

## **Gambling**

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It is a well known fact that there has been a moral decline in our beloved nation within the past several years. Gambling, fraud deceit and immorality are plainly evidences of it. Christianity is morality transfigured into obedience to the law of God as revealed in the Holy Scriptures.

Years ago, children were taught early in life by loving parents that the Bible is the inspired Word of God and that people should obey its teachings. They were taught to be good, law-abiding citizens. Gospel preachers told people to “fear God and keep his commandments for this is the whole duty of man” (Ecclesiastes 12:13). They taught that gambling was an evil vice and should be shunned by all, both young and old alike. Today it is different. Gambling is big business in our nation. Teenagers are entering the gambling world in increasing numbers.

### **GAMBLING DEFINED**

Webster’s Dictionary defines gambling. “To play or game for money or other stake. To hazard, wager. To stake or wager in gaming” (410). Many people seem to have trouble in understanding what constitutes gambling and what does not. The devil is our enemy and lying is one of his weapons to deceive us (John 8:44).

Gambling is playing for money – the betting on the results of a game or the playing of a game of chance for money. Gambling always involves risk in order to obtain something for nothing and often means losing what one has and obtaining nothing. It is getting something for nothing without rendering service or exchange of goods. It is an attempt to get money without earning it. Therefore it is a vice.

In essence, gambling is essentially stealing, a form of robbery. It is an attempt, through chance, to gain the possessions of another with nothing given in exchange. Every gambler is a parasite. He lives off what he can get from others. He is a leach on society.

Gambling in our society takes on a variety of forms: card games, dice, numbers, betting on elections, buying sweepstakes tickets, betting on horse races, slot machines, betting on sports events, bingo, buying tickets in raffles, etc. More and more the states are going to the lottery system, and more and more people are selling and buying chances.

Some say, "The State approves of the lottery, it makes much money for the government." This is one reason why gambling is growing so rapidly in our nation. Even women are entering the world of gambling. But does God approve of it? That is the question. Is it right for Christians to gamble?

Some also may say that gambling is anything that involves a chance and that all of life is a gamble, so there is nothing wrong in gambling. But they confuse the issue to try to justify gambling as it is practiced. There is a difference between tossing a coin to determine who will receive the football to start the game and the toss of dice on a table for stakes of one hundred dollars or more. There is a difference between the person who gambles to gain money without earning it and the farmer who plants a crop in the spring and expects a harvest but may fail in the autumn due to a drought. Many lose much money in gambling. There is a saying that there is a sucker born every minute. Colton said, "The gambler is a moral suicide," and Chatfield wrote, "There is but one good throw upon the dice, which is to throw them away."

Gambling and crime usually go together. Increase gambling, increase crime. Gambling and drinking of alcoholic beverages usually go together. Psychiatrists often classify habitual gambling as a mark of a disturbed personality.

### **GAMBLING AND COVETOUSNESS**

Bible scholars have long stated that gambling involves a break of the tenth commandment: "Thou shalt not covet..." (Exodus 20:17; Deuteronomy 5:21; Romans 13:9). To covet is to wish for with eagerness. No one can see the coveting heart; it is witnessed only by him who possesses it and by the Lord. But gambling is a desire to profit, or earn money, at the expense of another. Some even gamble for great sums of money and then lose it all. Gambling is a vice, the more dangerous as it is deceitful. It is productive of many evils and injurious to the morals and health of its votaries. It has been the ruin of many worthy families, the loss of many a man's honor and the cause of suicide.

Many times, to the beginner, gambling is fascinating. Then the winner begins to push his good fortune; then his fortunes reverse. The losing gambler, in hopes of retrieving his past misfortune, goes on from bad to worse, till, in desperation, he pushes at everything, and loses his ALL!

The gambler has a greedy, covetous desire for gain at another's expense. Those who wager money on state lotteries often are those who can least afford it. The love of money – the almighty dollar – is the bottom line for both the state governments and for individuals relative to the lotteries.

Covetousness is sinful. It is that inordinate desire of having that which will give self-gratification. Self-gratification must be avoided in our lives. "Mortify (put to death, ASV) therefore your members which are upon the earth; fornication....and covetousness, which is idolatry: for which things' sake the wrath of God cometh on the children of disobedience" (Colossians 3:5-6). Covetousness will keep a person out of heaven. Hence, gambling is morally wrong.

Gambling has a powerful and corrupting influence on society. Gambling almost inevitably leads to intemperance. Interested friends may warn, the wife may entreat with all the eloquence of her tears, children may cry for bread, but once in the fatal snare, the victim of gambling is seldom saved.

The gambling halls in our cities, tolerated and patronized, are a disgrace to our nation bearing the name of “a Christian nation.” But among those who attend and those who manage them, professors of religion are not unfrequently found. Bingo, when played for money and/or prizes, is also a form of gambling. It is especially appealing to senior citizens. Many thousands of people each year, from all classes, throw their money away by various forms of gambling. It is here that the poor man spends his last dollar. It is here that the rich man often becomes poor. Both rich and poor men lose in some kind of a lottery scheme. The avid gambler forfeits the happiness of this life and will endure the consequences of his sin in torment in the world to come (Galatians 6:7-8; Romans 6:23) – that is, unless he truly repents and turns to the Lord in obedience to God’s will and is forgiven, and then lives the Christian life faithfully until death (cf. Mark 16:16; Acts 2:38; 22:16; Romans 6:3-4; Revelation 2:10). But many a gambler has lost his wife, his family, his job, his money, his health, etc., all because of his compulsive habit of gambling, and finally he will lose his soul in torment in eternity.

### EARLY BEGINNINGS

Gambling is addictive. Gambling for amusement is but the wicket gate into the hall of the damnable vice. When once in, one may find it difficult to get out. Ruin is marked over the hall of the door to the gambling den. If one regards the salvation of his own immortal soul and the happiness of his family and friends, he will shun this heart-breaking, soul-destroying, fashionable, but ruinous vice.

Once the gambler has become addicted to this vice, he soon becomes qualified for every other species of wickedness. It casts down his moral principles. Let the youth of our nation, therefore, not forget that if they are once taken in the coils of this vice, the hope of extricating themselves or of realizing their visions of wealth and happiness is exceedingly faint. They have no rational grounds to expect that they can escape the terrible consequences that are inseparately connected with this sin. If they do not become bankrupt in property, they are surely to become such in character and in moral principles. Eternal torment will be theirs unless, of course, they repent of their sins and obtain forgiveness by the grace of God (cf. Ephesians 2:8; Titus 2:11-12).

Although having been forgiven, they may still have to bear in their bodies the *consequences* of their earlier years of sinful living. This fact is clearly stated in the Scripture. Note these statements:

I the Lord thy God am a jealous God, visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children unto the third and fourth generation of them that hate me (Exodus 20:5; 34:7)

For thou writest bitter things against me, and makest me to possess the iniquities of my youth (Job 13:26)

His bones are full of the sin of his youth, which shall lie down with him in the dust (Job 20:11).

Be not deceived; God is not mocked: for whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap. For he that soweth to his flesh shall of the flesh reap corruption; but he that soweth to the Spirit shall of the Spirit reap life everlasting (Galatians 6:7-8).

### STOP STEALING

When one becomes a Christian he gives up all evil practices such as stealing, cheating and gambling. In the Ephesian letter Paul wrote:

Let him that stole *steal* no more; but rather let him labour, working with his hands the thing which is good, that he may have to give to him that needeth (Ephesians 4:28).

Gambling is a legalized form of stealing in a sense. Some in the world call only that which is taken under cover of darkness or in secrecy stealing. But God calls the obtaining of what belongs to another by taking undue advantage stealing. The Lord regards a person a thief who takes from another his rightful due. Instead of making a living by dishonesty, a person should work in a way approved of God for a living, working with his own hands. To the Thessalonians Paul wrote:

And that ye study to be quiet, and to do your own business, and to work with your own hands, as we commanded you (1 Thessalonians 4:11).

For even when we were with you, this we commanded you, that if any would not work, neither should he eat. For we hear that there are some which walk among you disorderly, working not at all, but are busybodies. Now them that are such we command and exhort by our Lord Jesus Christ, that with quietness they work, and eat their own bread (2 Thessalonians 3:10-12).

People who are able are to be regularly engaged in honest, productive labor, the thing that is good, and then help those who are truly worthy and in need of assistance. But one is not to help those who are able to work and will not do honest labor for a living.

Parents, also, need to teach their children to work in some good, honest job. Men or women who are idle, are not living by the instructions of God's Word. This is why gambling is wrong, but honest industry is the best preventive from this sin.

Theft was almost a universal vice among the heathen in the first century (as it is today in so many various ways). Hence, there was the need to teach against such to the early Christians, and this teaching is sorely needed in every nation today. God made man to toil, even in the Garden of Eden he was "to dress it and to keep it" (Genesis 2:15; cf. 3:19).

The apostle Paul was not ashamed to work with his own hands (Acts 20:34-35). He was taught early in life to be a tentmaker (Acts 18:3). No man who is able to work and support himself has a right to depend upon others by gambling or any other wrong way for his livelihood.

We realize, of course, that there are some who cannot labor and support themselves. They are too young or too old, or they are crippled, or feeble, or lying on beds of affliction. We are to work that we may have the means to contribute to their welfare (cf. James 1:27). Truly, Christianity promotes honest industry: Albert Barnes wrote: "To talk about a *lazy Christian* is about the same as to talk of burning water or freezing fire....An *honest* employment benefits everybody."

Can a Christian think he is following Christ if he engages in acts of gambling? (cf. 1 Peter 2:21). Would Jesus do it? Paul set the example for Christians to follow by working with his own hands. After all, the main business of a Christian is not to make money dishonestly and to become rich in so doing, but that he may live a good life, pleasing to God, work in an honorable way, support himself and his family, and help give to those who are in need. This way of living will help convert the work to Christ. After all, stealing is the usual effect of idleness, for "an idle brain is the Devil's workshop."

### **GAMBLERS ANONYMOUS**

Atrocious crimes are often linked with the world of gamblers. Sometimes an addictive gambler will really want to stop his gambling. There is help for him. We have *Gamblers Anonymous* just as we have *Alcoholics Anonymous* for compulsive drinkers. These organizations do much good, but there is something that is better, and that is the gospel of Christ. The only real solution to curing gambling is obedience to the will of God as found in the Holy Scripture.

### **PAUL AT CORINTH**

The ancient city of Corinth was a commercial city and was noted for its luxury and its immorality. It was one of the most dissolute cities of the world. Paul, on his second missionary journey, went to Corinth and there he preached "Jesus Christ, and him crucified" (1 Corinthians 2:1-2). "and many of the Corinthians hearing believed, and were baptized" (Acts 18:8).

The converts were, for the most part, those of humble rank who had been sunk in iniquity and evil customs, having lived a life of gain and sensual pleasure (1 Corinthians 1:26). There was the worship of the goddess Venus. Paul wrote them a letter afterwards in which he stated those that would not go to heaven.

Know ye not that the unrighteous shall not inherit the kingdom of God? Be not deceived: neither fornicators, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor effeminate (homosexuals, NKJV), nor abusers of themselves with mankind (swindlers,, NASB), shall inherit the kingdom of God (1 Corinthians 6:9-10).

The Corinthians were noted for all of these crimes. But then Paul significantly stated:

And such *were* (PAST TENSE, PBC) *some of you* (WHO ARE NOW CHRISTIANS, PBC): but ye are washed, but ye are sanctified, but ye are justified in the name of the Lord Jesus, and by the Spirit of our God (1Corinthians 6:11).

Thus, many of those Christians had been guilty of these sins before they obeyed the gospel, but now they were forgiven. They had been converted to Christ. Note, however, that in this list of those who “shall not inherit the kingdom of God” are thieves and extortioners or swindlers.

The “wages of sin is death” (Romans 6:23), that is, spiritual death, or eternal separation from God. Some today seem to think that they can live a life of sin and yet die and go to heaven. But this is not true. However, the vilest of sinners can repent and turn to God and by His grace be forgiven. Some at Corinth did. Nevertheless, it seems that the broad road to hell is thronged!

### **STOCKS, BONDS, ETC.**

In the stock market one is investing in the work ethic, providing money or capital, for companies to make goods and provide services. A person also has ways of controlling the possibility of success and return on his investment. Gambling, in contrast, is nothing but chance with no hope of controlling the outcome.

In this connection some often ask about buying stocks or bonds or putting in money for interest in a bank or buying land. There is not anything wrong in doing this. This is done every day by thousands of people. But there is a difference in doing these things that are right and in gambling. Many have made money over the years by their wise investments and have used part of the income to help advance the kingdom of Christ in the world. In so doing they have laid up for themselves “treasures in heaven” (Matt. 6:20). But Christianity and gambling are not compatible.

Those who preach and teach the Word of God must, on occasion, include the subject of the sin of covetousness or the undue love of money. Jesus and Paul both warned against covetousness:

Take heed, and beware of covetousness: for a man's life consisteth not in the abundance of the things which he possesseth” (Luke 12:15).

But godliness with contentment is great gain. For we brought nothing into this world, and it is certain we can carry nothing out. And having food and raiment let us be therewith content. But they that will be rich fall into temptation and a snare, and into many foolish and hurtful lusts, which down men in destruction and perdition. For the love of money is the root of all evil: which while some coveted after they have erred from the faith and pierced themselves through with many sorrows.... Charge them that are rich in this world, that they be not highminded, nor trust in uncertain riches, but in the living God who giveth us richly all things to enjoy; that they do good, that they be rich in good works, ready to distribute, willing to communicate (distribute, ASV; willing to share, NKJV); laying up in store for themselves a good foundation against the time to come, that they may lay hold on eternal life (1 Timothy 6:6-10,17-19).

## CONCLUSION

Having seen from this study the evils of gambling, in whatever form it may be, may all who have, in the past, been guilty of it turn from it and by the grace of God receive forgiveness, as did many of those in the first century. In so doing, and then by faithfully living the Christian life thereafter, heaven will be their eternal home.

The gospel of Christ is still the means of leading sinners to abandon their sins and to turn to God. It is the only means for saving souls (Romans 1:16). Human philosophy and the passing of laws cannot do it. The gospel of Christ has proved its effectual power for reforming lives and making a better society in which to live. We entreat all to shun the vicious evils of gambling in all of its deceptive forms, obey the gospel, and live a good Christian life.

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