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Tower of Strength

**“The name of the Lord is a strong tower
The righteous runs into it and is safe.”**

—Proverbs 18:10

Gambling

Gambling is defined “to risk or bet something of value on the outcome of an event or a game of chance.” Gambling is one of those activities that most people know they are supposed to think is evil, but are not really sure why.

For example, I am holding a tract written by a Christian in Nashville Tennessee that rails against gambling. It describes the sinfulness of “the thrill of taking a chance,” and the danger of it becoming a “consuming fire,” and the “financial corruption and injury to vast numbers of people.” It chastens for “the hope of obtaining something for nothing.” But one thing that is a glaring omission is a single scripture reference in the whole tract. Not one!

Based on those arguments *alone*, one must also rule out “the thrill” of roller coasters, the “consuming fire” of marriage, and the potential of “financial injury” that is the reality of investing of every kind, including farming, opening a business, or purchasing a house. Furthermore, one must refuse to accept all assistance for which one has not paid.

The reasons given to prohibit gambling must be based on book, chapter, and verse. Now, the word “gambling” is not found in the Bible. But there most certainly are some Biblical principles that make gambling a sinful activity. Similarly, the words “abortion” and “pornography” are not found in the Bible, but there are Biblical principles that make them sinful.

Here are some sound Bible reasons to avoid gambling activities such as (but not limited to) playing the state lottery, and hitting the slot machines and card tables in Vegas.

Covetousness

One major reason people gamble is because they truly hope to hit it big. We know God's attitude toward greed (Eccl. 5:10, Luke 16:13, Col. 3:5, 1 Tim. 6:10, etc.) There is simply no question that a large percentage of those who gamble do so for the pursuit of money. It is important to remember that one doesn't have to possess a lot of money to be consumed by the love of money and the things money can buy.

The idea of living off of one's gambling winnings is alluring (astronomically improbable, but alluring nevertheless thanks to advertising). Yet, God's word instructs us how to support ourselves. Insofar as gambling undermines productive work, thrift, and the need to *earn* a living, it is sinful. Honest work is a command of God, and a blessing (Eph. 4:28). Paul says,

If anyone will not work, neither let him eat. For we hear that some among you are leading an undisciplined life, doing no work at all, but acting like busybodies. Now such persons we command and exhort in the Lord Jesus Christ to work in quiet fashion and eat their own bread... We did not act in an undisciplined manner among you, nor did we eat anyone's bread without paying for it, but with labor and hardship we kept working night and day so that we would not be a burden to any of you. (2 Thess. 3:10-12, 7-8).

Some suggest that there is no difference between playing the lottery and "playing" the stock market. Actually, there is a huge difference. When one buys into the market, he is making an investment in a company. He is actually purchasing a part of a company that endeavors to use the investors' money to produce goods and services that will turn a profit. Based on his research in that company, he is hopeful that the company will use his money ethically, and will succeed. This kind of investment is not a game of chance, but a sound and reasonable way to increase one's income and save for the future (see for example Matt. 25:27, Prov. 31:16). Another way to distinguish gambling and investing is to note that winnings from gambling come from money that others in the game must lose.

By the way, many religious people who play the lottery justify it by saying, "When I win, I will give half of it to the church!" Suuuure you will. But, even so, the end doesn't justify the means (Rom. 3:8). We could make the church much wealthier by selling ad space over the podium or hosting a bikini car wash in the parking lot, but that wouldn't make such activities wholesome or right.

Remember, God is in control of the world's wealth. In Haggai 2:8, God says, "the silver is Mine, and the gold is Mine." If God wanted to, He could find a way to empty Bill Gates' bank account and dump it into ours. But, I doubt that's really what the Lord wants. Remember, God blesses simple, humble efforts. He delights to accomplish His will through the despised things of the world (1 Cor. 1:27-29).

God has stated how he wants the church to raise its money—for the members of the church to lay aside a portion of their weekly earnings (1 Cor. 16:1–2). It is within God’s wisdom to force us to sacrifice to accomplish the work of His kingdom. I submit that in the long run, a large windfall would be more of a curse on God’s people than a blessing, allowing us to neglect our personal duty to count everything as loss for Jesus Christ. With each humble contribution, “the profit increases to your account” (Phil. 4:17). So, a poor widow’s mite won’t put any gold leaf in the foyer, but it will put stars in her crown. That \$10 wasted on a 40-million-to-one longshot would be better used helping the saints. The reward is a sure thing, and increases a hundredfold (Matt. 6:3–4; Luke 6:20–25; Mark 10:29)!

Weak-mindedness

The allure of wealth gives gambling the natural tendency to enslave the weak-minded, “for by what a man is overcome, by this he is enslaved” (2 Pet. 2:19). The ranks of Gamblers Anonymous have swelled with men and women who can’t afford to feed their families but feel like they can drop ten bucks on a lottery ticket.

In fact, government lotteries prey upon people who hold the foolish notion that they can gamble their way to success. The Florida Lottery has been rightly proclaimed a “tax on people who can’t do math.” Dr. James Dobson, who chaired the National Gaming Impact Study Commission, reported his findings in the April and July 1999 Focus on the Family newsletter:

- Massachusetts sells more than \$500 of lottery tickets each year for every man, woman, and child in the state. The lottery accounts for 13% of the state’s entire budget. One shameful Massachusetts Lottery ad offered two options for “How to Make Millions.” Plan A was a mocking account of a life of hard work and discipline. Plan B was simply: “play the lottery.”
- Dr. Dobson writes, “Lottery officials defend their livelihood by asking what harm there is if someone who can afford to bet chooses to throw away a dollar on a ticket. But that is not where lotteries make their money. The rake it in from players such as Ernie Kovic, a 28-year-old Bronx waiter studying aircraft design. Last summer, Kovic stood in line to buy \$3,000 worth of Powerball tickets, money he had been saving for tuition. Kovic told the *New York Times*, ‘If I win, I won’t have to go to school. I can buy my own aircraft.’ ”
- In a ghetto community in Boston, Dr. Dobson stood in a liquor store and watched poor people coming to buy lottery tickets. He asked one raggedy man why he came to buy several tickets nearly every day. He replied, “This is my retirement plan. I’m going to hit it big. I play every day. I won \$100 one time.”
- The Georgia lottery sells \$250 of lottery tickets per person in poor areas compared to \$100 per person in affluent areas. A shameless Illinois Lottery billboard advertisement in a Chicago ghetto exploited the impoverished neighborhood, claiming, “This could be your ticket out!”

I realize that not every person who gambles will become addicted or even misled. But the danger is real, and I for one don't want to give Satan a place in my heart.

Other Associations

But what if someone says gambling is just innocent fun, that spending \$10 in Vegas is no different from spending \$10 to see a movie? Again, there is a difference.

My son and I just returned from a trip out west. When people asked where we were going, I jokingly said, "We're flying to Vegas." Invariably, that got some puzzled looks! I would then explain that we were touching down in Vegas just long enough to rent a car and drive to Zion National Park. On the way back to the airport, I purposely drove down The Strip, just so that we could see the sights and sounds of a casino town.

It's called Sin City for a reason. Casinos aren't known for their family atmosphere! This is why each time a community considers lifting laws against gambling in order to benefit from the increased tax revenue, a large segment of the population rallies against it. The drinking, drug use, organized crime, prostitution, and rampant immorality that are present in casino towns cause a lot more harm than good, and soon overwhelm any taxation gains made by casino income. As 1 Cor. 15:33 says, "bad company corrupts good morals."

Gambling can't help its association with other vices—it has earned its nasty reputation honestly. Gambling—even legal gambling—has received the moral censure of society. Since we must "shine our light" (Matt. 5:16), we don't want non-Christians questioning our behavior when we enter a gambling casino or stand in line to purchase a lottery ticket. For this reason, I don't even want to receive a lottery ticket if someone were to give it to me. "Abstain from every form of evil" (1 Thess. 5:22). "Do not participate in the unfruitful deeds of darkness" (Eph. 5:11). And, in some cases such a Bingo night, revenue is used to support false teachings or corrupt organizations that I want no fellowship with at all.

No one can be blamed for having a little fun, but if that activity is against what God would have for his children, then some other fun should be found. Ephesians 5:17 says, "do not be foolish, but understand what the will of the Lord is." That is, use your common sense to weigh the plusses and minuses of any activity, in the light of God's inspired word, reflect on the outcome, and make an honest spiritual judgment rather than trying to grasp at straws. There are so many other games and activities that a Christian can participate in without question. Why sell one's birthright for a bowl of stew?

—John Guzzetta

Quote of the Week:

"A Christian is made by prayer, study, and suffering." —*Martin Luther*