

A Study Of Moral Issues: Gambling

Introduction. Looking at online forums, there is virtually no one willing to say that gambling is sinful, as long as it does not become a harmful addiction. The church has spoken out very little and done virtually nothing in opposition to the presence and influence of gambling. Government, especially on the state level, is an advocate for gambling, and the church needs to take a stand, expose the evils of gambling, and declare how it is really at odds with the righteous principles of the New Testament.

While the Bible does not say, “You shall not gamble,” or “gambling is wrong,” it does teach that while we might be free to do many activities, not everything is profitable and we should never be brought under the control or power of anything other than the righteous and pure reign of Christ in our lives.

I. The Definition Of Gambling

- A. The definition of gambling, according to the New Oxford American Dictionary, is “to play games of chance for money or some other stake.” It is the concept of “getting something for nothing.” There are four major elements to gambling.
 - 1. A game of chance or skill — any event of uncertain outcome. This may be a game that gamblers play among themselves (such as poker or blackjack) or may be some event that would have occurred anyway (such as the outcome of an election or sports event).
 - 2. The stakes. Each player places some possession of material value at risk.
 - 3. 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.
 - 4. 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. Gambling takes many forms: card games, dice, betting or pools of any kind, sweepstakes tickets, the lottery, carnival games, slot machines, bingo (for money or prizes), and raffle tickets. Also, athletic leagues where winners are not just awarded a trophy or plaque, but put money into a “pool” then play to try to win money or prizes, like fantasy football, March Madness, and golf and fishing tournaments, is gambling.
 - 1. Gambling is a matter of kind, not degree. Whether someone is wagering fifty cents or fifty dollars, or whether someone is buying dollar raffle tickets or playing blackjack in Las Vegas, he is still violating the same divine principles.
 - 2. The tenets of Gamblers Anonymous states, “Any betting or wagering, whether for money or not no matter how slight or insignificant where the outcome is uncertain or depends on chance or ‘skill,’ constitutes gambling.”
- C. People have tried to justify gambling by two ways.
 - 1. “Every activity in life involves a risk or chance.”

- a) Some have said that gambling is no more wrong than crossing the street, buying life insurance, owning a business, or investing in real estate. This reasoning is misleading.
 - b) These are not wagers placed on a chance. These are not parallel to the covetously motivated desire to risk one's own possessions in order to get someone else's. Not all risks involve gambling. There are no stakes, no wager, and no desire for uncompensated losses to occur in many of the risks we assume everyday.
2. "Gambling is found in the Bible."
- a) The casting of lots was used for various purposes in the Bible.
 - (1) The assignment of tribal lands (Numbers 26:55).
 - (2) The rotation of the offices of the priests (1 Chronicles 24:5).
 - (3) The identification of law offenders (Jonah 1:7).
 - (4) The selection of the apostle Matthias (Acts 1:26).
 - b) These were not forms of gambling. This was simply the method by which the Lord made His will known to man (Proverbs 16:33).

II. The Sin Of Gambling

- A. The Hasting's Encyclopedia of Religion and Ethics argues that gambling is motivated primarily by three desires.
1. The desire for gain.
 - a) Human nature is impatient with the delays of regular work. We want to acquire wealth at one stroke, without trouble and without gradual accumulation (Proverbs 15:27; 21:25-26).
 - b) In local lotteries, gamblers want to win the lottery without doing any work to earn it; they covet the fruits of labor expended by others.
 2. The desire for excitement.
 - a) This is, in a sense, a revolt against the narrowness, limitations, and ordinariness of existence. Man craves an intensified life; and gambling, with its risk, thrill, and hope supplies all the necessary elements.
 - b) On one hand, it is a resource for those who have no excitement in their lives; on the other hand, it is an outlet for the energetic and adventurous who find ordinary peaceful existence too boring.
 3. The instinct of combativeness.
 - a) In gambling, someone bets on their own ability, judgment, and luck. In a game of pure chance, people pit themselves against each other.
 - b) If there is no deception, each has an equal chance of winning, and even when all seems lost, a sudden victory is still possible.
- B. While "gambling" is not in the Bible, neither are the words "larceny" or "pornography." Will we authorize our activities by the absence of a particular English word? What if we changed these words? Would it make them right?
1. Murder — "life-extinguishing."
 2. Fornication — "noncommittal sexual relationship."
 3. Kidnapping — "child replacement."
 4. Assault — "hostility transference."

- C. This attitude ignores the scriptural approach to human problems. While the Bible does issue commands, it also contains principles which direct our moral and religious lives (Proverbs 2:6; 3:5-6; 1 Corinthians 10:31).
- D. Gambling is a violation of several biblical principles.
1. Gambling violates the New Testament obligation of faithful stewardship.
 - a) As recipients of the manifold grace of God, Christians must function as good stewards (1 Peter 4:10). We are careful to be “faithful and wise stewards” (Luke 12:42; 16:2), for the Lord requires in stewards that we are found faithful (1 Corinthians 4:2).
 - b) The biblical concept of stewardship teaches that God is the owner of the entire universe; everything is His and exists to glorify Him (Psalm 24:1; Isaiah 43:7). Anything that is not used, either directly or indirectly, for God’s service is misused. No person has the right to abuse the benevolence of God and involve himself in gambling away what does not really belong to him.
 - c) A professor of business in Utah told of a student whose mother won \$25,000 and an SUV one night at the casino. Her mom’s private comment when she got home? “I broke even tonight.”
 - d) “Gambling’s get-rich-quick appeal appears to mock capitalism’s core values: disciplined work habits, thrift, prudence, adherence to routine, and the relationship between effort and reward.” These core values of the work ethic are all part of a righteous life. Gambling corrupts these values and replaces them with greed and selfishness. Rather than depending on hard work, gamblers depend instead on luck and chance.
 2. Gambling violates the “golden rule.”
 - a) Gambling teaches that if one can secure his neighbor’s possessions by chance, it is the loser’s tough luck (Matthew 7:12; Romans 13:10).
 - b) The biblical pattern teaches that a man seeks his neighbor’s welfare (1 Corinthians 10:24; Philippians 2:4). Gambling is theft by consent. It involves the philosophy of do it to him before he does it to you.
 3. Gambling breeds covetousness and immorality.
 - a) The Bible teaches to be content with what we have and not lust after riches (Luke 12:13-15; Colossians 3:5-6; 1 Timothy 6:10; Hebrews 13:5).
 - b) Gamblers, like alcoholics and drug abusers, can resort to stealing or other illicit ways to cover gambling losses (Matthew 7:17-18). Gamblers lie because they seek to hide their habit and their losses. Some women have turned to prostitution to get money to gamble or to pay gambling debts. Studies of problem gamblers attending Gamblers Anonymous or in treatment have demonstrated that 22-37% have embezzled or stolen in the workplace. The National Council on Problem Gambling, citing various studies, reports that one in five pathological gamblers attempts suicide, a rate higher than for any other addictive disorder.
 4. Gambling promotes laziness and quenches the desire for honest work.
 - a) From the beginning, God intended that man work (Genesis 2:15). Later, the curse on Adam was that he would only eat by great effort (Genesis 3:19). God approved three means of transfer of money or property.

- (1) The law of labor whereby one earns a wage because of time and energy (physical or mental) expended (2 Thessalonians 3:10).
- (2) The law of exchange whereby one commodity is exchanged for its equivalent in money or another commodity (Matthew 13:45-46).
- (3) The law of giving whereby money is given to another without any expectation of anything in return (Acts 20:35).
- b) One who gambles seeks to obtain what another has worked for at little cost to himself (cp. Ezekiel 22:13; Luke 10:7; Romans 12:17). He views himself as a victim of “hard luck,” so “fortune” owes him something.
- 5. Gambling can be very addictive and controlling.
 - a) Christ taught that all who commit sin will be a slave to sin (John 8:34).
 - (1) About 7% of the adult population in the United States are compulsive gamblers, and this is being fed by growing casino accessibility. Children are three times as likely as adults to get hooked on a bad habit, meaning that a sizable amount of children and teens who gamble will become addicts. Compulsive gamblers come from all walks of life. They have families, jobs, and hold influential positions in their community. They are not “bad” people.
 - (2) Because the victims of compulsive gamblers are usually family members, there is less publicity about the consequences. Family violence, bankruptcy, and divorce do not make the news. But they leave lasting marks on those close to the gambling addict.
 - (3) A 2005 study of 1,000 18-year-olds in New Zealand found that the personality profile associated with problem gambling was very similar to substance-related addictive disorders such as alcohol, nicotine, and marijuana addiction. The study also found that people with problem gambling in the past year were three times as likely to have one of three substance-abuse issues. The habits tend to feed into each other: Gamblers will use gambling money to buy drugs and sell drugs to support gambling habits.
 - (4) Gambling addiction statistics show that people between the ages 20 and 30 have the highest rates of problem gambling. Seventy-five percent of college students report having gambled during the past year. The risk of developing a gambling addiction more than doubles for young adults in college settings.
 - b) The Christian has to be strong and possess self-control (1 Corinthians 6:12; Galatians 5:23). A stand has to be made somewhere, and Gamblers Anonymous members have found that the first bet is the one to avoid.

Conclusion. Worldwide, gambling is a 500 billion dollar business a year. The allure of “getting rich quick” is too great a temptation to resist for those who are desperate. The chances of winning are infinitesimal, which results in many peoples’ lives being ruined. As with other issues we have studied, a Christian can be ultimately victorious through the decision to abstain from sin and harness the power of Christ.