Grace to You :: *esp Unleashing God's Truth, One Verse at a Time*

Gambling: Some Definitions and Distinctions
Scripture: Proverbs 22:16; Proverbs 28:22
Code: B110525

To gamble is to wager on a contest or to play at a game of chance for stakes. When you gamble, you are risking money (or something else of value) on the outcome of something that involves an element of chance, uncertainty, or hazard—for the possibility of winning something someone else has put at stake.

A stake is a prize one person stands to gain through the loss of others.

Simple contest prizes, such as free sweepstakes and door prizes, do not involve gambling if no fee is charged for entry into the contest. Sweepstakes contests sponsored for advertising purposes are paid for by the sponsor. The winner's prize is not financed by the loss of other contestants. Therefore it is not gambling. Nothing is put at stake by the contestants in such events.

Likewise, ***investing in the stock market*** is not "gambling," regardless of how much risk is involved. If a stock gains value, all investors earn money. The gains of one investor are not financed by the losses of others. In other words, there are no losers when a stock gains value. When the stock value increases, the economic "pie" grows.

By contrast the size of the economic pie in a gambling contest is fixed. The prize is a pool of money contributed by the players. A casino may take a percentage of that pie off the top, but otherwise, the size of the pie is fixed by the aggregate total of the players' contributions.

Similarly, ***a farmer who plants seed hoping to yield a crop*** takes a calculated risk. (If weather or disease destroys the crop, he could lose all he has invested in the crop.) That risk is not, technically, a "gamble," because if the investment pays off, no one loses. Real wealth has been created, unlike in gambling, where no wealth is ever actually created.

In gambling, existing wealth merely changes hands. In other words, one person's gain always comes at the price of hurt caused to others. ***That is the reason an immoral principle underlies all gambling.*** (We'll probe this point more carefully before the end of this series.)

One more misconception is worth trying to clear up: You'll often hear someone compare the insurance business to gambling. But although buying and selling insurance involves risk, it is not the moral equivalent of gambling. ***Assuming risk per se is not gambling.*** As we know, life is full of risk,

and if the act of taking a risk were inherently the same as gambling, you could say that we all gamble every day.

In fact, that is precisely what some who advocate gambling *do* say. They point out that you take a risk every time you get in an airplane or ride in a car—or walk across the street. You would also face *some* risk even if all you did was stay in bed trying to avoid risk. Therefore, they say, life itself is a gamble.

But all of that is based on a faulty understanding of what gambling is. Look again at our definitions: ***To gamble is to play a game of chance for stakes. And a stake is a prize that is obtained at another gambler's expense.*** Remember: in gambling, whatever one person wins is lost by another.

Furthermore, in gambling, the risk is artificial. It is risk that is created by a game of chance. And the sole purpose for assuming this risk is to try to gain something at someone else's expense.

Now, notice this: all gambling involves four elements: ***One,*** something valuable is put at risk. ***Two,*** something belonging to someone else is at stake as a prize. ***Three,*** an element of chance is involved in determining the outcome. And ***four,*** no new wealth is created in the process.

And those four characteristics of gambling are the very reasons gambling is wrong. Each of the essential characteristics of gambling, when combined with the other three, violates one or more biblical principles. In the next post in this series, we'll begin to see why.

Phil Johnson
Executive Director

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