

Gambling and the Bible

by Ronald A. Reno

Love of neighbor-Jesus commanded, "Love your neighbor as yourself" (Mark 12:31). Gambling, meanwhile, is predicated on the losses, pain, and suffering of others. For one to win at gambling, others must lose. For many, the ramifications attributable to their gambling losses are profound. Families touched by a gambling addiction are at greatly increased risk for such negative outcomes as divorce, bankruptcy, child abuse, domestic violence, crime, and suicide. More than 15 million Americans already struggle with a gambling problem, and the number continues to grow as gambling expands.

See also Matthew 7:12; Luke 6:31, 10:25-37; Romans 12:10; Philippians 2:3-4; Hebrews 13:1-2.

Exploiting the poor-Gambling preys on the desperation of the poor. The National Gambling Impact Study Commission found that those with incomes less than \$10,000 spend more on lottery tickets than any other income group. High school dropouts spend four times as much as college graduates. Scripture exhorts us to look out for the poor and disadvantaged, and issues strong warnings against taking advantage of their plight.

See, for instance, Proverbs 14:21, 14:31, 22:16; Isaiah 3:14-15; Amos 5:11-12; Zechariah 7:10a.

Work ethic-Work has been part of God's design for mankind from the very beginning. We are to invest our time and energies into labors that supply our needs and those of our families (Proverbs 31, 2 Thessalonians 3:10, 1 Timothy 5:8) and that allow us to share with others (Ephesians 4:28). Scripture is replete with exhortations toward industriousness and admonitions against slothfulness. Gambling, meanwhile, portends something for nothing. Indeed, gambling advertising and marketing frequently belittles hard work and diligence.

See also Genesis 2:15; Exodus 20:9; Proverbs 12:11, 13:4, 20:4, 21:25, 28:19.

Greed-Gambling is founded on greed and undergirded by a "get-rich-quick" appeal. In a recent national poll, two-thirds of respondents stated that the reason they gamble is to win money. The Apostle Paul wrote in 1 Timothy 6:9-10a: "People 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. For the love of money is a root of all kinds of evil."

See also Proverbs 15:27, 28:20; Matthew 6:31; Luke 12:15; Ephesians 5:3; Colossians 3:5; Hebrews 13:5.

Covetousness-The 10th Commandment (Exodus 20:17) prohibits Christians from coveting another's possessions. Gambling is precisely the attempt to obtain the resources of others without providing anything of value in return. Some have rightly described gambling as consensual theft.

Stewardship-Christians are responsible before God for how they invest the resources entrusted to them, as the parable of the talents (Matthew 25:14-30) makes clear. In many cases, money spent on gambling is money that should have gone to provide for the well-being of one's family or the advancement of a worthy cause. In all cases, it is an unwise investment with an almost-certain negative return. More importantly, such spending propagates an immoral, predatory and exploitative industry.

See also Genesis 1:26; Romans 14:12; 1 Corinthians 4:2; 2 Corinthians 5:10; Colossians 3:17.

The role of government-The God-ordained purpose of government, as outlined in Romans 13:1-5, is to protect the welfare of the citizenry and to suppress evil. State-sanctioned gambling does the opposite. It victimizes many, especially the most vulnerable. It also condones-and even promotes-a vice that has historically been repressed specifically because of its inherent debilitating and corruptive nature.

Deception-Legal gambling operations are steeped in deceit. Lotteries that conceal or misstate the odds, casinos without clocks or windows to hide the passage of time, slot machines programmed for "near misses," and "riverboat" casinos that cannot sail are but a few examples. Scripture, on the other hand, detests deceitful conduct (Psalm 5:6: "You destroy those who tell lies; bloodthirsty and deceitful men the Lord abhors."). Indeed, Jesus describes Himself as the embodiment of truth (John 14:6) and Satan as "the father of lies" (John 8:44).

See also Psalms 26:4, 55:23, 101:7; Proverbs 14:8, 12:20, 24:28; Romans 1:29.

Avoiding temptation-Gambling establishments are often host to other corrupting vices, including prostitution and drunkenness. Christians are urged to avoid such environments (1 Thessalonians 5:22: "Avoid every kind of evil."). In 1 Corinthians 15:33, Paul writes, "Do not be misled: 'Bad company corrupts good character.'" Other Scriptures warn believers to flee temptation (1 Corinthians 6:18, 2 Timothy 2:22).

Lack of trust in God-The Bible teaches that Christians are to look to God as their provider, and that we are to be content with the material blessings we receive from His hand. To engage in gambling indicates both a lack of trust in and dissatisfaction with God's provision.

See also Matthew 6:25-34; Philippians 4:11-12, 4:19; 1 Timothy 6:6; Hebrews 13:5.

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