**Were They Lined Up To Lose?**

*by Harry Osborne*

There was a time when gambling was hidden in backrooms, behind locked doors. It was a “hush-hush” activity that avoided publicity due to the illegality and stigma associated with it. In my lifetime, I have seen gambling go from a distained vice inherently tied to organized crime to a widely advertised and socially acceptable means of state and tribal funding. In Oklahoma, we cannot avoid the advertisements for Indian tribe sponsored casinos whether watching television, listening to radio or driving down the highway. The state-run lotteries have become so common that we rarely think about it unless the jackpot gets high enough to make the news. Such was the case last week with the second largest lottery jackpot in history that was won by two people Tuesday night.

Do you wonder why so many people lined up to buy tickets for that lottery? Was the large volume of lottery ticket sales due to a sudden urge by many people to contribute to state education funding which the states claim to be benefitted from lottery proceeds? Did they pack the stores selling lottery establishments in order to help the general fund of the state coffers? Were they lined up to lose? We all know that none of the above points drove lottery-pick sales through the roof. The allure was plain and simple – put a dollar down in hopes that you would be the one person to win over $500,000,00 while everyone else lost. That, in a nutshell, is what gambling is all about!

This article will not engage in a discussion regarding the political implications of the lottery to state finances. However, it will examine the moral implications of gambling including the sanitized and legitimized forms like the state sponsored lottery.

The word "gamble" is sometimes used so loosely that it may be good for us to define the word before we begin and so limit the scope of our study. We will discuss this word in the sense of "to stake or risk money, etc., in the hope of great gain in a game in which success is solely dependent on chance" (see *Webster* and *Oxford American Dictionary*). When that gain takes place, it is at the expense of one or more who lose money without receiving any legitimate benefit or service of commerce.

We are not talking about the loose sense in which the word "gamble" is sometimes used. When one speaks of the farmer's craft as a "gamble," the word is used to mean the same thing as "risk." ***Risk*** is involved in any commercial undertaking where a legitimate benefit or service is exchanged for money or the expectation of gain. The Bible clearly approves of this kind of endeavor.

James speaks of the fact that the farmer must wait for the rain (which implies a risk) to make a crop. "See how the farmer waits for the precious fruit of the earth, waiting patiently for it until it receives the early and latter rain" (Jas. 5:7). Other passages clearly show that God approves the acceptance of risk in the process of legitimate commerce.

The word "gamble" is also used in that loose sense when referring to an investment whether in the stock market, bonds or some other commercial arrangement. We are not using the word in that sense either. In an investment, regardless of the risk, something of value is exchanged for the buyer's money in an effort to cause ***both*** parties to gain. Jesus showed approval for gain by investment.

Jesus told the parable of the talents in which a man of wealth left three stewards in charge of differing amounts of money (5 talents, 2 talents and 1 talent) expecting them to make a profit in commercial enterprise. Two showed a profit with the master's investment upon his return, but one did not because of his failure to attempt any business. The master said the steward should have at least drawn interest on his money (Matt. 25:14-30).

"Gambling" such as the lottery, casino games (poker, blackjack, slot machines, roulette, etc.) and bingo is the topic for this study. Such games of chance do not seek gain through the three means approved in the Bible: wages of labor, profits of investment or free-will gifts. Gain in gambling is never intended to be experienced by all parties as is the case in legitimate commerce. Gain in gambling can only come at the expense of others.

The Bible has a term which fits the action of gambling. The word is "coveteousness." This action is not seen as commendable and worthy of state sponsorship in God's word. To the contrary, it is condemned! A brief look at the company of sins it keeps quickly shows God's view of it (Eph. 5:3-5; Mk. 7:21-23; Lk. 12:15). Such conduct is the very opposite of that commanded by the Lord in our dealings with others. He said, "And just as you want men to do to you, you also do to them likewise" (Lk. 6:31). Is that what the gambler tries to do? Obviously not! Thus, the gambler stands condemned for his or her part in such action.

However, the individual gambler is not the only one condemned. The casino, bookmaker or other providers of organized gambling are condemned by the same principle. They set the games and the odds in such a way that the organizer is guaranteed about 50% of the total amount wagered. State lotteries involve the government in this vice as the largest offender. Typically, the lotteries are intended to return to the betting public around 50 to 55% of the revenue received. In other words, the states set up the system to insure they will take about half of the money received in the "lottery" while they try to convince the gambler that he can become rich by the lottery. The lottery advertisements appeal to people's greed for quick and easy riches. The fact is that the odds of winning a million dollars or more is approximately 13 million to 1, far less than the odds of one getting struck by lightning (400,000 to 1). So add lying, or at least deception, to the list of those things produced by the state lottery. What a scam! It should be called "robbery," not "lottery." I prefer to call it what it really is – a “stupid tax” because that is the group of people upon whom it is levied.

Think about the place of government ordained by God and it really boils down to something very simple (Rom. 13:1-7). Does God desire government which He ordained as “a minister of God for good” to raise money through the same means that organized crime has used for years? Or does He expect a higher standard from those whom He authorized to praise good and avenge evil? That is the bottom line! The same question can be asked of tribal leaders in the Indian nations. Any objective look leads one to the clear conclusion: Gambling is not an activity approved by God for gamblers or the bookmaker -- whether organized by the Mafia or government.