

A Tax On Covetousness

By J. W. Jepson, D.Min.

Copyright ©1997, 1998 by J. W. Jepson

All rights reserved, including the right to grant the following permission and to prohibit the misuse thereof:

The Author hereby grants permission to reproduce the text of this article, without changes or alterations*, as a ministry, but not for commercial or non-ministry purposes.

***Permission is given for publication of excerpts and condensed versions.**

(NIV) Scripture quotations from the Holy Bible, New International Version are copyright © 1973, 1978, International Bible Society.
Used by permission of Zondervan Bible Publishers.

(KJV) Scripture quotations in this publication from the Holy Bible, King James Version are in the public domain.

The Bible says more about economics than any other topic. That does not mean economics is the most important. It is not. Salvation is. It does indicate the nature of the Bible.

The Bible is a book--the Book--about God: how to come into right relationship with Him, and how to live a happy life in obedience to Him and in harmony with His natural and spiritual laws now. It is the instruction manual for living.

Much of living involves taking care of God's earth and its resources, particularly the part that comes into our personal possession. This is called stewardship. How we handle it affects us in many ways, including spiritually. That is why there is a greater total volume of Bible passages on this subject than on any other. God wants us to live wisely.

Most people live in disobedience to God in all areas of life, including their finances. Stewardship--accountability to God--seldom if ever enters their minds. They do not tithe. They assume what is theirs is theirs, and they spend their money accordingly. Covetousness is considered normal. Some even see godliness as a means of gain (1 Timothy 6:5).

One popular expression of this selfish state of mind is the lottery. Lotteries have been established just about everywhere. Like other evils that have gained public approval, lotteries are widely defended, usually on the pretext that they raise revenues for schools and other public purposes. But stripped of all such sophistry, the naked truth is lotteries are nothing more than legitimized covetousness. Like all other forms of gambling their driving force is greed.

A tendency among people, including many Christians, is to assume that whatever is legal is right. This is based on the naive notion that the government would never legalize something wrong or harmful to the public. But legality does not define morality. Morality is defined by the Scriptures. The Bible, not public opinion, is the standard of right and wrong.

The church must be a voice to society, not its echo. It must always stand on the moral high ground, speaking God's truth to the world and living it before the world.

Lotteries are contrary to the truth in a number of ways. Look at some of them.

As a form of covetousness, lotteries violate a universal moral obligation embodied in one of the Ten Commandments and inherent in the gospel: "Thou shalt not covet" (Exodus 20:17). "And he said unto them, Take heed, and beware of

covetousness: for a man's life consisteth not in the abundance of the things which he possesseth" (Luke 12:15).

Behind covetousness and greed lies a wrong sense of values. Lotteries promote the lie that happiness can be bought; that our quality of life is determined by our material possessions; and that who we are is defined by our economic status. Against this lie stands arrayed the whole truth of God.

Gambling, including lotteries, is contrary to truth also in that it urges us to put our trust in luck instead of in God. Christians are not lucky; they are blessed. Our source and the object of our trust is God, not chance. We do not trust in "uncertain riches, but in the living God, who giveth us richly all things to enjoy" (1 Timothy 6:17).

Gambling is commonly defended by the assertion that everything in life involves risk and therefore life itself is a gamble. But this fallacy fails to recognize the fundamental difference between the reasonable risks of productive living and the deliberate misuse of money in the attempt to enrich oneself at others' loss.

And speaking of loss, that is another reason to leave lotteries alone. Contrary to all the hype, lotteries are not designed to make winners out of people, but losers. Their purpose is not to give money away, but to take it away. They are a tax on covetousness (yes, and on foolishness).

Lotteries are counterproductive. Huge sums are spent on their administration and promotion. This money comes out of the pockets of the many who lose and becomes a substantial reduction in the amount available for public purposes and for redistribution to the far fewer who gain. Society has not yet learned that the way to achieve prosperity is not to stand around in a big circle with our hands in each others' pockets.

Lotteries feed the something-for -nothing notion. They erode the work ethic. We gain by producing. We prosper by serving.

Also lotteries tend to be regressive. They place the heaviest burden of loss on those who cannot afford to lose. Sometimes these are the people who play the lottery in a desperate and usually futile attempt to escape their poverty. Money designed for food, clothing, and rent gone, they sink deeper in self-loathing and despair.

Gambling is addictive, and lotteries feed that addiction. "People who want to get rich fall into temptation and a trap and into many foolish and harmful desires that plunge men into ruin and destruction" (1 Timothy 6:9, NIV).

Christ came to set us free. Let us stand fast in that liberty, shunning anything that would bring us under bondage. It is folly to toy with temptation. Because lotteries are an embodiment of covetousness, they violate the moral law, the law of love. Love does not seek to gain at the expense of others. Rather, it seeks the good of others. Love will protect the weak, not exploit them.

It is commonly claimed that lotteries are merely an innocent form of entertainment for most people who play them, a harmless pleasure. But love will not choose its pleasure in disregard for what those pleasures do to others. "We who are strong ought to bear with the failings of the weak and not to please ourselves" (Romans 15:1, NIV).

When we invite Christ into our lives, He establishes the rule of love in our hearts. Greed, covetousness, and all other forms of selfishness no longer have a place there. Christ will not tolerate them, and neither will we. Because love rules, it rules them out.

Open your heart to the love of Christ. Trust Him as your Savior. Follow Him as your Lord.