The dignity of personal growth in earning, spending and saving is undermined for the hastily gathering of wealth that will only diminish. Another casualty is the tenth commandment that says do not covet, instead by content in that which the Lord has called you to. It doesn't mean you don't try to work and advance yourself and create wealth but we learn how to walk in contentment with the Lord.

One, I believe that this isn't just a game. I think it has a world and life view. I think the world and life view behind it is that the state is the savior and must be funded at all costs yet it can't be funded at all costs because the population that wants the state to be a savior doesn't want to pay what they are asking for but those who want to be elected have now found a way with a regressive tax to get the money. I believe by principle I need to stand against that. I need to say to my state leaders to show some moral courage and establish a government within the means of taxation. Then tax us for what we get and then have the tax system appropriate. We want no regressive tax or hidden tax in the gambling industry that will bring corruption into the government and then will have a government who is feeding off of those who can least afford to do it.

I haven't even touched the social consequences of this with gambling addictions. I haven't even touched broken marriages or broken families. As I saw that man get \$45 worth of tickets I wondered if his wife knew or will he tell her and then she'll have to find out what they will have to do about groceries. What will that do to that marriage? What will that do to that family? I haven't even touched on how the government will then have to enlarge itself because its means of this regressive tax that's immorally applied will then call the government to create social services because of the other consequences that it produces.

On the one hand I know this has been the occasion of much curiosity and to some degree levity but I think it goes beyond that. The gambling addictions are real. The targeting is real. The marketing is real. The lack of moral courage and the leadership of a government to get the government to the right place it needs to be with the moral courage of a population that says no matter what it looks like it initially costs me to have a government to do simply what it is supposed to do and doesn't try to be my savior – I am willing to bear the proper auditing and shrinking of a government to get there. We have elected you to do it and when you do it we will keep electing you to do it so don't do what you think you need to do to get elected. Do what we sent you there to do – do the right thing. This is so they know there is moral courage in the electorate as well as what is expected in the leadership.

Finally I do believe also that not only does the Christian mind need to be addressing things like this but we need to develop such leaders to go into these halls of leadership with a Christian mind, leadership abilities and moral courage. I cannot tell you enough that is what we are lacking. I believe a heart that is steadfast is crucial for good leadership for they will do the right thing at the right time for the right reason in the right way. That is what we need in leadership. When our leaders do it I encourage you with all your heart find a way to not only pray for them but encourage them. Tell them we do not expect or want our government to engage in devised strategized market or brand, a regressive tax that goes after the very people that need to enjoy the dignity of work, find the opportunities to work and opportunities to grow in their ability to earn, spend and save out of the sufficiency's that Christ offers to us. Be content. Let's pray.

Prayer:

Father, thank You for the moments we could be together in Your Word. Thank You for the way Your Word shapes our mind, our lives and speaks to the matters of not only our private walk with You but also public policy, public theology and that we can move into the public square because we love our neighbor. So Father I am asking You that Christians in the state of Alabama would love their neighbor enough that they would not participate, support or be a part of implementing what destroys the very lives of those who are so vulnerable right now. Please give us the ability to send leaders who will lead us with a government that is constitutional and most of all that is Biblical and then Father, give us the ability to support them. Whenever any policy is raised up that will bring a state into corruption, will bring diminishment into the lives of its citizens, give us the ability with grace and conviction to not only oppose it but also Father, not participate in it for I pray this in Jesus' Name, Amen.