

Gambling

The *World Book Encyclopedia* of 1958 said this about gambling: “Gambling means staking something of value in a game of chance. True games of chance require no skill on the part of the player. Their outcome depends entirely on luck. People gamble because they hope to win something for nothing. But one can more easily lose, and the loss may involve money which was earned by hard effort and which may be difficult to replace. A serious loss often causes hardship. Hence it is not considered desirable or wise for anyone to gamble.”

The *World Book Encyclopedia* is not a Christian publication. Nevertheless, in 1958, the editors of this encyclopedia thought it wise to make such a statement about gambling. How times have changed!

Just 45 years later, state governments all over the United States have decided to use gambling as a means of raising revenue for state budgets. For years, the lottery has been the common gambling vehicle, but now states are beginning to go a step further. Slot machines are becoming the new means for states to raise additional revenue. *

This creates a moral dilemma for Christians. They would like to have relief from constantly rising property taxes, but with a moral objection to gambling, can they in good conscience file an application requesting to benefit from the revenue raised by their state government through gambling? To determine this, let us consider what the Bible has to say about gambling.

A Biblical Perspective On Gambling

The word “gambling” does not appear in the text of the Bible. So we must look elsewhere for concepts and principles which will lead us to an understanding of whether or not God would approve of staking something of value in a game of chance.

1. The Source of Revenue

When we come into this world, we bring nothing with us (1 Timothy 6:7a). When we leave this world, we take nothing with us (1 Timothy 6:7b). In between these two events, we live out our lives here on earth and in the process have access to a lot of material things. From where do these material things come, and who actually owns them? David said in 1 Chronicles 29:14 that all things come of God. Even the money we give in our offerings to Him has come from God Himself. It is difficult, therefore, to make the case for human ownership of things when we come into life empty handed and we leave life empty handed and in between have in our possession only those things which actually belong to God.

Psalm 24:1

The earth is the LORD'S, and the fulness thereof; the world, and they that dwell therein.

Psalm 50:10-12

For every beast of the forest is mine, and the cattle upon a thousand hills. I know all the fowls of the mountains: and the wild beasts of the field are mine. If I were hungry, I would not tell thee: for the world is mine and the fulness thereof.

At best, we may only consider ourselves to be stewards, or caretakers, of the things

which God owns. As stewards of material possessions, we have a duty to take care of them in a responsible fashion for the sake of the One who owns them. This means the decisions we make regarding the use of material things, including money, should be based on the best interests of the Owner, and not of ourselves.

2. The Purpose of Revenue

God places material things in our trust to be used for very specific purposes. These include the following:

To provide for our basic needs.

2 Thessalonians 3:12

... We command and exhort by our Lord Jesus Christ, that with quietness they work, and eat their own bread.

To support one's family.

1 Timothy 5:8

But if any provide not for his own, and specially for those of his own house, he hath denied the faith, and is worse than an infidel.

To contribute to the Lord's work.

1 Corinthians 9:9, 14

For it is written in the law of Moses, Thou shalt not muzzle the mouth of the ox that treadeth out the corn.... Even so hath the Lord ordained that they which preach the gospel should live of the gospel.

To meet human needs through benevolence.

1 Corinthians 16:1-3

Now concerning the collection for the saints, as I have given order to the churches of Galatia, even so do ye. Upon the first day of the week let every one of you lay by him in store, as God hath prospered him, that there be no gatherings when I come. And when I come, whomsoever ye shall approve by your letters, them will I send to bring your liberality unto Jerusalem.

2 Corinthians 9:7, 12

Every man according as he purposeth in his heart, so let him give; not grudgingly, or of necessity: for God loveth a cheerful giver. For the administration of this service not only supplieth the want of the saints, but is abundant also by many thanksgivings unto God;

To give to the poor.

Matthew 19:21

Jesus said unto him, If thou wilt be perfect, go and sell that thou hast, and give to the poor, and thou shalt have treasure in heaven: and come and follow me.

Ephesians 4:28

But rather let him labour, working with his hands the thing which is good, that he may have to give to him that needeth.

To pay taxes.

Matthew 22:21

Then saith he unto them, Render therefore unto Caesar the things which are Caesar's; and unto God the things that are God's.

Romans 13:7

Render therefore to all their dues: tribute to whom tribute is due; custom to whom custom; fear to whom fear; honour to whom honour.

To provide an inheritance to grandchildren.

Proverbs 13:22

A good man leaveth an inheritance to his children's children:

3. The Misuse of Revenue

God frowns very sternly upon those who lose through irresponsible actions what He has put into their trust. This is illustrated through at least two stories in the Bible.

The first is the parable of the talents. In this story told by Jesus (Matthew 25:15-30), five talents were given to one steward, two talents to another, and one talent to a third. Each was to put the talents to work and return a profit for the owner. The first turned his five talents into ten. The second turned his two talents into four. But the third steward hid the one talent given to him and gained nothing. He knew that his Lord reaped where he sowed not and gathered where he had not sowed. In spite of this, his own laziness caused him to lose what he could have gained if he had only trusted in his Lord's ability. Because he did not make wise use of what had been put in his trust and because he lost what profit could have been gained through wise stewardship, he lost the privilege of stewardship over anything. The story shows why some of God's people will never be given much stewardship privilege – God knows they will only waste it anyway.

In the second story, there is another steward who lost a large sum which belonged to his Lord (Matthew (Matthew 18:23-35). Because of the loss, the steward was in deep trouble, and the Lord commanded that his wife and children and all his possessions be sold to cover the loss. As the story unfolds, the steward pleads forgiveness with a pledge to repay what he lost. The Lord offers him forgiveness, but has to withdraw it when the irresponsible servant shows that he himself possesses an unforgiving heart. The story shows the kind of heart that exists in a man that will be irresponsible in the stewardship of his Lord's possessions; and it shows the consequences of having such an irresponsible heart.

In neither of these stories is gambling the cause of the loss. However, they both show that losing what belongs to the Lord whether by inaction or by irresponsible action is a bad thing. It would be reasonable to conclude, therefore, that the choice to voluntarily lose money through the risking activity of gambling is a sure way to obtain the disfavor of God.

4. The Biblical Opposite of Gambling

The Bible promotes a good work ethic as the means of securing the goods of stewardship.

Luke 10:7

The labourer is worthy of his hire.

Exodus 20:9

Six days shalt thou labour, and do all thy work:

Ephesians 4:28

Let him...labour, working with his hands the thing which is good....

1 Thessalonians 4:11-12

And that ye study to be quiet, and to do your own business, and to work with your own hands, as we commanded you; That ye may walk honestly toward them that are without, and that ye may have lack of nothing.

2 Thessalonians 3:10-12

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.

The Word of God states it clearly and plainly. Do not make a big deal out of it. Just quietly work and be responsible and you can eat. But if you do not work, you do not deserve to eat.

Gambling is the activity by which one hopes to obtain money without working for it. Work produces either products, which people may use, or services, which meet peoples' needs. Gambling produces neither products nor services. Gambling consists of one simple thing: the hope that everyone else loses their hard earned money so that you may win and take their hard earned money home with you, even though you did no work to obtain it. The Bible declares that if you did not work for it, you should not have it. No one deserves to win and have through gambling what other people worked for and earned by labor.

5. The Nature of Gambling

The Bible names and describes several unjust methods of obtaining what other people have earned. One of these is called stealing. In the Ten Commandments, God said, *Thou shalt not steal* (Exodus 20:15). In Ephesians 4:28, God contrasts stealing with working when He says, *Let him that stole steal no more: but rather let him labour, working with his hands the thing which is good....* Another unjust method of obtaining (or at least desiring to obtain) what others have earned is called covetousness. This is also disallowed by the Ten Commandments when God said, *Thou shalt not covet thy neighbor's house...nor his ox, nor his ass, nor any thing that is thy neighbour's* (Exodus 20:17). Covetousness is not to be named even once among the saints as it is unbecoming of those who belong to Christ (Ephesians 5:3). A third unjust method of obtaining what others have earned is called defrauding. In 1Thessalonians 4:6, God instructed, *That no man go beyond and defraud his brother in any matter: because that the Lord is the avenger of all such, as we also have forewarned you and testified.* An example of defrauding is given in James 5:4 where *the hire of the labourers who have reaped down your fields...is of you kept back by fraud....* In this example, the employer hires men to work in his fields with the promised of paying them wages. Instead, he benefits from their labor but withholds their wages.

Gambling has very similar characteristics as stealing, coveting, and defrauding. The motivation to gamble is the desire to take possession of what rightfully rightfully belongs to others, similar to covetousness. The result of gambling is that one person takes home what rightfully belongs to others, similar to stealing. (Granted, those who lose seem to be relinquishing their money voluntarily which is not the case in stealing. However, in light of the point to follow regarding defrauding, one must wonder about the degree of dishonesty that exists in at least some forms of gambling.) The enticement to gambling is the promise of possible big winnings with the result being that the vast majority have no real possibility of seeing the fulfillment of that promise, similar to defrauding. And in further consideration of this last point, gambling has an addictive attraction which exaggerates the consequences of the vice for those whose soul is too weak to resist the fraudulent enticement to win.

For those who say it is too strong a position to relate gambling to the sins of coveting, stealing, and defrauding, consider the following statement taken directly from the Word of God: *Woe to him that increaseth that which is not his!* (Habakkuk 2:6b). This is an interesting statement. John Gil writes about this saying,

Substance or goods, not his own, as the Targum explains it; which they had no right unto, nor property in, but were another's; and therefore guilty of great injustice in taking it from them, and might justly expect vengeance would pursue them for it;

Almost sounds like something you could say about gambling, doesn't it?

Proverbs 28:8 refers to those who increase their substance by unjust gain. Nothing can be more unjust than to enjoy enriching oneself through the loss and impoverishment of others. And the fact is that this is the very basis of gambling. If no one loses, no one can win in games of chance. The only way some one can win is if someone else, nay, if many others lose. Shame on those who enjoy a process which impoverishes many and benefits so few.

Conclusion

In Act 72, the Homeowner Tax Relief Act in Pennsylvania, the following simple fact is the basis of success for the program: the more people lose in the slot machines, the more money will be available for rebates to home owners. The consequences of gambling were actually part of the rationale for adopting the program. Apparently, many Pennsylvania residents leave the state to gamble in other states. But once they destroy their own financial standing through massive gambling losses, they turn to the Pennsylvania state government for assistance and rehabilitation. So the Governor and State Legislators reasoned that since they must pay for rehabilitation anyway, they may as well pay to rehabilitate those who gamble in their own state rather than in another state. Of course, the more they have to pay for rehabilitation of losing gamblers, the less there will be available for rebates to home owners.

In light of the unjust nature of gambling, and in light of the fact that at least half of the home owner rebates will come from the money people lose in gambling, Pennsylvania Christians will not be able to submit the application and request to benefit from the gambling losses of others and at the same time maintain a clear conscience before God. We simply cannot accept the idea of benefitting from the losses of others, especially when many of those losses will cause such financial, emotional, and social devastation as to require rehabilitation at great expense to the state.

The Gospel of Christ is the antithesis of gambling. In gambling, only one person wins

while everyone else loses. In the Gospel of Christ, one person gave up all He had so that everyone else could receive eternal life.

If you are a Christian and you think it is acceptable to gamble a little bit, whether through office pools, or lottery tickets, or friendly wagers, perhaps you should rethink the matter. Consider how you can benefit from others losses and in the same moment invite the losers to benefit from Christ's sacrifice. Surely you can see the contradiction. 📖

*Act 72, the Homeowner Tax Relief Act in Pennsylvania, for example, has approved the installation of slot machines in specific locations throughout the state, including race tracks and some other places. The money lost in these slot machines has been ear marked to provide revenue for rebates to home owners, purportedly providing some "relief" from the heavy burden of property taxes. [Half the money for the rebate will come from the slot machine revenue and half from an increase in the local income tax.] Home owners must, however, fill out a form requesting the rebate in order to receive it. So the program works essentially like this: residents who own the home in which they reside may ask the state government in Pennsylvania to give them money which other people have lost by feeding it into slot machines.

Note:

At the present writing, more than two thirds of the school districts and two thirds of the home owners have declined to participate in this scheme.