

Don't Bet On It

Introduction. Gambling is big business. It has been estimated that the revenue of the U.S. gambling industry in 2015 will exceed 31 billion dollars. The global gaming industry collects more than 330 billion in revenue each year.

Not that long ago, Americans held gambling in about the same esteem as heroin dealing. But now gambling is on the rise among teens and pre-teens, according to gambling addiction experts and psychiatrists. The trend can be attributed to a growing acceptance of gambling in American culture, an increase of Internet gambling, and more betting shows on TV, such as "Celebrity Poker Showdown," "The World Series Of Poker," and "The World Poker Tour."

Several days ago, the news broke that Atlantic City's Revel casino was shutting its doors a little over two years after its opening. The Showboat Casino Hotel closed its doors a couple of weeks ago, and Trump Plaza is closing next week. This flurry of gambling news, along with back-to-school fundraisers which could include selling raffle tickets, gives us a timely opportunity to discuss gambling.

The word "gamble" is not found in the Bible, but neither are the words "larceny" or "pornography." The practice, however, violates Bible principles regardless of the amount of money involved. We will examine what constitutes gambling and then examine Bible principles regarding its moral significance.

I. What Gambling Is

A. The definition of gambling.

1. There are four essential elements of gambling.

- a) A game of chance or skill — any event of uncertain outcome. This may be a game the gamblers play among themselves or it may be some event that would have occurred (i.e. an election or sports event).
- b) The stakes — each player places at risk some possession of material value.
- c) The agreement (wager or bet) — before the game each player agrees to risk losing his possessions in exchange for the opportunity to take the possessions of others, depending on the outcome of the game.
- d) Lack of fair compensation — no goods or services of fair value are given in exchange for what is lost. The loser will give up his possessions without being recompensed, and the winner will gain possessions without repaying the loser.

B. Activities that are not gambling.

1. People sometimes confuse the issue by claiming that certain acts are gambling, even though some essential elements of gambling are missing.
 - a) Crossing the street or driving a car. Some people say, "Everything in life involves a gamble." This confuses risk with gambling. Not all risks involve gambling. These acts involve no wager and no stakes. There is no agreement to try to take someone else's possessions.
 - b) Games without stakes or bets. The same games, on which people sometimes bet, can be played simply for fun with no possessions put at risk. This too is not gambling.
 - c) Farming, owning a business, etc. Some say this is gambling because one risks losing money. But again there is no wager, but there is compensation. There is no agreement to take other people's property without compensation. The intent is to produce goods or services of benefit to others in exchange for what benefits us.
 - d) Investing in stock. Some say this is gambling, but what is stock? Stock is a means for people to become part owners of a company. Buying stock is no more inherently gambling than is ownership of any other business. The intent is to make a profit by producing something of benefit to customers. Investors receive their share of these profits in the form of dividends or increases in the value of the stock. Furthermore, when stock is sold, both buyer and seller agree on the price. There is no wager — no prior agreement to risk loss at another's expense..
 - e) Buying insurance. Some think insurance is gambling. But again, there is no wager and there is compensation. No one agrees to gain at the expense of someone else's loss. On the contrary, the whole purpose of insurance is to compensate the insured if he does have a loss. If no such loss occurs, the customer has purchased the peace of mind of knowing he would have been compensated if he had experienced a loss.
2. In short, none of these examples constitute gambling, since no one necessarily wants uncompensated losses to occur. But the gambler always wants financial loss to occur because he hopes to profit from those losses.

C. Activities that are gambling.

1. In the following examples, all the elements of gambling are present.

- a) Casino gambling: slot machines, roulette wheels, dice and card games, numbers games, etc., played for stakes, whether on a boat or on land.
 - b) Racetrack betting on horses, dogs, cars, etc.
 - c) Lotteries.
 - d) Bingo, raffles, etc., for charity. If someone says, "It's for a good cause," just make a donation and skip the gambling!
 - e) Bazaar and fair booths/games where you pay to spin a wheel, knock down a milk jug, throw a ring on a bottle, etc, and try to win a prize.
 - f) Amateur gambling including poker games for money, office pools, fantasy football, etc. Also included are some athletic leagues where winners are not just awarded a trophy or plaque, but players put money into a "pot" then play to try to win some of the money.
2. Even if small amounts of money are involved, such activities still violate Bible principles. Furthermore, they establish a precedent that makes it impossible to consistently object to other people's gambling. Where do you draw the line and say, "This much money risked is all right, but any more is immoral?"

II. Objections To Gambling

- A. It violates three principles of legitimate passage of money and/or possessions.
 - 1. The law of labor.
 - a) One may be paid as compensation for work done to produce goods or services that benefit other people. Scripture strongly teaches this "work ethic" (Ephesians 4:28; 1 Thessalonians 4:11-12; 2 Thessalonians 3:10-12; 1 Timothy 5:18).
 - b) We must not try to live off the labors of others. We can expect goods or services from others only as compensation for work we do that produces something of benefit. Gambling undermines the biblical work ethic because, instead of accomplishing productive labor that benefits others, the gambler seeks to get something for nothing by taking what other people have earned.
 - c) Someone may argue, "Gamblers are just paying for a form of entertainment." However, in legitimate entertainment the entertainers are paid for providing a service. But gamblers are all providing the same "service" for one another; so if gambling were legitimate entertainment, then all participants should be paid or all should pay. The gambler does not want the other players to profit; he wants to profit at their expense! This violates the principle that the laborer is worthy of his hire.

2. The law of exchange.

- a) A person may simply agree to exchange possessions (goods or money) with someone else. Each party is paid or fairly compensated by receiving possessions of fair value in return for what he gives up (Genesis 23:1-18; Matthew 13:45-46; John 4:8).
- b) Neither party should attempt to take other people's property without giving fair value in exchange. But again gambling does not fit here because the winner has no intention to compensate the loser. In fact, each gambler hopes other people will lose so he can take their property, while at the same time he hopes no one will take his property.

3. The law of giving.

- a) A person may knowingly choose, of his own free will, to unconditionally give something away as an expression of kindness, with no obligation for the receiver to offer any compensation in return (Acts 20:35; 2 Corinthians 9:6-7; Ephesians 4:28; 1 John 3:17-18).
- b) Again, gambling does not fit this category because gamblers do not give willingly or freely as an act of love or compassion.

B. It violates the laws against covetousness and greed.

1. What is covetousness and greed?

- a) In general covetousness is the desire to wrongfully take someone else's property. It is a desire for the increasing of one's substance by appropriating that of others. So a person is covetous if he wants to take other people's property in a way not authorized by God.
- b) The Bible repeatedly warns against covetousness and greed (Proverbs 1:19; 15:27; 21:26; Mark 7:20-23; Romans 1:29-32; 1 Corinthians 6:9-11; Ephesians 5:5-7; 1 Timothy 6:6-10; 2 Timothy 3:2; Hebrews 13:5).
- c) If we seek to take someone else's property which he really does not want to give, while at the same time we seek to avoid giving him fair compensation in return, that would be covetousness. Yet this is exactly what gambling involves.

2. Efforts to rationalize gambling.

- a) Someone may say, "Gamblers agree to pay up if they lose, so they do give it willingly." But it is not done in the spirit of good will that the Bible describes, else why does the gambler try to keep others from taking his possessions?
- b) The truth is, gambling is mutual covetousness like dueling is mutual attempted murder. In dueling, each person agrees to let

the other person try to kill him in exchange for the opportunity to try to kill the other person.

- c) But killing would still be unauthorized regardless of the agreement (Romans 13:8-10). So a gambler agrees to let others try to take what he has in exchange for the opportunity for him to try to take what the others have. The agreement simply makes both parties guilty of sin!
 - d) Someone else may say, "It's just a friendly game. We don't really care whether we win or lose the money." A professional gambler once told me that people gamble, not to make money, but for the excitement.
 - e) If people do not gamble for the money, why not leave the money out of it? If you say, "The money makes it more exciting," then I ask why so, if you do not care about the money! The only possible reason why the money makes it more exciting, is that gamblers do care about the money!
- C. It violates the principles of stewardship.
- 1. We are stewards of God's manifold blessings and should use these blessings to glorify God (1 Peter 4:10-11; cp. 1 Corinthians 4:1-2).
 - 2. Material property is part of our stewardship in that God ultimately owns everything physical but has entrusted them to us (Psalm 24:1-2; 50:10-12). Instead of being greedy and loving the physical, we should use them to accomplish God's purposes (1 Timothy 6:9-10, 17-19).
 - 3. The gambler is an unfaithful steward. Instead of using the Master's possessions for the intended purpose, the unfaithful steward wastes them or risks losing them for selfish purposes (Matthew 25:14-30; Luke 16:1-2).
- D. It violates the law of love.
- 1. The second greatest command is "love your neighbor as yourself" (Matthew 22:39). Does the gambler love his neighbor as he loves himself?
 - 2. Love leads us to do good, not harm, even to our enemies (Luke 6:27; 1 John 3:16-18). Note that coveting violates the law of love because it does harm our neighbor (Romans 13:8-10). Love does not seek to profit by taking what belongs to others against their will and without compensation.
 - 3. Do to others as you want them to do to you (Matthew 7:12). Does the gambler want the other players to take his possessions? No! Then he must not try to take theirs! By definition, gambling violates the law of love because a gambler tries to do to others what he does not want them to do to him.

4. We should seek, not just our own interests, but the interests of others (Philippians 2:4). Gambling, by its nature, is selfish and self-seeking — completely contrary to love.
- E. It is a root of all sorts of evil.
1. A tree is known by its fruits (Matthew 7:16-19). If gambling produces evil, this will confirm our conclusion that gambling is evil (1 Timothy 6:9-10).
 2. The fruits caused by and associated with gambling.
 - a) Poverty and divorce. Gamblers often gamble with money the family needs to survive.
 - b) Anger and hatred. This is directed by the losers against the winners, especially if the losers think they have been cheated.
 - c) Drinking and drugs, alcoholism, and addiction. Gamblers who lose seek to drown their sorrow and guilt.
 - d) Lying. Gamblers seek to hide their habit and their losses.
 - e) Crime. A surprising amount of gambling is illegal. Gambling of all kinds attracts criminal types and is often sponsored by organized crime syndicates. Gamblers often deal drugs, embezzle, or steal to get money to gamble or to pay gambling debts.
 - f) Sexual immorality. A tremendous amount of immoral entertainment is provided in gambling places. The Las Vegas Yellow Pages has 136 pages of advertisements relating to prostitution.
 - g) Suicide. It is an escape from compulsive gambling or from huge losses.
- F. It is a temptation and evil influence.
1. Like drinkers and drug abusers, gamblers begin by thinking they can avoid the dangers involved. But participation lures them in deeper and subjects them to the moral dangers associated with gambling. Is it worth the risk?
 2. Several passages warn us against taking such risks for the sake of our own self-indulgence (Proverbs 13:20; Matthew 6:13; 26:41; 1 Corinthians 15:33; 1 Timothy 6:9).
- G. It sets a horrible example.
1. Gamblers not only sin and tempt themselves to sin, they also tempt others to sin (Matthew 5:13-16; 18:6-7; 1 Timothy 4:12).
 - a) Young people — As with smoking, drinking, and drug abuse, most gamblers start young because of the influence of others: friends, relatives, older people they respect. If you gamble, your example may lead some young person to start or continue gambling.

- b) Reformed compulsive gamblers — As with alcoholics and drug addicts, when a compulsive gambler quits, he must never again return to the practice or he immediately becomes an addict again. If he sees or knows you gamble, your example encourages him to try the practice again.
 - c) Non-Christians — Many people who are not Christians know that gambling is very un-Christlike. If you gamble, you may never be able to lead them to hear the soul-saving gospel. Furthermore, the gambler will never be a successful soul-saver (Proverbs 11:30).
2. No one gambles alone. If you gamble, you must gamble with others. So every gambler has a bad influence on someone. The only way to avoid this problem is simply to avoid gambling altogether.

Conclusion. Christians imitate the example of Jesus (Matthew 10:24-25; 1 Corinthians 11:1; 1 Peter 2:21-22). Can you honestly imagine Jesus on a river boat playing a slot machine or roulette wheel, or betting on a dice or poker game? Does gambling harmonize with the example of Jesus and the teaching of His word?