40752 - Ruling on selling exorbitantly expensive telephone numbers and “custom” licence plates

the question

What is the ruling on buying and selling telephone numbers and custom licence plates. If a person buys a custom licence plate then sells it, is that money halaal?.

Detailed answer

Praise be to Allah.

Every Muslim should realize that Allaah has forbidden extravagance and wasteful spending, which both mean going beyond the limit in spending money.

Allaah says (interpretation of the meaning):

“and eat and drink but waste not by extravagance, certainly He (Allaah) likes not Al-Musrifoon (those who waste by extravagance)”

[al-A’raaf 7:31]

“And give to the kinsman his due and to the Miskeen (poor) and to the wayfarer. But spend not wastefully (your wealth) in the manner of a spendthrift.

27. Verily, the spendthrifts are brothers of the Shayaateen (devils), and the Shaytaan (Devil-Satan) is ever ungrateful to his Lord”

[al-Isra’ 17:26-27]

Every Muslim should realize that he will not be sent either to Paradise or to Hell until Allaah has asked him about several things, one of which is his wealth – from where he acquired it and on what he spent it.

It was narrated that Abu Barzah al-Aslami (may Allaah be pleased with him) said: The Prophet (peace and blessings of Allaah be upon him) said: “A person will not move on (on the Day of Judgement) until he has been asked about four things: his life and in what he spent it, his knowledge and what he did with it, his wealth, from where he acquired it and on what he spent it, and his body and how he wore it out.”

Narrated by al-Tirmidhi, 2317. He said: It is hasan saheeh. It was classed as saheeh by Shaykh al-Albaani in Saheeh al-Targheeb wa’l-Raheeb, 126.

Moreover it should be noted that buying distinct mobile phone numbers and car licence plates for thousands of riyals is a kind of extravagance and wasteful spending on haraam things. Allaah will ask every one of these people about his wealth and what he spent on such things.

Especially since we see the Muslims in most parts of the world suffering misery and hardship in their lives. Some of them cannot find a morsel of food with which to ward off hunger, and others cannot find clothes with which to cover their bodies, or a house in which to shelter themselves, and the houses of some of them have been destroyed with them inside.

Yet at such a time of hardship we find some Muslims buying a licence plate with the number “1” for the equivalent of 2.18 million dollars in an auction!

In the same auction, the licence plate bearing the number “2” was sold for the equivalent of 1.11 million dollars. The organizers of the auction said that the turnover of the auction on the first day was nearly 3.9 million dollars.

It is similar with mobile phone numbers where a number was sold for the equivalent of 360,000 dollars.

This madness has spread in a number of countries where it would have been better for them to help the Muslims and keep their wealth safe from such foolishness, extravagance and waste.

It should be noted that what makes these people buy such things is deplorable attitudes such as arrogance, pride and feelings of superiority. One of the most ridiculous comments that was made

on this matter was that which was published by one of the newspapers which spoke of a man who came to ask for the hand of a girl in marriage, and he said to the girl's father: "You do not need to ask about me; look at my licence plate and you will know who I am."

It may also be noted that the price for a distinct number or licence plate is many times greater than the price of a Rolls Royce which in the Emirates costs between 1 million and 1.5 million dirhams, and it may cost five times as much as a high-end car like a Mercedes, or ten times as much as a famous car such as a Lexus, which is favoured by the rich.

How much food and drink and clothing, or even telephones and cars, could this have bought for those who need them? How many young men could have been kept chaste by spending this money on getting them married? How many debtors in prison could have been set free by paying off their debts? How many of those who are misguided could have been brought back to the straight path if this money had been spent on the distribution of books and tapes?

All that a custom plate does is tell others that its owner is distinguished by his naivety and concern with trivial matters. A custom plate – unlike the car itself – is not a product of technology which people seek out because it offers comfort, speed or safety. A custom plate is not something that you can enjoy looking at – like some kinds of birds. It is just a sign of arrogance, pride and wasteful spending.

If a special phone number is used by a store or business, or by an important department that people need to contact, then there would be a point in buying it, so long as the price does not reach the exorbitant levels described above.

But buying a special phone number is, to a large extent, akin to wearing a garment of fame or vanity, which is forbidden.

"Whoever puts on a garment of fame or vanity, Allaah will clothe him with a garment like it (or a garment of humiliation) on the Day of Resurrection." Some reports add: "Then He will set it ablaze."

Narrated by Abu Dawood, 4029; Ibn Maajah, 3607.

Ibn al-Qayyim said:

That is because his intention in wearing it was to show off and act proud, so Allaah will punish him with the opposite of that and will humiliate him, just as He punished the one who made his garment long by causing him to be swallowed up by the earth, and he will continue sinking into it until the Day of Resurrection.

Zaad al-Ma'aad, 1/145, 146

Shaykh al-Islam Ibn Taymiyah said:

It is makrooh to wear a garment of fame and vanity, which is anything that stands out from the ordinary, whether it is by wearing the finest and most expensive garments or by wearing the cheapest and scruffiest. The salaf disliked both extremes. According to the hadeeth, "Whoever wears a garment of fame and vanity, Allaah will clothe him in a garment of humiliation." The best of all matters is that which is moderate.

Majmoo' al-Fataawa, 22/138

In conclusion:

It is not permissible to buy and sell these custom numbers. Even if it may be permissible in some cases, it is not permissible to sell them for such high prices.

The one whom Allaah has blessed with wealth should be grateful for this blessing and take proper care of it. He should not spend it on things that incur the wrath of Allaah or things which serve no purpose. He should realize that he will be questioned about this wealth on the Day of Resurrection and will be asked from where he acquired it and on what he spent it.

And Allaah is the Source of strength.