

## **Gambling**

Mike Richardson tells this story, A preacher saw a man who looked homeless sitting on a park bench and seemed to be in deep distress so he passed by him, handed him a £20 and whispered to him, "Never Despair". The next day the preacher saw the man coming toward him hurriedly and gave him £60. The preacher asked what that was and the man said, "You were right! Never Despair came in first yesterday paying out 6 to 1 odds in the 4th race.

### **Introduction**

We have seen and heard a lot this week about the governments gamble with taxpayers' money during the current financial crisis. So this week we will look at the subject of Gambling.

### **Statistics on UK gambling.**

From the official Scottish Executive 2006 document RESEARCH ON THE SOCIAL IMPACTS OF GAMBLING

Although a considerable amount of data – albeit of a variable quality – on the social impacts of gambling exists from an international perspective, the evidence base for the U.K., and particularly Scotland, is practically non-existent.

Very little research into the associations between crime and gambling has been conducted in the U.K.

Research has found that the location of casinos within a fifty mile radius of an individual's home roughly doubles rates of problem gambling.

The gambling commission produced The Gambling Prevalence Study which published official statistics in 2007

Who gambles on what

National Lottery draw - 57%

Scratch cards - 20%

Horse races - 17%

Slot machines - 14%

Other lottery tickets - 12%

Private betting - 10%

Problem gambling is higher than in Norway, but similar to Canada and New Zealand and lower than Australia and the US.

### **US statistics**

John Smithson of Michigan has done a lot of research into the effects of gambling in America and in particular casinos.

Sharpest increase in gambling is among senior citizens.

In CA, 40% of lottery tickets are bought by the unemployed.

The casinos' most profitable day is Sunday.

Over 50% of the money spent in casinos is not brought in with gamblers, but is extracted electronically.

The total of money spent last year for gambling is roughly equal to national deficit!

Las Vegas has the highest rate of suicide in America, for both residents and visitors

A 1996 U.S. News and World Report analysis found crime rates in casino communities to be 84% higher than the national average. The total number of crimes within a 30-mile radius of Atlantic City increased by 107% in the nine years following the introduction of casinos to the area.

In 1998, Americans spent more money on gambling (approximately 50 billion) than on recorded music, theme parks, video games, spectator sports, and movie tickets combined (39.9 billion).

Americans gamble more money than they spend on groceries.

Utah, which has no legalized gambling, has the healthiest growing economy in the nation.

## Luck

Gambling depends on luck and luck is defined as a force that brings good fortune or adversity.

Even atheists will say “good luck” as if there is some force beyond their control.

When we explain away positive moments in our life to luck, by saying weren't we lucky, we deny the sovereignty of God.

Gambling is not the same as taking a risk.

Not all risk taking is gambling. No where does the Bible condemn risk taking. Jesus actually condemned a man for playing it safe, when he buried his treasure, instead of investing it! In the Luke version of the parable of the talents the “man of noble birth” actually instructed them to '**Put this money to work, until I come back.**' Luke 19:13

To justify gambling, many people say things like “Life is a gamble... A farmer planting a crop each year is a gamble... Every time you drive a car is a gamble... Buying a used car is a gamble.” No...leaving home in a car is a risk... making a wager on that risk is gambling! There is a certain amount of risk inherent in all activities, but the mere presence of risk does not make it a gamble!

Gambling is designed for you to lose. Gambling winnings come from gambling losses. For every winner, there has to be a loser. One person gains because many others lose. Nothing is produced, nothing is created, no goods or services exchange hands. It is extremely exploitative. For one person to win, many must lose, that is not God's way.

What does God say about luck?

**Is 65:11-12 11 "But as for you who forsake the LORD and forget my holy mountain, who spread a table for Fortune and fill bowls of mixed wine for Destiny, 12 I will destine you for the sword, and you will all bend down for the slaughter; for I called but you did not answer, I spoke but you did not listen. You did evil in my sight and chose what displeases me."**

There are Spiritual forces behind gambling.

Literally this says that those who forsake God spread a table for **Gad**, who is the god of fortune, a Babylonian god that would supposedly bring good luck if you gave him an offering. This is the meaning of the expression by gad!

The other God here is “**Meni**”, who is the Babylonian God of destiny or fate. This was a female goddess who is sometimes called, “Lady Luck”

It is no coincidence that phrases like “Lady Luck” find their way into our vocabulary. There is spiritual significance to it.

When people sing Frank Sinatra's song, “Luck be the lady,” they do not realize that they are asking help from a demon that was the goddess named Meni.

Some people are very superstitious and carry trinkets that bring luck or they wear their lucky socks etc.

Those that indulge in gambling or concede in any way to Lady Luck are effectively giving offerings to these false gods. They will never be satisfied. It might begin as mere entertainment but it can easily grow to something more.

The wayward nation of Israel had forsaken the Lord to worship the gods gad and meni. God spoke directly against those that gave offerings to these gods and when gamblers today are giving offerings to them they do so in the hope that they will bless them. But behind gad and meni are demons.

Gambling is no new phenomenon. Remember they cast dice for the clothes of Jesus at the foot of the cross.

But do not confuse gambling with the High Priests use of the Urim and Thummim, and the biblical casting of lots.

Prov 16:33 tells us that this is an act of faith, not something left to chance or luck **The lot is cast into the lap, but its every decision is from the LORD.**

It was their way of saying, God has made the decision it is His responsibility to show us what it is.

### **What is gambling?**

Seeking to gain at another's loss, without giving anything of appropriate value, and as a result of an artificial risk. It appeals to the sense of greed and laziness. Something for next to nothing. The only real winners of gambling are the promoters – whether it is Ladbrokes or a charity organising the raffle.

Rob Harbison of Georgia reminds us; **When gambling thrives someone suffers. Remember that “legal” and “moral” are not necessarily the same thing! If gambling is wrong in principle, then neither the amount gambled or the reason for gambling is relevant.**

Beware of terms such as moderate gambling, a harmless flutter or gambling in a good cause where the end justifies the means.

Maybe everyone is happy to loose their stake, but are you happy to gain at the collective loss of your neighbour? It is embarrassing to say no, especially to other Christians in a church context. One can appear anti-social or a spoil sport. If you are happy to “loose” your stake why not just make it a gift saying something like, “Raffles are not for me, but I support your cause.” This is not threatening or judgemental.

There are also some Biblical principles that indirectly teach against gambling:

### **Warning against dishonesty**

Ex. 20:15 **“you shall not steal”**

Gambling breaks the spirit of that command, because gambling is robbery by mutual consent; it is not as a gift. Nothing is given back in exchange.

Just because the winners and the losers consent, doesn't make it right. It simply shows that they BOTH had covetousness in their heart.

Jerry Shirley of Illinois make the following observation; **Two men walk into an alley. One has a gun, walks out with the other man's money...or he has a pair of dice, and walks out with the other man's money!**

**What's the difference? In the first case there was a thief, in the 2nd, there were two! Because both of them desired to take what rightfully belonged to the other man.**

### **Warning against covetousness**

Every form of gambling is covetousness, the desire for something that is not yours!

Exodus 20:17 **You shall not covet**

Gambling Christians are saying that they are unhappy with God's provision.

Philippians 4:19 **And my God will meet all your needs according to his glorious riches in Christ Jesus.**

Matthew 6:26 Look at the birds of the air; they do not sow or reap or store away in barns, and yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not much more valuable than they?

It violates the "GOLDEN RULE" of Matt. 7:12.

In everything, do to others what you would have them do to you, for this sums up the Law and the Prophets.

The whole principal of gambling is to gain at another's expense and is totally contrary to spirit of Christ.

### **Warning against the "something for nothing" philosophy**

Work is honourable for Christians. Laziness and sloth are not.

In a passage on how to live as children of God Paul writes He who has been stealing must steal no longer, but must work, doing something useful with his own hands, that he may have something to share with those in need. Ephesians 4:28.

Gambling is in violation of this principle because the gambler does not want to earn his living, but wants to win it.

Paul also tells Timothy of the importance of providing for one's own family. 1 Tim. 5:8 Gambling limits money that could be used for family needs.

### **Warning of the dangers involved**

Prov. 6:27 "Can a man take fire in his bosom, and not be burned?"

No alcoholic ever planned on becoming enslaved when he took his first drink. And no gambler planned on becoming enslaved when he bought his first lottery ticket or walked into a casino for the first time.

The compulsive or problem gambler harms not only themselves but their entire family.

### **Warning about stewardship**

We are expected to put to good use what God has given us. Gambling does not provide a good return! We need to remember texts such as Hag 2:8 The silver is mine and the gold is mine,' declares the LORD of hosts, and Rom 14:12 each of us will give an account of himself to God.

What will happen if I win? What will happen if I loose?

As Jerry Shirley says; The man who gambles and wins is a thief, the man who gambles and loses is a fool!

We have the privilege to contribute to God's work on earth as well as help the poor and needy.

Mike Richardson sums it up by saying; Money is designed to do three basic things...

1. Take care of personal and family needs...
2. Further the work of God...
3. Provide help for those in need....

### **Who gambles and why?**

For some the motivation is to attempt to overcome the boredom and frustration of depression.

For many it is simply dissatisfaction, covetousness, greed envy always wanting more and more.

For others it is despair – the only hope for things to get better – one last try. This is why gambling often targets the poor.

What will happen if I win? What will happen if I loose?

University students are lured into the casinos with free food and drink. After just a few weeks they are often hopelessly and deeply in debt. Not all parents able or willing to bail out their children.

In Tenby we now have CyberBet – with free tea, coffee or a soft drink as an enticement!

## Good Luck Blessing

Texas Pastor Castilleja gives a positive way for Christians approach the issues of gambling and luck in general.

“Good luck” moments are opportunities to pray. Think about it. Almost every time we are in a situation where it is appropriate to say good luck, it is an opportunity we could pray for someone. You run into someone and they say, I have a job interview, don’t say good luck, pray for them. If someone says I have a test today, don’t say good luck, say a prayer for them.

Instead of saying “good luck” say, “may the favour of God be with you. We need to get out of the habit of saying “good luck.” We don’t want our words to be meaningless.

We don’t want to say things we don’t mean. I know that you don’t really mean to say “good luck” when you know that God is the one who is in control.

As a parent, we should be careful what is said to our children. Have fun with it. It is like Star Wars. You know Luke Skywalker “may the force be with you.” We say “may the favour of God be with you.” Furthermore, think about the testimony it is to other people. Say you are around your friends and they say, “wish me luck!” Won’t it be a surprise when you say back to them. “May the favour God be with you.” When you say that, there is no denying where your faith stands. They may even ask, “What do you mean favour of God?” You can tell them about how to get God’s favour. “May the favour of God be with you.” It’s even a greeting or a farewell. “May the favour of God be with you.”

Next time you are in one of those situations, instead of saying “good luck,” say let me pray for you and seek God’s favour. You are not like the rest of the world. You are a child of God.

## Conclusion

May the favour of God be with you

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