

What the Bible Teaches about Gambling

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Original: 9-20-98; Revised: 9-19-99; 9-17-00; 9-15-02; 9-21-03;
10-10-04; 9-21-08

Topic: Gambling

Central Idea of Message: Although the Bible does not deal directly with gambling, or pornography for that matter, it does contain a multitude of very relevant teachings which present a clear biblical picture: God is against gambling.

Introduction: Gambling is addictive and unethical. Surveys reveal that the average compulsive gambler is the equivalent of one year of salary in debt before he or she seeks help; 66 percent of compulsive gamblers turn to crime to support their habit or pay off their debts; 20 percent of compulsive gamblers attempt suicide; 22 percent divorced because of gambling; 40 percent quit or lost a job due to gambling; 49 percent stole from work to pay gambling debts; 63 percent had contemplated suicide; 79 percent said they wanted to die, and, children of gamblers are more likely to become gamblers.¹ Joyce B. Illustration. Gambling ravages its participants.

- I. Gambling Violates the Principle of **Lordship**²
 - A. The first commandment declares that there shall be no other god before the Lord God (Exod. 20:3)
 - B. No room for subservience to false gods: chance, fate, or "Lady Luck"
 - C. God spoke against dependence on luck or chance (Isa. 65:11)
 1. Against forsaking the Lord
 2. Against forgetting his holiness
 3. Against setting up tables for Fortune
 4. Against filling cups with intoxicating beverages for Destiny
 - a) Fortune and Destiny were pagan gods of fate

¹"National Gambling Commission Issues Report," *Salt* 9, no. 3 (1999): 5.

²*Biblical Insights on Gambling* (The Ethics and Religious Liberty Commission of the Southern Baptist Convention, 1998), 1.

- b) Served as symbols of good luck and bad luck
- c) Isaiah's protest was against those Israelites who trusted in the false gods of chance rather than the one Lord God
- D. Gambling fails the lordship test

II. Gambling Violates the Principle of **Stewardship**³

- A. The earth is the Lord's (Ps. 24:1)
 - 1. Money from wallet illustration
 - 2. We are not absolute owners but merely stewards or managers of what is God's⁴
- B. Property is provided in trust by a gracious God
 - 1. Wealth and economic goods are not evil in themselves
 - 2. But if the owner acquires them in covetous ways, or uses them without reference to God's intention, they become sinful vices
- C. Biblical stewardship begins in self-surrender to the sovereign will of God
 - 1. Move from here to grateful handling of our stewardship in economic matters (Matt. 25:14-46; Luke 12:42-48)
 - 2. Money can be used for the following
 - a) To pay taxes (Matt. 22:21; Rom. 13:7)
 - b) To give to the poor (John 13:29)
 - c) To contribute to the Lord's work (1 Cor. 16:1-3)
 - d) To meet human needs (Eph. 4:28; 2 Thess. 3:10)
 - e) To support one's family (1 Tim. 5:8)
 - 3. Money should not be used for that which is vanity (Isa. 55:2)
- D. Gambling's chief basis of appeal is profit
 - 1. It differs from investing since there are real, tangible assets "backing" investments such as stocks, bonds, and real estate: there is solid biblical basis for wise investing (Matt. 25:14-30)
 - 2. The Bible encourages a careful attitude toward expenditures of any kind (Matt. 6:19-21)
 - 3. Not only is gambling's chief basis of appeal profit, but gain through exploitation

³*Biblical Insights*, 3.

⁴Cooper, 3.

- a) Casinos are structurally designed to encourage indulgence in gambling⁵
 - b) Done by eliminating windows and clocks, which causes gamblers to lose track of time⁶
 - c) Do these tactics of exploitation not signal danger for you?
 - d) Gambling is still the largest source of revenue for organized crime⁷
 - e) The money which gambling offers is money someone else has lost
- 4. Gambling creates too much pain to call it healthy or harmless recreation
- E. Gambling fails the stewardship test

III. Gambling Exploits the **Poor** (Amos 5:10-15)

- A. Colorado⁸
 - 1. The thirty two Colorado counties with the highest per-capita lottery sales all have per-capita income levels below the state average
 - 2. The poor in Colorado get exploited
- B. Georgia⁹
 - 1. Residents with household incomes below \$20,000 bought \$249 in lottery tickets per resident per year, while residents with household incomes above \$40,000 bought only \$97 in lottery tickets per resident per year
 - 2. The poor in Georgia get exploited
- C. New York¹⁰
 - 1. Those living in impoverished areas spent eight times more of their income on gambling than those living in affluent areas

⁵*Casino Gambling* (The Ethics and Religious Liberty Commission of the Southern Baptist Convention, 1997), 3.

⁶Ibid.

⁷*Issues & Answers: Gambling* (The Christian Life Commission of the Southern Baptist Convention, n.d.), 2.

⁸*Gambling Facts* (The Ethics and Religious Liberty Commission of the Southern Baptist Convention, 1998), 2.

⁹"National Gambling Commission," 1.

¹⁰*Gambling Facts*, 2.

- 2. The poor get exploited eight times more often than do the rich in New York
 - D. New Mexico¹¹
 - 1. The three poorest counties in New Mexico all rank among the state's top ten counties in lottery sales
 - 2. New Mexico's wealthiest county accounts for the fewest lottery purchases per resident
 - 3. The poor get exploited in New Mexico
 - E. Whatever exploits is unethical
 - F. Gambling fails the "do not exploit the poor" test
- IV. Gambling Violates the Principle of **Spiritual Priorities**¹²
- A. It elevates material gain to a dominant place
 - 1. It opposes Jesus' insistence that mankind cannot serve God and money simultaneously (Matt. 6:24)
 - 2. Even a small-time gambler contributes to the pattern of the exaltation of mammon
 - 3. Those wanting to get rich fall into a temptation and a snare (1 Tim. 6:9)
 - B. It ignores the biblical warnings against greed and avarice (1 Tim. 6:10)
 - 1. Love of money becomes a source of many kinds of evils
 - 2. Contributes to a pattern of greed
 - C. It is covetous (Luke 12:15)
 - 1. Supporters may argue it is recreation and entertainment
 - a) Not simply for fun
 - b) Take the potential of winning away, it dies
 - c) Surveys confirm that most people say they gamble in order to win money¹³
 - d) In order for one to win money another must lose money

¹¹Ibid.

¹²Ibid., 1.

¹³Barrett Duke, *A Temptation and a Snare* (The Ethics and Religious Liberty Commission of the Southern Baptist Convention, 1998), 1.

- (1) Gambling is robbery by mutual consent¹⁴
(Prov. 15:27)
- (2) The Bible teaches "thou shalt not steal"
(Exod. 20:15): pools at work on games
 - (a) Stealing is taking something of value from another without returning a proper equivalent¹⁵
 - (b) Whether you have consent or not
 - i) What about the consent of the spouse, children, and creditors?
 - ii) Even if it were possible to obtain consent from all of these parties, what about the consent of God?
 - e) Christians should not seek any "amusement" which is personally and socially destructive and pays the bills for big time crime¹⁶
- 2. Behind these arguments lies the economic self-interest of pro-gamblers and pro-gambling groups
 - a) Their main motive is gain
 - b) There is little or no regard for the moral or social consequences
- 3. Gambling undermines one's character by appealing to one's weaknesses: lust of the eyes and greed
- 4. Gambling develops recklessness, callousness, and covetousness
 - a) Encourages risks
 - b) Ignores the likelihood that the source of your winnings was another man's wages, for which he got nothing of substance in return
- D. Gambling is **compassionless** (Matt. 27:35)
 - 1. The Roman soldiers casting lots for the clothing of Jesus cared only for their own gain
 - 2. They thought nothing of the loss of Jesus to his family and followers

¹⁴Lamar E. Cooper, Sr. *Critical Issues: Gambling Myths vs. The Hidden Realities* (The Christian Life Commission of the Southern Baptist Convention, 1995), 2.

¹⁵M. C. Owens, "What is Wrong with Gambling?" *Progress* (January 1991): 6.

¹⁶*What's So Bad About Gambling?* (The Christian Life Commission of the Southern Baptist Convention, n.d.), 1-2.

3. Gambling plans to make someone else suffer in order for the gambler to prosper
 4. In gambling there is one person who gets something for nothing and another person who gets nothing for something
 - E. Gambling fails the spiritual priorities test
- V. Gambling Violates the Principle of **Love**¹⁷
- A. Love for God and others is central in the Bible (Matt. 22:37-40; Mark 12:28-34)
 1. Love leads us to seek the interest and welfare of another
 2. Love never allows the luxury of self-interest to the exclusion of the needs and interests of another (Rom. 12:10; 13:10; Phil. 2:3-4)
 - B. Love refuses to engage in actions that mistreat or exploit others; personal gain by way of exploitation of others is condemned in Scripture (James 5:1-4)
 1. Love is violated when personal pleasure and profit, under the guise of recreation or entertainment, are gained at the expense of another
 2. For those who argue that they beat the "house" and got its money, be reminded of where the "house" got the money to begin with: by exploiting others
 3. This money is then tainted!
 4. The tenth commandment teaches "thou shalt not covet that which is thy neighbor's" (Exod. 20:17)
 5. One cannot love another while attempting to take what belongs to that person when he or she will not receive anything of value in exchange
 6. In order to win at gambling you must victimize someone else¹⁸
 - C. Gambling fails the love test
- VI. Gambling Violates the Principle of **Work**¹⁹
- A. Honest work and honest wages go together (Luke 10:7)
 1. Work must be in keeping with God's intention

¹⁷*Biblical Insights*, 2.

¹⁸Mark S. Hartman, "What is So Wrong About Gambling?" Sermon manuscript, 4.

¹⁹*Biblical Insights*, 4.

2. There is dishonorable work which needs to be avoided: how one makes money is important!
 - a) Whatever is socially degrading (abortion)
 - b) Whatever is morally degrading (stripping)
 - c) Whatever is inconsistent with God's intention
 - (1) Incompatible with human good
 - (2) Is its basic contribution to humanity harmful or helpful?
 - d) No one is to sponge off of others (2 Thess. 3:10-12)
- B. Gambling violates God's design of trust in him for livelihood (Prov. 3:5-6; Matt. 6:33)
- C. Gambling fails the work test (Jer. 22:13-17)

VII. Gambling Violates the Principle of **Witnessing**²⁰

- A. Christians should wisely use their freedom and influence to be salt and light
 1. All forms of conduct need to be subjected to a controlling motive: do all to the glory of God (1 Cor. 10:31)
 2. Abstain from every appearance of evil (1 Thess. 5:22)
 3. One's influence should be used for furthering Christian values
- B. Christians should flee youthful lusts (2 Tim. 2:22)
 1. Nearly every vice begins in adolescence or early adulthood
 2. This should remind us how vulnerable we were and how vulnerable youth and young adults are
 3. Evil longs to get a foothold early by appealing to the immature nature
 - a) Appeals to a nature, not necessarily an age
 - b) If something appeals purely to one's earthly nature instead of to one's spiritual nature, it is probably sinful
- C. Gambling fails the witness test

VIII. Gambling Violates the Principle of the **Civil Magistrate**²¹

- A. Government is ordained by God to promote good behavior (Rom. 13:1-4)

²⁰Ibid.

²¹Ibid., 5.

1. Gambling does little to contribute to public education. Lottery states earmark about 50 percent of their budget for education, while non-lottery states earmark about 60 percent of their budget for education²²
 2. It should say something that gambling was outlawed until legalized by Nevada in 1931²³
 3. Abortion used to be illegal too
 4. Is this evidence of our country's turn from God?
 5. Are we, as a nation and as Christians, becoming more and more tolerant and desensitized to the social and moral evils all around us?
 6. If the world wants it so badly, it is probably ungodly
- B. By promoting gambling, the government becomes the equivalent of a bookie
1. Encouraging sinful and damaging behavior in order to get its cut
 2. By promoting gambling, the government has become a predator, seeking to gain at the expense of those it was entrusted to protect
 3. When states legalize gambling, they send the signal that gambling is good²⁴
- C. Gambling fails the civil magistrate test
- IX. Gambling Creates a **Stumbling Block** (Rom. 14:21)
- A. Sets a terrible Christian example: would Jesus gamble?
 - B. Ask others (dialogue): not alright for you or me
 - C. Gambling fails the stumbling block test

Conclusion: Whatever aids or abets a social evil, or whatever might cause another to stumble and succumb to its allurements, should be avoided. Watch out about setting a dangerous example for the young and the weak (Matt. 18:6-10). We should all set an appropriate example and deny gambling its opportunity to ensnare us or anyone else by refusing to participate in it. Such idolatrous practices as gambling introduce grossly unspiritual and painfully unethical factors into one's life and outlook.

"In addition, gambling contributes nothing to the common good. It undermines values, mocks work, finances crime, robs

²²"National Gambling Commission," 2.

²³Casino, 1.

²⁴Critical Issues, 12.

children, enslaves its addicts, subverts governments, and poisons whatever it touches. Biblical insights lead us to reject its false promises and say 'No' to gambling."²⁵ Christians "should oppose, in the spirit of Christ, every form of **greed, selfishness, and vice.**"²⁶ Conclusively, then, gambling is personally **selfish**, morally **irresponsible**, and socially **destructive**; it must, therefore, be vigorously resisted.²⁷

²⁵*Biblical Insights*, 5.

²⁶*Ibid.*, 6.

²⁷*Issues & Answers*, 4.