

Gambling

Introduction. From the dusty streets of ancient Babylon to the glittering Las Vegas Strip, whether with animal bones or a deck of cards, gambling is virtually as old and as widespread as the human race. In Babylon headless arrows were used in wagers, and in the time of Homer the Greeks had dice marked with numbers on four sides which were made from the knuckle bones of sheep, goats, and calves. The children of Rome played "heads and tails" with coins. Archaeological discoveries have revealed gambling devices as far back as 1800 B.C.

Not that long ago, Americans held gambling in nearly the same esteem as heroin dealing and applauded when ax-wielding police paid a visit to the corner dice room. But moral outrage has become as outmoded as a penny slot machine. Gambling -- especially poker -- 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."

According to the American Gaming Association, in 2006, gaming activities generated gross revenues of \$91 billion in the United States. That is more than what is spent on spectator sports, movies, recorded music, video games, and theme parks combined. Casinos now operate or are authorized in 26 states. Lotteries are played in 37 states and the District of Columbia. Bingo, the most common gambling game of them all, is legal in 46 states. Only three states -- Hawaii, Tennessee, and Utah -- have no legalized gambling. Since 1992, the Texas Lottery has generated over \$16 billion dollars. Approximately 27% of the revenue went to education. Total U.S. consumer spending at commercial casinos more than doubled in the decade from 1994 to 2004. In 2005, 53% of adult Americans played the lottery, 35% gambled in a casino, 18% played poker, 6% bet on a race and 2% engaged in Internet gambling. In Nevada and New Jersey, the only two states that track poker revenues, Americans spent 45 percent more on poker in 2004 -- \$151.7 million -- than they did the previous year.

There are members of the Lord's body who have the attitude that the gospel cannot confront modern moral issues. Maybe you do not realize just how dangerous it is, but it undermines the principles of the Bible. If we cannot control this, we will open a floodgate of problems that will drag the church down and leave other generations struggling to fix them.

I. ***The Definition Of Gambling***

- A. The common definition for 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 the gamblers play among themselves 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 possession 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 is gambling.
1. Gambling is a matter of kind, not degree. Whether someone is wagering fifty cents or fifty dollars, or whether someone is pitching pennies 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 upon 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, purchasing life insurance, owning a business, or investing in real estate. This reasoning is absurd and misleading. This is not a wager placed on a chance.
 - b) 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.
 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 urges.
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, suspense, 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. The word "gambling" is not in the Bible, but neither are the words "rape," "larceny," or "pornography." Will we seek authority for 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. 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 must be 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 us 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."
2. Gambling violates the "golden rule."
- a) Gambling teaches that if one is able to secure his neighbor's possessions by means of chance, that is the loser's tough luck (Matthew 7:12; Romans 13:10).
 - b) The biblical pattern teaches that a man must seek his neighbor's welfare (1 Corinthians 10:24; Philippians 2:4). Gambling is theft by consent. Gambling involves the philosophy of do it unto him before he does it unto you.
3. Gambling breeds covetousness and immorality.
- a) The Bible teaches us 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 of acquiring money to cover gambling losses (Matthew 7:17-18). Gamblers lie because they seek to hide their habit and their losses. Many women turn to prostitution to get money to gamble or to pay gambling debts. Approximately 75 percent of Reno, Nevada embezzlement cases are gambling related. About 20% of problem gamblers try to kill themselves.
4. Gambling promotes laziness and quenches the desire for honest work.
- a) From the very beginning of time, God intended that man work (Genesis 2:15). Later, the curse upon Adam was that he would eat by the sweat of his brow (Genesis 3:19). God approved three basic 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 (1 Timothy 5:8; 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; John 4:8).
- (3) "The law of giving" whereby money is given to another without any expectation of anything in return (Acts 20:35; Ephesians 4:28).
- b) One who gambles seeks to obtain what another has worked for at little cost to himself (cf. 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 become a slave to sin (John 8:34).
 - (1) About 7% of the adult population in the United States are compulsive gamblers. 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. Divorce, bankruptcy, family violence, and shame 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 marijuana and sell marijuana to support gambling habits.
 - b) The Christian must 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.

III. ***The Effects Of Gambling***

- A. Many people believe that gambling can be a legitimate way of relieving the taxation burden. Gambling interests, attempting to capitalize upon such attitudes, suggest that the funds could be made available for

education, the elderly and disabled, etc. Gambling as a source of revenue is not new to America. Lotteries have funded the building of the Washington Monument and started the University of Pennsylvania.

- B. However, schemes such as these have never really worked and the liabilities always outweigh the alleged benefits.
 - 1. Many states are dazzled by the prospects of wealth through a state lottery. They rarely consider the flip side of the coin when considering the cost of higher crime rates, the infiltration of organized crime, the increased cost of welfare, and the cost of human misery to those families who have gambling addicts.
 - 2. This misery can take the form of poverty, neglect, fighting, divorce, alcoholism, school truancy, lying, and suicide. There is no realistic reason why a state should be involved in promoting an industry which has so many negative impacts -- and they know it ahead of time.
 - 3. The untold secret is that when states raise money through the lottery, they usually cut the amount they are putting into those programs. But even if gambling provided an abundance of wealth, it is never right to do evil that good may abound (Romans 3:8).
- C. The "lottery curse" is when someone wins the lottery and expects their life to change radically for the better. However, instead of a blissful life with millions of dollars, it goes horribly wrong. Sadly, it is not unusual for people to go broke after winning the lottery.
 - 1. Callie Rogers won \$3 million in the lottery. After six years, she was down to \$32,000. She had blown all the rest on designer clothes, drugs, partying, and exotic cars. She was quoted as saying: "I honestly wish I'd never won the lottery money -- and knowing what I know now I should have just given it all back to them."
 - 2. Kenneth and Connie Parker won a \$25 million jackpot. After becoming rich beyond their wildest dreams, their marriage of 16 years collapsed.
 - 3. Jeffrey Dampier, a \$20 million winner, was kidnapped and murdered by his own sister-in-law.
 - 4. Jack Whittaker, who won one of the largest payouts in lottery history, stated at the time, "I can take this much money and do a lot of good with this much money right now." However, it did not work out as he planned. His life was soon consumed by hardship, including the death of his granddaughter due to a drug overdose and the breakup of his marriage. His ex-wife was quoted as saying, "If I knew what was going to transpire, honestly, I would have torn the ticket up."
- D. Few realize that gambling is a parasite on a local economy. Millions of dollars are automatically removed from an economy each week to feed

the lottery and supposedly to fix society's problems. State legislators think this is free money, but it is not free. It is just taken from other parts of the local economy. Casino owner Donald Trump admitted, "People will spend a tremendous amount of money in casinos, money that they would normally spend on buying a refrigerator or a new car." The lowest economic groups are always the ones with the predisposition to gamble, and they cost all of us money. For example, if someone declares bankruptcy and walks away from tens of thousands of dollars in credit card debt, that cost gets passed along in the form of higher interest rates for everyone else who uses a credit card.

Conclusion. The Gamblers Anonymous guidebook says, "The greatest loss that resulted from our gambling was neither time nor money, which are gone forever, but our sense of values." We live in a world that is increasingly lax on gambling. Many think that because gambling is not mentioned in the Bible, there is nothing wrong with it. Gambling is a sin because it violates God's principles! If do not treat gambling as a sin, our children will see no wrong in the existence of gambling and all the corruption that coexists with it.