

Is Gambling Sinful?

Gambling is a big part of our society. Most states have the lottery, many schools and organizations run raffles and the number of casinos is climbing. Historically, religious people have condemned such activities. However, gambling is more socially acceptable. Hence, the denominations gave up fighting it some time back and more and more brethren are giving in. Note: What made gambling a sin 30-40 years ago, makes it a sin today.

What Makes Gambling Sinful?

The word "gambling" does not appear in any version of the Bible (of which we are aware). Thus, some people question the teaching that identifies gambling as sinful, something which will cause you to lose your soul in hell.

Infant baptism is not directly condemned in the New Testament. The term "infant baptism" does not even appear in the text. However, we know it is sinful because the Bible does teach a person must be a penitent believer in order to be baptized (Mark 16:16; Acts 2:38; 8:36-38). Since infants do not fit this, it is sinful to baptize them.

"Polygamy" is not found in the New Testament. Yet, it is condemned by truths pertaining to marriage. Each man is to have his own wife--singular (1 Corinthians 7:2). This means more than one wife is sinful.

A similar thing is true in regard to gambling. The sinfulness of gambling is a doctrine of the Bible, though the word does not appear in the text and it is not specifically spelled out.

The Bible reveals there are three ways to legitimately increase wealth or possessions. Work to earn pay (Ephesians 4:28; 1 Thessalonians 4:11-12). Exchange goods, barter (Genesis 47:17; 1 Kings 5:10-11). Receive a gift or inheritance (Matthew 7:11; Ephesians 4:28). Gaining money or material goods by deceit, cheating or stealing is sinful.

Gambling is a form of stealing. In gambling, one person takes from another what he does not want to give. It does not matter that the other person entered into the game willfully. Dueling is entered by mutual consent, but when one person is killed, it is still murder.

Gambling is also driven by covetousness, which is idolatry (Colossians 3:5). If it were not so, it would not be so popular. Covetousness is the appeal of lotteries and raffles. States, schools and organizations would not rake in large amounts of money by simply asking for donations. So, they appeal to man's covetousness--and get a good response!

Are Investing and Life "Gambling"?

When confronted with principles which condemn gambling, some people reply, "The stock market is a gamble. Therefore, it has to be sinful too." This is not so.

In the stock market, and many other business investments, people provide capital to a company, which in turn, uses that capital to increase profits. When profits increase, all receive the benefits. In other words, one person does not steal from another.

Some want to explain away the sinfulness of gambling by saying life is a gamble. There are risks in life, but that does not make it equivalent to gambling. God gave us life. He did not give us craps, 21 or the roulette wheel.

These arguments are designed to obfuscate the issue. The Bible condemns gambling. Any excuse to get around this simply will not work.

Steven F. Deaton