

The Sin of Gambling

Edward Williamson

It might seem strange to refer to gambling as a sin. After all the bible doesn't mention it by name. Indeed, casting lots is about as close as the bible comes to mentioning gambling. People across the nation feel that the lottery is a good thing because of all the extra revenue it brings in for the government. However, the prophet Isaiah said, "Woe unto them that call evil good, and good evil; that put darkness for light, and light for darkness; that put bitter for sweet, and sweet for bitter!" (Isaiah 5:20). The purpose of this article is to show from the word of God that gambling is indeed a sin, and something which Christians need to avoid.

What constitutes gambling? Is there a difference between betting two dollars on a horse race and losing millions in the stock market? Does the fact that gambling is legal and brings in revenue for the state justify our participation in it? The problem of gambling is widespread, you cannot escape it wherever you go. It is even a problem among some brethren who reason that since it isn't mentioned by name in the bible then it must be all right.

Gambling occurs when there is an uncertain outcome to an event, when there is a wager or bet that is deliberately chanced, and where there is a winner and a loser. When these three conditions exist you have gambling. Gambling is not determined by the size of the bet, it doesn't matter if a person gambles with fifty dollars or fifty cents. Gambling, however is not simply a risk. People take risks all the time which cannot be considered as gambling. Examples would include walking across the street, engaging in farming, or buying and selling stocks. Gambling is not the same as buying insurance, nor is it involved when a prize is awarded to a particular winner, such as a door prize.

The bible shows in the very beginning that man was to work for his living. God told Adam that he would eat his bread by the sweat of his brow (Genesis 3:19). How unlike the lottery and other forms of gambling. Our society is suffering from a lack of a good old fashioned desire to work for a living. The gambling industry tells us that we can be rich without any effort at all. This is a lie.

The lottery is only one of numerous avenues of gambling available to citizens of most states. Other forms include horse racing, dog racing, betting on sporting events, casino gambling, riverboat gambling, slot machines, card games, or bingo. You do not have to go to Las Vegas or Atlantic City to

indulge yourself in gambling. It is everywhere you turn. Even some Native American tribes have gotten into the gambling business.

In Missouri, the daily lottery numbers are broadcast on television and in the newspapers. You can buy lottery tickets at innumerable locations across the state, at gas stations, supermarkets, convenience stores, and bars. Advertisements in print, radio, and television constantly bombard the citizens of the state proclaiming “You can’t win if you don’t play.” People can travel to various locations around the state, board a riverboat, and spend the afternoon gambling. Did all of this happen overnight? No, it happened because the citizens of Missouri voted to allow the lottery. Back in the early 1980’s, a movement began which championed the cause of gambling. It was said that allowing the state to conduct a lottery would generate untold millions of dollars for education. What wasn’t told was that the lottery was only the beginning. From that dark beginning when the gambling proponents narrowly won the election, the gambling industry has become larger and more complex.

Why is gambling a sin? The Apostle Paul tells us in Titus 2:11-14, that we are to live as people of God. This involves saying “no” to ungodliness and worldly lusts. These worldly lusts include the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life. Gambling caters to all of these lusts. The present age in which we live stimulates a desire for material possessions. The gambling advocate tells us that we can win big with only a small bet. We have forgotten the example of Jesus who said no to material possessions when tempted by Satan.

Why is gambling a sin? Gambling is addictive. The Apostle Paul tells us in 1 Corinthians 6:12, “All things are lawful unto me, but all things are not expedient: all things are lawful for me, but I will not be brought under the power of any”. With the increase of gambling opportunities there has also been an increase in the number of gambling addicts. It is sad to see people using money which could be used to provide a decent meal for their children wasting it instead on lottery tickets. Gambling is also a sin because it is based on covetousness. Gambling involves an unholy desire to gain without giving something. The gambler seeks to gain at the expense of others. Paul said in Colossians 3:1-6, “If ye then be risen with Christ, seek those things which are above, where Christ sitteth on the right hand of God. Set your affection on things above, not on things on the earth. For ye are dead, and your life is hid with Christ in God. When

Christ, who is our life, shall appear, then shall ye also appear with him in glory. Mortify therefore your members which are upon the earth; fornication, uncleanness, inordinate affection, evil concupiscence, and covetousness, which is idolatry: For which things' sake the wrath of God cometh on the children of disobedience". And we are also instructed in 1 Timothy 6:6-10, "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 drown 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".

Gambling is a sin because it violates the principle of Christian living specified by our Saviour, Jesus Christ. For He says in Matthew 7:12, "Therefore all things whatsoever ye would that men should do to you, do ye even so to them: for this is the law and the prophets." We are instructed to seek the welfare of others (1 Corinthians 10:24). No gambler wants to lose, yet they are perfectly willing to take advantage of the misfortune of others to win. For every lottery winner there must, of necessity, be multitudes of losers.

Gambling is a sin because it violates the biblical principles for legitimate transfer of money or property. There are three legitimate means of transfer found in the word of God. These are labor, exchange, or a gift. Labor involves the exchange of money or other items of value for effort which is extended. An exchange is simply a trade of one commodity for another. A gift is a free-will offering to another without any expectation of something in return. Gambling cannot be classified under any of these three categories. It involves no labor, implies no exchange, and certainly is not a free-will gift.

Gambling is a sin because of the other problems which are associated with it. Gambling brings an increase in crime, drunkenness, theft, neglected children, covetousness, and broken dreams. Jesus said, "By their fruits you shall know them" (Matthew 7:20). Gambling produces no good fruit, it only steals from those who participate in it. We are told by the Apostle Paul, "Abstain from all appearance of evil" (1 Thessalonians 5:22). We cannot do this if we gamble. Also for your consideration, how could anyone participate in something which the Roman soldiers did while they crucified our Lord (Matthew 27:35-36)?

Gambling is a sin for all of these reasons. It certainly falls under the category of covetousness (Luke 12:15, Ephesians 5:3, Hebrews 13:5, 1 John 2:15, 2 Timothy 3:2). Even though it is not mentioned specifically in the bible, it still destroys our witness as Christians if we engage in gambling. Let us not then engage in something which so clearly is a work of the flesh, rather let us allow our light to shine before men so that they may seek to follow Jesus.