

Church Declines \$600,000 Tithe from Lotto Winnings

The Wired Word for September 7th, 2008

In the News

Robert Powell, of Orange Park, Florida, recently tried to give \$600,000 to his local church, but the church's pastor said no thanks. For some time, Powell has been playing the same Florida Lotto numbers twice a week -- a combination of his birthday numbers and his wife's birthday numbers -- and in June, he won \$12 million, but chose a lump sum payout of \$6,713,200. This month, he attempted to donate a 10 percent tithe of his winnings to his church, First Baptist Orange Park.

First Baptist's pastor, David Tarkington, declined the donation without explanation, saying only that he didn't want to talk about members' gifts. It is assumed, however, that the donation was turned down because it resulted from lottery winnings, and many churches oppose gambling in any form, including lotteries.

Not all pastors would follow Tarkington's lead. Dr. Lorenzo Hall, pastor of El-Beth-El Divine Holiness Church in Jacksonville, Florida, does not approve of gambling either, but said that if one of his members won the lottery, he would hope that member "would give 10 percent to the church." He said that he does not ask members where their donations come from and added that \$600,000 can do a lot of good.

Lottie Walker, a member of Hall's church, said that if she won, the first things she would do is give money to her church.

"Anything extra is bonus so that would be an extra blessing of offering ..., so if I did win lotto, sweepstakes I would tithe to my church," says Walker.

Even though Powell took the \$6 million lump payout, Powell told Lottery officials that winning made him, "feel like \$12 million!"

More on this story may be found at these links:

<http://www.firstcoastnews.com/news/news-article.aspx?storyid=116301>

<http://luckylotto.com/florida-lottery/never-look-a-gift-horse-in-the-mouth> (Be aware that this article was written on behalf of LuckyLotto of Florida and is very biased toward lotteries in general. It even brands as "shaky grounds" the pastor's decision to decline the tithe because it was from lottery winnings. That reeks of bias. We have referred you to this source only to give another view about the declined tithe, but the report should not be taken as neutral journalism.)

The Big Questions

Here are some of the questions we will discuss in class:

1. Does the good that can be done with money from an activity to which a church has moral objections mean that that church should accept the gift? Why or why not?
2. When a church member engages in an activity such as gambling to which the church objects, should that member be disciplined in any way by the church? Why or why not?
3. When a person gives a portion of lottery winnings to the church, does that suggest that he or she sees the winnings as a blessing from God? Can winnings from such an activity actually be a blessing from God? Why or why not?
4. Does accepting "tainted" money compromise the message of the church? Explain your answer.
5. If we are unwilling to accept gifts arising from activities we consider wrong, should we also be unwilling to accept gifts where the motive of the giver is questionable?
6. On what moral grounds do churches often oppose gambling?

Confronting the News with Scripture

We will look at selected verses from these Scripture texts. You may wish to read these in advance for background:

Exodus 25:1-9

1 Chronicles 29:1-22

John 19:23-25

1 Corinthians 8:1-13

Galatians 5:2-15

In class, we will talk about these passages and look for some insight on the big questions, as well as talk about other questions you may have about this topic. Please join us.