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“Should Christians Gamble?”



.... I felt I had to write and urge you to contend for the faith that was once for all entrusted to the saints. Jude 1:3 NIV

“Should Christians Gamble?”

Hebrews 13:5 (NIV) ***“Keep your lives free from the love of money and be content with what you have, because God has said, ‘Never will I leave you; never will I forsake you.’ ”***

Ecclesiastes 5:10 (NIV) ***“Whoever loves money never has enough; whoever loves wealth is never satisfied with his income. **This too is meaningless.**”***

1 Timothy 6:6-10 (NIV) ***“⁶But godliness with contentment is great gain. ⁷For we brought nothing into the world, and we can take nothing out of it. ⁸But if we have food and clothing, we will be content with that. ⁹People who want to get rich fall into temptation and a trap and into many foolish and harmful desires that plunge men into ruin and destruction. ¹⁰For the love of money is a root of all kinds of evil. Some people, eager for money, have wandered from the faith and pierced themselves with many griefs.”***

In America, nearly all states allow some form of legalized “gambling” or “gaming” for stakes. As a result, millions of Americans spend countless millions every day in hopes of one day “hitting it big” to become rich and live a life of ease, or just winning extra money to travel, pay bills, etc. The options readily available for those looking to gamble include but are not limited to the following: the lottery, casinos, poker, slot machines, raffles, office pools, sport events, dice games, bingo, scratch-off, etc. Legalized gambling in America is part of our history. Unbeknownst to many, lotteries were frequently used in Colonial – era America to finance public work projects such as paving streets in need of paving.

In addition, once upon a time in America, lotteries were also used to build churches. At one time, lotteries were used to finance the construction of buildings at Harvard and Yale. However, most forms of gambling and all lotteries were outlawed by the states beginning in the 1870’s. In fact, the federal government outlawed the use of the U.S. mail for lotteries in 1890 and in 1895, invoked the commerce clause to forbid shipments of lottery tickets or advertisements across state lines, thereby ending all lotteries in the United States.

However, the revival of lotteries began in 1964 when New Hampshire established a state lottery. New York followed in 1966. New Jersey introduced its lottery in 1970 and was followed by 10 other states in 1975. Currently, almost all the states have lotteries and/or some form of legalized “gambling or gaming.”

It has been estimated that 95% of Americans have gambled at some time in their lives. About 82% have played the lottery, 75% have played slot machines, 44% have played cards for

money, 34% have gambled via bingo, 26% have bet on sporting events, 74% have gambled in casinos, and an untold amount have gambled via office pools.

Furthermore, according to Dr. James Dobson who served on the National Gambling Impact Study Commission, in a report issued in 1999, the following was observed:

- Americans gamble more money each year than they spend on groceries.
- In Mississippi, more money is spent on betting than on all retail sales combined.
- 85% of young people have already become gamblers.
- Usually the people who gamble the most are the people who can afford it the least; the poor and the elderly.

Needless to say, with the percentage of Americans that have gambled in one form or another being so high, there must be a large number of Christians that have gambled and/or continue to gamble in one form or another.

With such staggering statistics on gambling in America, that obviously includes Christians, the logical question for Christians looking to live godly lives must be, “Should Christians Gamble?” To be honest, there is no passage of scripture that says, “Thou shalt not gamble.” However, there is no specific passage of scripture for many of the sins we commit, but we know they are wrong because of the principles that are clearly taught in the Bible. For example, there is no passage of scripture that says “Thou shalt give the cashier back the extra money she inadvertently gave you.” However, because we know that a cashier may lose their job or be forced to repay the extra money they gave us by mistake, we as children of God, get reminded by the Holy Spirit that is in us of the principles clearly taught in the “Great Commandments” found in Mark 12:30-31 (NIV). There we read, “³⁰*Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind and with all your strength.* ³¹*The second is this: ‘Love your neighbor as yourself.’ There is no commandment greater than these.*” By obeying the second “Great Commandment” from this text, in which Jesus commands us to, “**Love your neighbor as yourself,**” we would return the extra money to the cashier, considering how we ourselves would want to be treated under the same circumstances (See also “The Golden Rule” in Matthew 7:12).

As already mentioned, there is no specific scripture that says, “Thou shalt not gamble.” As a result, some will ask “why is gambling wrong if the Bible says nothing specific about it?” One of the reasons there is no specific scripture that forbids gambling is the fact that gambling was not a social problem in the Bible day; therefore, there was no need to condemn it specifically. However, the fact that there is nothing specifically said about it, that in no way makes gambling ok for Christians. There is no specific passage that says, “Thou shalt

not smoke cigarettes” either since cigarette smoking was not a problem in the Bible day. However, we know smoking cigarettes is wrong because it does damage to our body (temple) where the Holy Spirit resides (1 Corinthians 6:19-20).

In order to search the scriptures for the principles that either condone or disapprove of gambling, we must, in a nutshell, define gambling. That said, gambling in a nutshell is defined as: “A wager or a bet in which each player agrees to risk losing money or some other material possession to other players in exchange for the chance to win the money or the possessions of the other players, without compensation to the loser(s). The winner(s) or loser(s) are determined by the outcome of the game.”

The activities that fall within this definition of gambling are:

- Casino gambling: slot machines, roulette wheels, dice and card games, number games, etc.
- Racetrack betting on horses, dogs, etc.
- Lotteries (legal or illegal)
- Church sponsored bingo, raffles, etc. (for any good cause, you just make a donation, you do not need to gamble)
- Amateur gambling: poker games for money, office pools for money, sports games, etc.

The amount of money used in these activities does not matter, it is still gambling. By gambling in the way defined, gamblers have violated at least 5 biblical principles; consider the following:

Principle No. 1 – “The Law of Labor”

The biblical example given for Christians seeking to live godly lives is to work for our living and not try to live off the labors of others, which is exactly what gamblers are doing. The gambler undermines the law of labor because he/she seeks to get something for nothing by taking what other people have earned.

In 1 Timothy 5:18 (NIV) we read, “*For the Scripture says, ‘Do not muzzle the ox while it is treading out the grain,’ the **worker deserves his wages.***”

In 1 Thessalonians 4:11 (NIV) we read, “*Make it your ambition to lead a quiet life, to mind your own business and to **work with your hands, just as we told you***”

Finally, in 2 Thessalonians 3:10-12 (NIV) we read, “¹⁰*For even when we were with you, we gave you this rule: ‘**If a man will not work, he shall not eat.**’* ¹¹*We hear that some among you are idle. They are not busy; they are busybodies.*

¹²*Such people we command and urge in the Lord Jesus Christ to settle down and earn the bread they eat.*”

Principle No. 2 – “The Law of Exchange”

Biblically, money or possessions are to be exchanged after two parties agree on how each will be compensated for their money or possessions being exchanged. In gambling, there is no exchange, one party takes the other’s money or possessions without giving them anything for it. In Genesis 49:30 (NIV) we read, “*the cave in the field of Machpelah, near Mamre in Canaan, which Abraham **bought** as a burial place from Ephron the Hittite, along with the field.*” In 2 Kings 7:16 (NIV) we read, “*Then the people went out and plundered the camp of the Arameans. So a seah of flour **sold** for a shekel, and two seahs of barely **sold** for a shekel, as the Lord had said.*” Therefore, “The Law of Exchange” demands that both parties are compensated for their money or property being exchanged.

Principle No. 3 – “The Law of Giving”

Any person may choose to give to another person out of their own free will. That is to say, they will give unconditionally out of their goodwill or kindness without obligating the receiver of their gift(s) to in any way compensate them for the gift(s) they received. In Acts 20:35 (NIV) we read, “*...**It is more blessed to give than to receive.***” Gamblers have a different philosophy, for them, it is more blessed to take from others than it is to give to them. Christians, like Jesus, are to be givers, not takers. Christians look to give to the poor and elderly, not take what little they have through gambling.

Principle No. 4 – “The Law of Stewardship”

Christians are called to be “stewards” of God’s manifold blessings. We are to use God’s blessings to glorify him in all that we do with the blessings bestowed upon us. By definition, a steward is a servant who has been entrusted to use his master’s property to achieve the master’s purposes. Contrary to the very popular opinion, 10% of what we have or receive is not all that belongs to God. The fact is, not only does the remaining 90% belong to God, everything under the sun belongs to him, we have been simply entrusted with a portion of our master’s property and he expects us to use it wisely. In Psalms 24:1-2 (NIV) we read, “*¹**The earth is the Lord’s, and everything in it, the world, and all who live in it;** ²*for he founded it upon the seas and established it upon the waters.*” (See also 1 Samuel 2:7 and Psalm 50:10). Gambling is poor stewardship at best, since statistically, gamblers lose much more than they ever win. Therefore, Christian gamblers misuse their master’s possessions for which they must one day give an account (Matthew 25:14-30).*

Principle No. 5 – “The Law of Love”

In Matthew 22:39 (NIV) we read, “..***Love your neighbor as yourself.***” If we love our neighbor as ourselves, we do good to them, we do not deliberately harm them through gambling. In Romans 13:10 (NIV) we read, “***Love does no harm to its neighbor...***” Love for our neighbor means we do not, by gambling, seek to take what belongs to them without compensation. All gamblers hope others lose so they can profit by taking their money or possessions, no matter who the loss hurts.

Finally, at the root of gambling is “covetousness” and “greed.” In Exodus 20:17 (NIV) we read, “...***You shall not covet your neighbor’s wife, or his manservant or maidservant, his ox or donkey, or anything that belongs to your neighbor.***”

Covetousness in short, is the desire to wrongfully take someone else’s property. In Colossians 3:5 (NIV) we read, “***Put to death, therefore, whatever belongs to your earthly nature: sexual immorality, impurity, lust, evil desires and greed, which is idolatry.***” Greed in short, is a desire to have more than what you need. The greedy Christian that gambles to get more than what God gives them is in essence telling God that he is not a good provider nor does he know how much they need to live. The only cure for the greedy and those who covet what others have is learning to be content with God’s provisions. In 1Timothy 6:8 (NIV) we read, “***But if we have food and clothing, we will be content with that.***” (See also Philippians 4:11-13).

Rather than to waste money gambling, which puts astronomical odds against them, Christians should sow into the kingdom of God through tithes and offerings. The biblical principles regarding tithing are found in Malachi 3:10-11 (NIV) where we read, “¹⁰***Bring the whole tithe into the storehouse, that there may be food in my house. Test me in this, says the Lord Almighty, and see if I will not throw open the floodgates of heaven and pour out so much blessing that you will not have room enough for it.*** ¹¹***I will prevent pests from devouring your crops...***” While lotteries, casinos and other forms of gambling sell people dreams, the living God gives us his principles that he will honor; with God we never lose!! Therefore, Christians should sow into their church/ministries and the lives of others. By doing this, we store up treasures in heaven (Matthew 6:19-21).

God Bless,

Pastor D. M. Duncan

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