

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

## Gambling vs. Faithful Stewardship

Scripture: Proverbs 22:16; Proverbs 28:22

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I closed [the last post](#) with a list of four distinguishing marks drawn from a standard definition of "gambling." All four of these are true of every variety of gambling:

***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.***

Now, let's devote a few posts to considering each of those features of gambling, one at a time. It is my contention that there's something in each one of them that conflicts with biblical principles. We'll take them in order, starting with the first:

**Gambling places something valuable at risk for an illegitimate purpose. That violates the most basic biblical principles of wise and faithful stewardship.**

Let me point out first of all that one of the fundamental principles of all biblical stewardship is given to us in the Tenth Commandment, Exodus 20:17: "Thou shalt not covet thy neighbour's house, thou shalt not covet thy neighbour's wife, nor his manservant, nor his maidservant, nor his ox, nor his ass, nor any thing that is thy neighbour's." It's a *sin* to covet anything that belongs to your neighbor. This is not a gray area.

### **Gambling is covetousness distilled to its very essence**

I know people—and in all likelihood you do, too—who claim that they gamble only for entertainment or recreation; not out of greed or covetousness.

But if it's mere entertainment they seek, why not play a game without staking any money on the outcome? *Every gambler to whom I have ever posed that question* has given me the same answer: "To play a game with nothing at stake is not as much fun." The stake makes the game more "fun" or more "interesting."

As a matter of fact, one commenter made that very point: "Poker simply doesn't work without some money at stake . . . the money at stake adds to the enjoyment of the game." He said he plays for small amounts—so that "the financial losses are not enough to be any more than entertainment money, and the prize not enough to create greed."

Analyze that for a moment. Why would the element of gambling make a game more "fun?" There is only one reason: because the "fun" is derived not from the game itself but from the possibility of winning something that belongs to your neighbor. In other words, what makes gambling "fun" is pure covetousness.

**Sorry to be blunt about it, but that is *sin*.**

Note carefully: it's *the principle of covetousness* that makes that sort of "fun" sin, not the size of the stake. A Christian who thinks it's safe to cultivate covetous desires as long as the sum at stake is small has completely missed Paul's point in 1 Timothy 6:9-11:

But those who desire to be rich fall into temptation and a snare, and into many foolish and harmful lusts which drown men in destruction and perdition. For the love of money is a root of all kinds of evil, for which some have strayed from the faith in their greediness, and pierced themselves through with many sorrows. But you, O man of God, ***flee these things*** and pursue righteousness, godliness, faith, love, patience, gentleness.

Gambling involves an inordinate desire to get something from one's neighbor without a legitimate exchange. So it is a sin on those grounds, even if we said nothing further.

### But There's More . . .

Gambling *can be* a sinful dereliction of the steward's duty for several other reasons as well. **Note:** I'm not arguing here that every act of gambling is necessarily tainted by *all* the following sins. But these are all major factors in the complex of evils that commonly accompany gambling. Anyone who *practices* gambling as a pattern of life is systematically tolerating and even cultivating the sin of covetousness in his or her heart. That person will *of course* be especially susceptible to many of the corresponding temptations, too:

-**Slothfulness.** Get-rich-quick schemes are practically *all* foolish and immoral. Solomon wrote this in Proverbs 28:22: "A man with an evil eye hastens after riches, and does not consider that poverty will come upon him."

The promise of easy wealth is an overt appeal to slothful desire. Yet most gamblers freely acknowledge that the promise of gaining money quickly and with little effort is one of the major factors that adds to the "fun" of gaming. In other words, gambling fuels both covetousness *and* sloth.

-**Foolishness.** Listen to Proverbs 22:16: "He that oppresseth the poor to increase his riches, and he that giveth to the rich, shall surely come to want." That's an interesting verse. Most of us will instinctively understand that it is sinful to oppress the poor in order to increase our riches. *But the verse also says that you shouldn't just give your money to the rich.* Who would give their money away to rich people? ***People who gamble in casinos are doing it all the time.***

Numerous studies have shown that poor people tend to spend a much larger proportion of their income on gambling than people in middle—or upper-income brackets. Gambling is a particular plague on lower-income people, primarily because of its illegitimate promise of getting rich quick. [More](#) than [one study](#) has demonstrated that the poor bet more than three times the amount wagered by persons in middle-income and upper-income brackets.

Meanwhile, those who are licensed to sponsor lotteries and casino games *never* lose—they gain enormous wealth by taking money off the top, and by skewing the odds overwhelmingly in their favor.

In other words, money won in state lotteries and other forms of gambling is money taken from the poor. And money *lost* in such wagers is money given to the rich. So both of the evils condemned in Proverbs 22:16 are fostered by the machinery of gambling. If you want to oppress the poor and give your money to the rich, there is no more systematic way to do it than through gambling.

**-Profligacy.** Gambling is an expensive business. [In 1974, statistics showed Americans were betting about \\$17 billion per year through legal channels. That was an astronomical sum, but it ballooned to \\$330 billion by 1992.](#) By most estimates, [Americans now wager more than \\$600 billion each year.](#) That's more than we spend on food. It's seriously wasteful by any standard.

**-A lack of self-control.** Furthermore, as the above statistics (and many [others](#)) indicate, [gambling is seriously addictive.](#) Research suggests that one in every ten gamblers does so compulsively. There are an estimated ten million gambling addicts in the United States alone. And the average compulsive gambler has debts exceeding \$80,000. It is a bigger problem than alcoholism. And in areas where gambling is widespread—such as Las Vegas and Atlantic City—the [suicide](#) rate is three times higher than the national average.

**-Miscellaneous concerns.** There is the stewardship of *time*. Gambling consumes people's leisure time with activities that are neither relaxing nor healthy for the body.

We could also talk about gambling's negative impact on philanthropy and charity for the poor.

And there's gambling's destructive consequences for marriage and the family; its detrimental effect on society, the crime rate, and the spiritual climate wherever gambling flourishes. Gambling has been shown to contribute to turmoil and physical abuse in the home, crime and violence in society, and all kinds of personal and psychological disorders in the person who is addicted to gambling.

The effects of gambling are virtually all bad. And no wonder. It is contrary to everything Scripture teaches about wise stewardship.

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