

## What Does The Bible Say About Gambling

### I. "Gambling is inevitable."

1. So began the introduction to the final report of the Commission on the Review of National Policy Toward Gambling.
2. "No matter what is said or done by advocates or opponents of gambling in all its various forms, it is an activity which is practiced, or endorsed, by a substantial majority of Americans."
3. No doubt that statement is true.

### II. Most Americans like to gamble now and again, and most of those who don't, have no qualms about those who do.

1. The Commission issued its final report in 1976 after three years of research.
2. The report contains two interesting—and seemingly contradictory—statements.
  - a. First, it found that "most Americans gamble because they like to, and they see nothing wrong with it."
    - i. This being so, they see no real distinction between going to the track to place a bet and backing their favorite horse with the local bookmaker."
  - b. Second, the commission noted that although gambling is practiced by two-thirds of the American people and approved by perhaps 80 per cent of the population, it nevertheless "contributes more than any other single enterprise to police corruption in their cities and towns and to the well-being of the nation's criminals."

### III. There in just two quotations is the whole debate concerning gambling.

1. Like every good debate, there are two sides to the question.
2. One side asks, "How can any activity which receives the approval of 80 percent of the people be considered wrong?"
3. The other side replies, "How can we give our approval to any activity which so obviously opens the door to personal and civic corruption?"

### IV. There are a few questions about gambling which must be answered.

1. What does the Bible say about gambling?
2. Why should legalized gambling concern the Christian?
3. Is gambling always wrong?
4. To be sure, Christians have not always agreed on the answers to those questions.

### V. In fact, there are three schools of thought on the question of gambling and the Christian faith.

1. The first is the position which sees gambling on a small scale as a harmless social activity.
  - a. This is the position of the Catholic Church.
2. The second is the position which sees no great harm in gambling but opposes legalization on a major scale.
  - a. Many mainline denominations take this position along with many individual Catholics.
3. The third is the position which views gambling as a moral evil and therefore opposes it in any form, public or private.
  - a. Most evangelicals take the third view.
4. For the Christian, every thing in life must be considered in light of, "**What does the Bible say?**"
  - a. Every choice we make must be filtered through, "*what saith the Lord?*"
  - b. Colossians 3:17 makes it very clear, "*And whatever you do in word or deed, do all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through Him.*"
  - c. It is by His Word that we, as well as all mankind, will be judged (John 12:48).
5. When considering a matter we must ask, "is it right or wrong?"

### VI. Having said that, it must be admitted that gambling is fairly popular among church members (Christendom) across the board.

1. Tom Watson, Jr., in his book Don't Bet On It (Regal Books, 1987) reports that, when asked, 8 out of 10 Roman Catholics classify themselves as gamblers.
2. Gambling among Jews is pegged at 77 per cent, followed by Presbyterians and Episcopalians at 74 per cent, Methodists at 63 per cent, and Baptists at 43 per cent.
3. Among those calling themselves nondenominational, 33 per cent say they gamble now and then.
4. Watson notes that this last group includes the traditionally conservative Bible churches.
5. As he says, "that figure sounds low when compared to the denominations, but it means that one out of every three conservative Christians may have no scruples about gambling." (p.64)
6. Therefore, because Christians have not always agreed on gambling, it is worthwhile for us to examine the issue of gambling from a Biblical perspective.

## **Discussion**

### **I. Definition Of Gambling**

A. The issue is more important than it might seem.

1. It is sometimes said that buying life insurance or investing in the stock market is a form of gambling.
2. If that is true, then most of us are guilty of gambling or (and this is what is intended by the argument) gambling is not wrong.
3. Such a viewpoint can only be sustained by a vague, indistinct definition.
4. The dictionary defines gambling as:
  - a. "to bet money on the outcome of a game, contest, or other event,"
  - b. "to play a game of chance for money or other stakes."
5. Another more complicated definition says that gambling is "wagering money—or something of value—on an uncertain event whose outcome is dependent either wholly on chance or partly on chance and partly on skill."
6. Those definitions have in common two key elements:
  - a. The first is the element of chance or luck.
  - b. The second is the wagering of money.

B. However, those definitions leave out a key element which other definitions include:

Gambling is "participation in any game of chance in which a prize is offered to the winners at the losers' loss."

1. That is very important and must not be overlooked.
2. True gambling means that for me to win you must lose or for you to win I must lose.
3. It is this principle which is behind all forms of gambling—from the friendly Friday night poker game to the glittery casinos of Las Vegas.
4. If the winner's prize doesn't come at the expense of the loser, then it's not really gambling.
5. Here, then, is a comprehensive definition: "Gambling is the betting of money—or something of value—on the outcome of an artificially created chance or uncertain event, whereby the prize money is not determined by value, service or goodwill but rather by chance, in such a way that the gain of the winners is at the expense of the losers."

C. Therefore, there are three key elements in the definition of gambling:

1. First, the betting of money or something else of value.
2. Second, the winner is determined by a chance or uncertain event.
3. Third, the gain of the winners is at the expense of the losers.
4. Such a definition is broad enough to include traditional casino gambling, the Friday night poker game, bingo, raffles, lotteries, pari-mutuel betting, and other more exotic forms of wagering.
5. It is narrow enough to exclude things like life insurance and investing in the stock market.

D. Incidentally, the primary difference between gambling and life insurance or investing in the stock market is that the first involves artificially-created risks while the latter two involve risks inherent in life.

1. That is, everyone is going to die.

a. That is a determined factor; the only undetermined factor is when a given person will die.

b. Life insurance does not create the risk of death, but merely spreads the risk out among many people.

2. Likewise, the stock market will go up or down depending on various conditions in the economy.

a. That is a determined factor; the only undetermined factor is when and by how much.

b. Investing in the stock market does not create the risk of economic change, but merely spreads it among many people.

3. Planning in light of the future certainty of death is not gambling nor is investing in view of future economic change.

E. In light of the definition, it should be clear that horse racing is not gambling.

1. Likewise, playing bingo is not gambling.

2. But betting money on the outcome of a horse race or on the outcome of a bingo game is gambling.

3. It is gambling because the winner of a horse race is an uncertain event and the winner of a bingo game is determined by chance.

4. It is gambling because money is wagered.

5. It is gambling because the winner's prize is paid out of the loser's money.

F. The key point is that the money to pay the winner has to come from somewhere and the only somewhere it can come from is from the pockets of those who wagered and lost.

1. Las Vegas is not, as is often claimed, a winner's town.

2. It is a loser's town, kept in business by losers, kept running for losers.

3. The same could be said for WinStar Casino in Thackerville or Choctaw Casino in Durant.

4. These are kept in business by losers.

5. If everyone won, or if even most people won, or if anything other than a tiny minority won, Las Vegas and the others mentioned, would go out of business tomorrow.

6. It is built on loser's money.

7. The casinos pay off the occasional winners and pocket the rest of the money.

## **II. Now having said all of that, let's consider, "What The Bible Says About Gambling."**

A. It is worth noting that the Bible has relatively little to say about gambling.

1. There are various references to the casting of lots in the Old Testament which may be similar to rolling dice. (Joshua 14:2, I Chronicles 25:7, Proverbs 16:33)

2. However, the purpose of casting lots was to determine the Lord's will in a given matter, not to make a financial gain.

3. The only New Testament reference to anything that approaches modern gambling is the account of the Roman soldiers casting lots for Jesus' garments at the foot of the cross. (Matthew 27:35)

4. Since the Bible does not deal with the issue directly, we are forced to look at the larger context of the Bible.

5. We must look to principles from the word of God that will provide the direction that we need in this area as well as any area.

6. Remember Peter wrote, *"as His divine power has given to us all things that pertain to life and godliness, through the knowledge of Him who called us by glory and virtue."*

7. God has provided the answers for all of life's questions, we simply must study His word to find them.

8. When we do that, it becomes very clear how God feels about this issue.

B. What is so sinful about gambling?

### **Body.**

**I. Gambling is sinful because it violates the Golden Rule.** *"Therefore, whatever you want men to do to you, do also to them, for this is the Law and the Prophets."* (Matt. 7:12).

A. In gambling, you desire that others lose so you can win.

1. It has to be that way in order for it to work.
2. It is "winner take all" while everyone else loses all.
3. That is the foundation upon which gambling exists.
4. That is not what Jesus said in Matthew 7:12.

B. Gambling deprives others of the means of their living.

1. It doesn't matter if they are a willing participant or not, the result is the same.
2. People may agree to steal but, that does not make it right (cf. Rom. 13:9).
3. People may agree to commit fornication, but their agreement doesn't make it right!
4. Fornication is sin, period (1 Cor. 6:13,18)!

**II. Gambling is sinful because it violates God's work ethic; it is not an honest day's work for an honest day's pay.**

A. Gambling is an attempt to beat someone else out of what they have without having to compensate them for it with honest labor.

1. The work ethic God gave man from the very beginning says, *"In the sweat of your face you shall eat bread..."* (Gen. 3:19).

2. It is man's responsibility to labor and earn a living. *"Let him who stole steal no longer, but rather let him labor, working with his hands what is good, that he may have something to give him who has need."* (Eph. 4:28).

B. According to the Bible, there are three legitimate ways to get money.

1. First, you can work for it. (II Thessalonians 3:10)
2. Second, you can make money through wise investments. (Luke 19:1-27)
3. Third, you can receive a gift or an inheritance. (II Corinthians 12:14)
4. There is no fourth category.

C. Gambling is not work, for the gambler hopes to make money without working at all.

1. Gambling is not an investment, for the gambler creates an artificial risk hoping to make easy money.

2. Gambling is not a gift, for the money is won from the losers, not given as a gift.

**III. Gambling is sinful because it violates the principle of proper stewardship.** *"Moreover it is required in stewards, that one be found faithful"* (1 Cor. 4:2).

A. The Bible repeatedly and consistently paints the picture that God is the ultimate owner of all earthly possessions.

1. The psalmist observed that the Lord owns the cattle on a thousand hills (Psalm 50:10).

2. James wrote that every good and perfect gift comes from God (James 1:17).

3. Jesus referred to humans as stewards—those who are entrusted to take care of another's property (Luke 12:42).

4. And He declared that every person has the moral responsibility to be a faithful steward of the money that has been entrusted to him (Luke 16:10-11).

B. Yet, each year people shell out billions of dollars gambling away the money that has been entrusted to them by God.

1. Imagine the good, wholesome projects that could be supported annually by such enormous stores of cash—children could be fed, the Gospel could be preached, houses could be built, and the list goes on.

2. Instead of such worthwhile projects, however, these billions of dollars are pumped into a system that leads to addiction and abuse.

3. It would be difficult, indeed, to conclude that gambling is good stewardship of the money with which God has entrusted a person.

4. In reality, to pour one's money into a system that mathematically and statistically has been proven, time and again, to benefit the "house," and take from the gambler, certainly would fall into the category of unfaithful stewardship.

5. Concerning unfaithful stewardship, Christ said: *"Therefore if you have not been faithful in the unrighteous mammon (money or riches), who will commit to your trust the true riches?"* (Luke 16:11).

6. To stand before the throne of Christ, having squandered the money God entrusted to you on an idle and degenerative activity like gambling, would be a frightening thought indeed.

**IV. Gambling is sinful because it sets an evil example.** We are to *"Repay no one evil for evil. Have regard for good things in the sight of all men."* (Rom. 12:17).

A. Gambling is not an honest way of making a living.

1. It is living off of the misfortune of others.

a. *"in all things showing yourself to be a pattern of good works; in doctrine showing integrity, reverence, incorruptibility, sound speech that cannot be condemned, that one who is an opponent may be ashamed, having nothing evil to say of you."* (Titus 2:7- 8).

b. *"Beloved, do not imitate what is evil, but what is good. He who does good is of God, but he who does evil has not seen God."* (3 John 11).

2. We must set a good example for others. *"Let no one despise your youth, but be an example to the believers in word, in conduct, in love, in spirit, in faith, in purity."* (1 Tim. 4:12).

B. Jesus is our perfect example. *"For to this you were called, because Christ also suffered for us, leaving us an example, that you should follow His steps:"* (1 Peter 2:21).

C. Can you imagine Jesus gambling?

**V. Gambling is sinful because it joins you with evil companions.** *"Do not be deceived: "Evil company corrupts good habits." (morals)* (1 Cor. 15:33).

A. Gambling is the very stock and trade of organized crime which preys on people who are willing to squander their living.

1. Is this the company you desire to keep?

2. When Lot pitched his tent toward Sodom it put him in some very bad company and caused him great misery (cf. 2 Peter 2:6-8 *"and turning the cities of Sodom and Gomorrah into ashes, condemned them to destruction, making them an example to those who afterward would live ungodly; and delivered righteous Lot, who was oppressed by the filthy conduct of the wicked (for that righteous man, dwelling among them, tormented his righteous soul from day to day by seeing and hearing their lawless deeds)--"*).

B. Solomon warns in Pro. 4:14, *"Do not enter the path of the wicked, And do not walk in the way of evil."*

C. Paul reminds us saying, *"Do not be deceived, God is not mocked; for whatever a man sows, that he will also reap. For he who sows to his flesh will of the flesh reap corruption, but he who sows to the Spirit will of the Spirit reap everlasting life."* (Gal. 6:7-8)

**VI. Gambling is sinful because it leads to other sins.** *"But evil men and impostors will grow worse and worse, deceiving and being deceived."* (2 Tim. 3:13).

A. Gambling leads to dishonesty, immorality, theft, lying and fraud.

1. Such crimes are much higher where gambling is present.

2. California Council on Problem Gambling reports that 60% of those addicted to gambling will commit crimes.

3. A report from Reno, Nevada, stated that 75% of their embezzlement cases are related to gambling.

4. Again, The California Council on Problem Gambling reports that 63% of gamblers are alcoholics.

5. The National Council on Problem Gambling reported that out of those hooked on gambling 20% commit or attempt suicide.

B. Solomon states that *"The labor of the righteous leads to life, The wages of the wicked to sin."* (Prov. 10:16).

1. God through Isaiah said, *"Woe to the rebellious children," says the LORD, "Who take counsel, but not of Me, And who devise plans, but not of My Spirit, That they may add sin to sin;"* (Isa. 30:1).

2. Second Corinthians 8:21 says, *"providing honorable things, not only in the sight of the Lord, but also in the sight of men."*

**VII. Gambling is sinful because it destroys the home and family.** *"But if anyone does not provide for his own, and especially for those of his household, he has denied the faith and is worse than an unbeliever."* (1 Tim. 5:8).

A. The addictive nature of gambling has caused many to get into debt so deep they lose everything they have, even their family.

1. In Bankruptcy Developments Journal, John Warren Kindt reported that 20% of addicted gamblers have filed for bankruptcy.

2. The National Research Council, The Guardian states that 50% of addicted gamblers abuse their spouses and children.

3. 50% of addicted gamblers will divorce.

4. And 20% of the homeless are gambling addicts.

B. Any activity which results in the destruction of the home is sinful.

1. The home is sacred.

2. Man has no right to tamper with it.

3. Jesus said, *"what therefore God has joined together, let not man separate."* (Matt. 19:6).

4. Gambling has wrecked many a home and left children hungry, homeless, and cold.

**VIII. Gambling is sinful because it violates the first and great commandment to love God supremely.** *"Jesus said...You shall love the Lord your God with all of your heart, with all of your soul and with all of your mind."* (Matt. 22:37). He also said, *"No one can serve two masters; for either he will hate the one and love the other, or else he will be loyal to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and mammon."* (Matt. 6:24).

A. The Bible also teaches that we should not be covetous or greedy.

1. God wants people to work to have money for daily living—for self, family, and the needy (1 Timothy 5:8; Galatians 6:10).

2. But "making money to live" is very different from "living to make money."

3. God has always warned people not to lust after this world's riches (Colossians 3:5; 1 John 2:15-17).

4. Paul spoke of those who *"desire to be rich,"* who have *"the love of money"* and who *"trust in uncertain riches"* (1 Timothy 6:9,10,17).

5. Paul wrote, *"Therefore put to death your members which are on the earth: fornication, uncleanness, passion, evil desire, and covetousness, which is idolatry."* (Col. 3:5)

B. Our first priority is the Lord's way, not our own way (cf. Matt. 6:33).

1. Gambling becomes the master of those who participate.

2. It enslaves!

3. You can't serve God and riches (wealth) at the same time.
4. It takes you away from God.
5. Gambling does not promote God, Christ, the church, home, family, or heaven.
6. It does not make people show more devotion to things that are holy.
7. Instead, gambling desecrates and blasphemes the Lord's way.

## Conclusion

**I. Gambling takes many forms: lottery, roulette wheel, card games, dice, numbers, races, slot machines, elections, sweepstakes, sporting events, sports pools, punch boards, bingo, bunco, raffle tickets, buying chances, cake walks, matching coins, pitching pennies, etc. etc.**

1. There is no limit to what people will bet on in an effort to take advantage of others.
2. Brethren I pray that we have demonstrated, in no uncertain terms, the evils of gambling.

**II. Brethren, DO NOT buy chances, even if it's for a good cause.**

1. Isaiah wrote long ago, *"Woe to those who call evil good, and good evil; Who put darkness for light, and light for darkness; Who put bitter for sweet, and sweet for bitter!"* (Isa. 5:20)

1. If you want to help a good cause, give a donation —don't gamble.
2. Souls are at stake.
3. To promote gambling in any of its forms, involves one in that which violates the law of God.

This sermon was preached by Mike Bentley at the Morton Street church of Christ in 2016. I wish to thank the authors of the many of the resources used in preparation for this sermon.

[NOTE: I heard this sermon and asked Mike for the above material, as I see more and more of God's children participating in gambling—even those in leadership of congregations, believe it or not. Mike alludes to and even mentions the addictive nature of gambling, but the fact that it is ADDICTIVE perhaps needs to be emphasized as a MAJOR POINT, as well giving some attention to it. Did not Paul say that things that are legal or lawful should not be brought under the power of such things? 1 Cor. 6:12 (He did not NAME or call everything that could fall into this category, so inspiration leaves some things to us, such as knowing things by their fruits, Matt. 7:16. Also, are not some so-called pleasures sinful because they DO enslave?

Read Jer. 6:13; 8:10 where covetousness is condemned.

Read Prov., 21:17 where those who "love" pleasure will become a poor man

Read Luke 8:14 where one can be choked with pleasure

Read Tit. 3:3 where some serve divers lust and pleasures

Read Isa. 47:8 where those who re "given to pleasures" can result in loss of children, v. 9, and is called "wickedness, v. 10, when they say "no one sees me" (what about when men just happen to be in a place and bet a little just for the fun of it? I know about a gospel preacher who put a quarter into a gambling machine of some kind in a restaurant in New Mexico, and hit the jackpot, and it just happened that some church members who KNEW him, saw it happen? He never lived it down)

Read 1 Tim., 5:6 where some love pleasure more than God (One can get so addicted that it will take away from time for God, for spiritual things, and their influence for God. I know of 2 elders who have been known FOR their gambling rather than their leadership in the church. I know of one preacher who had an interest in a horse that was used in horse races in Ruidoss, N.M.)]

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