

## SHOULD A CHRISTIAN PLAY THE LOTTERY?

Harding University was in the Arkansas news last week because of their policy regarding students playing the lottery. Channel 11 reported the decision by the administration not to apply the rules against gambling to the lottery. The news reporter interviewed several students and showed some of them playing. Harding University was referred to as a Christian school, but the report did not specifically mention its ties to Churches of Christ.

Apparently, the school administration changed its mind and is now applying the prohibition of gambling to the lottery as well. Ellen heard this Friday night on the local news in northwest Arkansas. By the way, the news report there did mention Harding as a “Church of Christ school.”

This incident presents some timely lessons for us. First of all, God designed churches of Christ to be autonomous, so that if one is in error it will not affect the others. When “churches of Christ” develop a denominational structure with a sponsoring church arrangement or church support of colleges (such as Harding) and children’s homes, they become “Churches of Christ.” With such an intertwined system tying those churches together, their claim of not being a denomination rings hollow. With Harding recognized as a “Church of Christ school,” their standard is a reflection on all those who call themselves “Churches of Christ.” In the mind of the undiscerning public, this also includes others who call themselves a “church of Christ” but are opposed to the denominationalism of “Churches of Christ.”

A second important lesson is the morality of playing the lottery. By some rationale, the administration of Harding made a distinction between gambling and playing the lottery. By rescinding their decision, does it now see no difference?

What is gambling? Sometimes, people use the word “gamble” just to refer to a risk. “Gambling” is more than taking a risk. Life is full of risk, and we are to take it (**Ecclesiastes 11:1-4**). Gambling consists of four necessary parts:

1. An uncertain event
2. A wager of some value on that uncertainty
3. A loser (he loses what he has wagered)
4. A winner (he gains what the loser wagered)

Playing the lottery certainly is gambling in this sense. The sequence of numbers drawn out of the lot is uncertain. People buy tickets to select the numbers they predict to be drawn (the **value amount of the wager is irrelevant** to the issue). The winners are the state (it is rigged so that “the house” wins; no matter how many people guess correctly, the payout is the same; it is divided by the number of winners!) and those who correctly predict the numbers sequence. The losers are everyone who paid for a ticket and received nothing in return. The money won comes from the wagers of all who bought tickets.

What does the Bible say about gambling? The word “gambling” does not appear in the Bible. This question must be addressed the same way many questions are answered by applying scriptures to the issue (**Hebrews 5:12-14**).

The Bible certainly talks about the motive for gambling. It is *covetousness*. Covetousness is wrong (**Colossians 3:5**). Some will say, “I don’t gamble for selfish reasons. It is for charity.” This may have been part of Harding’s rationalization of distinguishing between gambling in general and the lottery that pays for student scholarships. We must remember that the end does not justify the means. Take the covetousness test: instead of playing to win the lottery, just send the money as a donation to the scholarship fund. Instead of buying raffle tickets for charity, make a donation to that charity. This is what the Christian with pure motives will do.

In a similar vein, gambling violates the Golden Rule (**Matthew 7:12**). It is not loving others or treating others the way you want to be treated. The winnings are at the expense of the loser. The Christian who loves his neighbor as himself will give to him instead of take from him.

**1 Timothy 6:9-10** warns against the greed for easy money that causes many to give in to the temptation to gamble. Nearly every temptation is a short-cut of some sort, and gambling has entrapped

many people because Satan drew them away by their own lust for money. The desire for gain without working for it is manifested in gambling, along with other forms of stealing. The desire to get rich quick makes victims of fraud easy targets, and thieves of all sorts are usually motivated by greed. Gambling takes advantage of both forms of greed—the winner and the loser.