

CHRISTIANS AND GAMBLING

A distraught man came into my office one day in Florence, Italy and told me he had just lost his whole estate at the gambling tables of Monte Carlo. He was crushed, and frightened about going home to face his family. He is merely one of a multitude of people all over the world who daily see their great hope of easy money go down in flames.

Today, gambling is presented as recreation and Los Vegas is advertised as one of the "fun capitals" of the world. Gambling has been dignified by state lotteries which have been able to gain legal sanction by posing as a wonderful means of raising money to improve our schools. The truth of the matter is that wherever gambling exists, crime and corruption and misery become center stage. It is reported that bankruptcy rates are about 18% higher in gambling areas. It is further estimated that the costs to society run about \$3 for every \$1 brought in by a casino. Millions of addicted gamblers are bringing disaster to their families even as I write. A study of 500 members of Gamblers Anonymous showed that 48% had thought about suicide, and 13% had actually attempted suicide.¹ Furthermore, gambling is very bad for business. Donald Trump says that "People will spend a tremendous amount of money at the casinos, money that they would normally spend on buying a refrigerator or a new car. Local business will suffer because they will lose customer dollars to the casino."²

By its very nature, the cost of gambling is counted in the human lives that are sacrificed. There is a "National Center for Pathological Gambling" whose existence is one indication of the seriousness of the problem. Gamblers Anonymous, founded in 1957, is an international organization with more more than 800 chapters. The National Gambling Impact Study Commission found the results of gambling to be so negative that they recommended a moratorium on any further expansion of legalized gambling the United States.³ The primary victims are the poor. An article in the Canadian Medical Association Journal stated that lower income families, in proportion to their income, spend almost four times as much on gambling as compared to those of higher income.⁴

If airlines advertised that those who boarded their planes had one chance in a thousand, or one in a hundred, or even one in ten of arriving safely at their destination, no one would fly with them. Gambling exists because it brings great benefits to the promoters while offering none to the vast majority of their customers. On an intellectual level, everyone knows this. Why, then, would anyone want to gamble?

No doubt there are many who go to places like Los Vegas and plan to spend a small amount of money at the machines or tables. They probably do not expect to win, but enjoy the thrill of the process. For a great number it is serious business. Their hopes are fixed on winning, and eventually they may commit so much money in the process that they cannot afford to stop. They live in the hope that the next hand, or the next turn of the wheel, or the next pull on the handle, or the next lottery ticket will repay all their loses. There is a growing number who become addicted, and any counselor who has worked with persons addicted to gambling knows how difficult that is!

What is the Christian perspective? While there is no verse that says, "Thou shalt not gamble," there are many which in principle say it is sinful. It is sinful because it is predicated on getting the money or goods of another person while giving nothing in return, thereby violating the principle of love which we are told does nothing that is harmful to ones neighbor (Rom. 13:10). It is sinful because it represents poor stewardship. All that we have comes from the Lord. We are going to be held accountable for the way we use His blessings (Luke 16:10-11, 2 Cor. 5:10). It is wrong because it opposes the biblical work ethic. Even the thief is told to quit taking money to which he has no right and instead go to work so that he can give to the poor (Eph. 4:28). It is wrong because it is motivated by a lust for money which we are told is the root of all kinds of evil (1 Tim. 6:10). It is wrong because of the evil fruits that gambling produces. Jesus said very clearly that we can judge a tree by the quality of its fruit (Matt. 7:17). Gambling is wrong as it tends to be an impulsive act. Impulsive acts are those which are undertaken by those who leap without first looking carefully at where they are most likely to land. Even folk wisdom tells us it is better to look at probable outcomes and then make the wisest decision as to whether or not leaping is a good option! Don't be a gambler...you can't afford it!

End Notes:

1 <http://gamblingexposed.org>

2 Ibid

3 Ibid

4 Korn, David A., Canadian Medical Association Jr., July 11, 2000, pp. 61-64

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