



Accents & Issues

Gambling and Lotteries

Gambling is risking money, property, or something else of value on a chance outcome. In recent years, governments switched from prohibiting gambling to endorsing it to raise money for a variety of agencies and programs. Gambling resorts have become family-entertainment centers supporting the gambling business. Local gaming operations have sprung up, such as riverboat gambling, reservation casinos, gambling parlors, internet gambling sites, dog and horse racing, and off-track betting establishments. Moreover, government-run lotteries entice people to bet that they will eventually strike it rich.

Nevertheless, institutional gambling is not a true game of chance. The odds are calculated and manipulated to favor the government or gambling establishments. Indeed, gambling is a huge transfer of assets from those least able to afford the losses to hugely wealthy and powerful entities. It is a reverse Robin Hood effect where money is robbed from the poor and powerless and given to the rich and powerful. As a matter of fact, institutional gambling requires that losers not only pay for winners but also pay for the overhead, operating expenses, and exorbitant profit margins of the gaming organizations. A winner, therefore, is “cashing in” at the expense of the many losers. Multitudes lose so that a few can accumulate wealth.

As gambling has become widespread and generally accepted, a significant number of people are currently incarcerated for habitual gambling. Their compulsion caused them to break the law to cover gambling debts or to simply support their gambling addiction. Indeed, gambling is a catalyst for increases in crime, divorce, family disruption, addiction, poverty, and debt.

No biblical commandment states, “You shall not gamble.” Therefore, our assertions regarding gambling grow out of Christian love and concern. Gambling appeals to selfish instincts like greed, covetousness, thrill-seeking, entertainment dependency, and the desire to get something for nothing. Gambling, for some, becomes a compulsion — an addiction — that can drive them to neglect their family, disregard responsibilities, and even steal or commit other crimes to support their addiction.

Even for persons not addicted to gambling, the desire to “get something for nothing” is tempting. Indeed, losing frequently makes one want to try again anticipating that the next bet will provide financial redemption. Winning whets the appetite for excitement, enticing one to take greater chances. Ironically, both winning and losing can cause self-centeredness rather than dependence on God and thus undermine the biblical call to holiness.

Moreover, God-centered holy living involves the stewardship of resources, which demands that we not support endeavors that destroy the livelihood of others. On the surface, gambling can appear quite harmless — perhaps even fun, exciting, and daring. However, beneath the surface lurks a monster that feeds on selfish desires, regardless of how small the amount or infrequent the gambling.

Indeed, some risks of gambling may be even greater than loss of money or possessions. Many have lost self-respect, freedom, family, and job. Moreover, the individual gambler is not the only one who suffers. Children, spouse, friends, relatives, and society in general pay a great price for the destructive effects of gambling. Gambling is particularly harmful to the poor, and government-sponsored gambling is an additional tax on the people in our society who can least afford it.

.....

As a community of faith, we oppose gambling — legal or illegal. Christians have a certain amount of freedom to exercise personal viewpoints and practices. Nevertheless, we must be cautious in making a personal decision that might cause another to stumble. We are called to reflect the light and truth of Jesus in living each day. Any practice that threatens our witness for the Lord or undermines our full reliance upon God to provide for our daily needs must be questioned. Gambling is such a practice.

