

Gambling: The Seductive Fantasy

Part 1

By John MacArthur Jr.

Well, as you know, this morning we are going to address the subject of "Gambling: The Seductive Dream." I feel a little bit more like an investigative reporter than a Bible teacher this morning. This may sound a little more like a "20/20" television documentary than a sermon, and I don't very often do this, but I want to share with you something of the scene and how gambling fits into our culture today, so that we have some grasp of the importance of understanding what the Word of God has to say, which can be applied to this very, very important issue.

America is on a gambling binge. It is the new invisible addiction assaulting millions of people in our country and around the world. The lottery has become the number one American fantasy. Estimates of the total amount wagered are very difficult to come to; it is hard to be exactly accurate. We do know that there is about 500 billion dollars wagered every year legally in America, and estimates up to one trillion dollars totally, when you add the illegal gambling. The best statistics indicate that there are about 10 million compulsive gamblers, and that's more than the number of alcoholics. America is fast becoming a land of gamblers and not only legal gambling, but illegal gambling makes the actual effect and impact of this thing almost incalculable.

Lest you think that's something new--it isn't. We like to look back at the foundations of our country and assume that everything was as it ought to have been in the early Christian beginnings of America, but gambling, in fact, played a very prominent role in early American History. When Columbus came over here and discovered America, his little boats were filled with sailors who gambled away much of their time crossing the Atlantic by playing dice and playing cards. In landing here they, therefore, brought their gambling interest with them and it took root in the new nation.

In 1612 the British government ran a lottery to assist the new settlement at Jamestown, Virginia. The father of our country, George Washington, wisely declared, "Gambling is the child of avarice (or greed), the brother of iniquity, and the father of mischief." We certainly agree with George; however, he himself kept a full diary of his own winnings and losses! In 1776, the First Continental Congress of the United States sold lottery tickets to finance the American Revolution. President Washington himself bought the first lottery ticket to build the new capital called, "Federal City," now known as Washington D. C.. So, our nation was founded on lottery, the revolution was financed by a lottery, and our capital city was financed by a lottery.

From 1790 to 1860, 24 of the 36 states sponsored government run lotteries. Many schools, universities, colleges, hundreds of churches conducted their own lotteries to raise funds for their own buildings. Now, through this period of early American history and involvement with lotteries and government sponsored gambling, the voice of the Church was somewhat uncertain. The Church, early on, was becoming liberal. There were liberal elements that supported these lotteries and this gambling. The [Roman] Catholic Church, to this very day, has had an uninterrupted interest in gambling and in lotteries to finance its operations.

But the early Church also had some detractors. There were some among the Puritans, and some among the Quakers, even the Baptists and the Methodists who tended to be the Evangelicals, [who] took up, as it were, verbal arms against this government sponsored gambling. Cotton Mather, one of the early American Puritan preachers, preached against gambling as the denial of the providential control of God, and Puritans and Quakers generally followed in echoing his very message and garnered a hearing in places. Yet the professor of ethics, of all subjects, at Harvard College, William Ames, defended gambling. In fact, Harvard financed the erection of its building by a lottery, and the University of Pennsylvania raised its operational budget through gambling.

There was a protest by none other than Francis Scott Key, who was the author of our national anthem. He was one of the great laymen of the church of his day. He was a member of the American Episcopal Church, and he was evangelical in his convictions. He introduced a resolution to the General Convention of 1817 calling on that body to condemn gambling as inconsistent with Christian sobriety, dangerous to the morals of the members of the Church, and peculiarly unbecoming to the character of Christians. But the Episcopalian Church declared his resolution unnecessary.

The Church struggled a little bit in dealing with gambling because they couldn't point to a verse that said, "Thus saith the Lord, 'Thy shalt not gamble.'" But they did denounce it as socially harmful and inconsistent with the biblical view of God and with a Christian's understanding of good stewardship. Methodists and Baptists, Puritans and Quakers began some evangelical activism and began to attack this government sponsored gambling. Under this attack, and because of the increasing corruption of the gambling, by 1894 it had disappeared from America. By 1894 there was no more government sponsored gambling--it ended in corruption and in a financial fiasco. Public gambling at any level was stopped cold at that time because John Wanamaker (sp.), who is famous for the department store in Philadelphia but was quite a noble Christian, was the Postmaster General of the United States and an evangelical, and he barred "all letters, parcels, postcards, circulars, lists of drawings, tickets and other materials referring to lotteries, from the mail.

So, gambling came to a halt in 1894. Between 1894 and 1964, there was no government sponsored gambling in America. In 1964 it was reintroduced by the state of New Hampshire, which became the first state to offer a lottery, and now there are 37 states that have government sponsored lotteries, and Washington D. C. makes 38 entities. There are over 500 casinos across the nation, mostly on Indian reservation land, where the government allows them to just about do anything they want to do, tax-free, as reparations for early American encroachment into the West as settlers came and battled against the Indians, the native-Americans.

In 1974, this 10 years later, a Gallup poll indicated 61% of Americans gambled, wagering 47.4 billion dollars annually. In 1989, 71% were wagering \$246 billion. In 1992, \$330 billion was being wagered. By 1995, studies indicate 95% of Americans gambled, 82% play the lottery, 75% play slot machines, 50% bet on dogs and horses, 44% on cards, 34% on bingo, 26% (that's better than one out of four) on sporting events, 74% frequented casinos, and 89% approved of gambling--that means there was 6% who didn't approve, but gambled anyway. Interesting. Well, a lot of us don't approve of everything we do--is that not true?

This area of legalized gambling has paralleled the general trend in America towards permissiveness, sex, pornography, drugs, and materialism--it's just kind of ridden the crest of that same wave. No longer is gambling confined to Las Vegas, and no longer even to Las Vegas and Atlantic City; it is the national addiction. It is everywhere across this country, and as I said, most of the casinos can now be built in various land which was once reservation land and, therefore, is outside the purview of general, national law.

Gambling expenditures each year exceed the amount spent on films, books, amusements, music, and entertainment combined. People spend more money gambling than they do buying tickets to all national athletic events put together (baseball, football, and everything else). In 1993, people spent \$400 billion, and that's legal, and it's at least that much again, if not more, illegally. They spent \$400 billion in 1993 legally, \$482 billion in 1994, and now it has exceeded that, as I said earlier, it's well over \$500 billion! Five billion is spent every year just in the slot machines in Nevada alone! Ninety-two million households visit the casinos and 10% of all money earned by people in America is thrown away in gambling!

Frankly, the future is very bright for the gambling industry. Because they're now adding to their casinos "theme parks," with the singular goal of attracting children so that they can turn them into gamblers at the earliest possible age. And that is a very successful operation--they want to make your little children gamblers. Ninety percent of today's teenagers have gambled, so that's how successful they have been at this. College students are up to eight times more likely to develop gambling addictions than their parents because they have been

susceptible to this tremendous escalation in state run lotteries; the development of casinos in the last few years, and this attempt to draw them in.

People earning less than \$10,000 annually buy more lottery tickets than any other income group. Gambling is linked to "Organized Crime" at every level. [I was] Speaking with an L. A. P. D. [Los Angeles Police Department] officer in the "Vice" area here (he's been there for over 25 years, with special assignment to gambling)--he told me some very interesting things about gambling in our own city--illegal gambling, which goes on at a far greater pace than any of us would ever imagine. Some of you, no doubt, in an audience this size [4,000+] are involved in this. The money earned by those who operate the gambling business is largely "laundered" through pornography and prostitution. In one four-square mile area of Los Angeles, just four-square miles, there are 120 "book-making parlors" for horse races alone, and many more all over the city. Heaviest lottery spending comes from the poorest ethnic groups and the poorest part of the community. In the San Fernando Valley most of the betting is done on the phone and codes are used so it is hard to trace. The Mafia (Organized Crime) is highly involved in all of this; in fact, they get involved in many ways: they own many lawyers who work their schemes through the legal system. One of the things they do in our area is they get control of unions; they get control of anything they can get control of. One of the things they have done in our area is to find CEOs, or leaders in organizations or companies who are indebted by gambling debt, who are deep into gambling problems--and because of this they remove those CEOs from their company. The CEOs go willingly, I guess; the alternative would be to be thrown to the bottom of the ocean tied to a concrete block or something. They will step aside and the Mafia will replace them with one of their own as the new CEO in the company, and then launder illegal gambling profits through that company.

New technology makes gambling readily available by telephone. It is now on the Internet and you can now gamble with money you don't have by using your credit card--confounding your indebtedness even further. There are so many anecdotes that I have read in the last couple of weeks about this, that talk about young people getting involved, committing suicide, turning their girlfriends into prostitutes--so many, many, sad stories. I could tell you story after story; but you need to know that the large number of statistics indicate how many real stories there are.

Now, the question comes up, and I have been asked this several times since the lottery has become such a prominent thing in the State of California--people have often asked me this question, "What is the proper definition of gambling?" "What is the proper definition of gambling?" I want to give you that, I want to answer that question, so that you understand what gambling is. If we are going to deal with it Biblically, then we need to know what we are talking about.

Now, let me say this first of all; gambling is not taking a risk. There is risk in gambling, but that's too simplistic a definition. There is risk in everything in life. I mean, life basically is risk because we don't know what tomorrow brings. Your life is "a vapor appearing for a little time and vanishes away," and you can't even say, "Tomorrow I will do this, and tomorrow I will do that," James says, because you don't know. We all understand there I risk. It's an uncertain world and life itself is uncertain. There are many legitimate labors, and many legitimate investments, and many legitimate things that you do that have risk tied to them, but they are not gambling; and the reason they are not is because the risk is connected, listen carefully, to reasonable, wise and manageable processes and rewards.

For example, if you are a farmer there is risk. You made a profit from last year's crop; you take all the money you made, you go down and you buy seed, and you buy a new tractor or whatever equipment you need, and you basically put all your money in the soil, with the hope that you are going to receive fivefold on that investment when the harvest comes in. But if you have a terrible winter, or if you have a blight, or if you have a locust invasion, or whatever might be--you could lose everything. Or it could well be that your investment succeeded, your crop came in, but unfortunately, they were producing the same thing in the Philippines at a third the price, because labor is so much more cheap, and land is so much more cheap; and you have no place in the market,

and you have to sell at loss. There is risk in any kind of business. That's not what we are talking about--that's just the way life goes.

You might decide to start a company and you've figured out how to build a better mousetrap. And you've got your little mousetrap all figured out; and you know the world is going to come running to the feet of the one with the better mousetrap, and "Boy!" the day yours comes out you're going to be so excited. But one week before yours arrives in the market, a better one than yours came out, and you didn't know somebody was working on it. Sorry, you made your best effort; you used wise management; you got people who studied and you did some surveys; and you did all you could--but there's risk in that.

Some young people go to college and they spend a fortune for four years to get a college education believing that they are going to go down a certain track, and by the time that they come out there is no job opportunities. I can think of so many people who went through that in the engineering field, when there was such a cutback on military engineering effort, and people who were engineers wound up doing all kinds of things--flipping hamburgers and things like that, because there was just no market.

Life is full of risk. People say, "Well, is putting money in the stock market gambling?" No, because what you are doing is investing, and if you do it well and wisely--you are going to look at a company and all you are doing is taking a part ownership in a company, a company that is large enough to have gone public, successful enough to produced at a level that has produced that kind of income that it could go public; and you're saying, "I think it is a wise use of my money to invest in that company." It may go up and it may not, but that's the way life goes. That can happen at any point in time; even the Lord Himself, as we saw last Sunday, in Isaiah 5, illustrates how it is to plant a vineyard and to find that all you get is sour berries. In anything in life there is risk. Investment has risk, but it is manageable. It is based on rationality, or reason, wisdom, and it promises a reward if it used carefully.

You bought a house. Some of you bought a house at a high price during the time when real estate was inflated, and you figured that prices were just going to go up, and your whole future was in this house, and your retirement was in this house; and all of a sudden there was a turn and the value of your house started to drop. I know even the house I live in dropped to half of what it, at one time, was worth. Fortunately, I bought it long before it ever got to that high point, but many of you didn't, you bought a house and its got a mortgage on it that's more than what it's worth. And you thought your future was going to be secure because there was going to be enough in your house to retire; and it was a wise decision. And how do you know what the future is going to bring to bear? You still don't know what yet may come.

But life has risk. We are not talking about a risk which is a rational thing, which has some track record of experience, to which you could apply some wisdom, and over which you have some control. Even insurance is a risk. I risk a lot of money that I am going to die. Do you now that? I have insurance on my car, I have insurance on my house, I have insurance on my books, I have insurance; a lot of insurance. And you know what's going to happen? We are going to waste all this money and get raptured! But, I can't convince my wife that I shouldn't by some insurance for her, because she wants to be sure that she and the children are cared for; and that makes reasonable sense to me. It is a manageable kind of risk, but it is a risk--you're hedging against the unknown. That's not gambling, that's common sense, and I have been very happy, through the years, to have auto insurance! I'll say no more. And if you live in Southern California, you probably have earthquake insurance, and with good reason. Right?

Where there is reasonable, manageable risk you don't have gambling. Gambling is not simply risk. The word "gamble," "gambling," "gambler," are related to the word "game." They come from an old English word "gammon." It's the idea of a game. Gambling is a game. It is not a game based on skill. It is not a game base on reason, and it is not a game based on anything controllable. It is a game based on sheer chance.

Gambling is an appeal to sheer chance: random luck without skill or one's personal involvement--that's gambling. It's not like competing for a prize where you have to produce something, or run faster than somebody else, or do something better than someone else does, because you have control over that. That's a rational, manageable, controllable, activity. Gambling is not like that. It is not like risking in business for a return--it is an appeal to sheer chance, without any control--purely random.

Let me give you a definition, a formal definition sort of summing up what I have been saying. Gambling is an activity in which a person risks something of value, usually money. It's an activity in which a person risks something of value to forces of chance completely beyond his control, or any rational expectation. That's it. It is an activity in which a person risks something of value to forces of chance completely beyond his control, or any rational expectation, in hope of winning something of greater value, usually more money. But it is an appeal to sheer chance.

The foolish thing about chance is the idea that if you do it longer, your odds get better. That's not true, because there are no controllable elements; so the odds cannot be reduced. Pure chance, sheer random luck, never changes its odds. In fact, I read somewhere this week where you have about much chance of winning the lottery as being eaten by a shark on dry land!

Now, this appeal to sheer chance has devastating effects, and I want to talk about those effects for a few minutes. It provides wealth for a handful of people at the expense of the masses, mostly the poor. People in the lowest income bracket spend four times as much of their income on gambling as others. Gambling is the exploitation of the poor. It is the exploitation of the uneducated. It is the exploitation of the undisciplined, the people who lack self-control. It is the exploitation of the lazy people.

It is unthinkable, in my mind, that a government that is supposed to exist for the welfare of the people, "a government of the people, by the people, for the people," said Abraham Lincoln--it is inexplicable to me that government for the benefit of the people would get to the place where our government has, where it exploits the poor to the degree that it does. And the exploitation is massive. On the one hand, you hear all of this promotion, all of this constant promotion about raising the taxes of the wealthy: taxing the wealthy (the people who work hard, the people who produce, the people who are successful): increasing, and increasing, and increasing their burden of tax (which of course limits the people they can hire, because they have to give so much of their money to the government). They have to cut back on their work force; that's why in all this corporate merging that is going on. People are losing jobs. This is the day of corporate merger because of taxation; companies coming together and cutting people loose--they don't have the money to pay and the taxation bill is so big.

On the one hand, the government is saying, "We have got to give benefits to the poor, benefits to the poor, tax the rich, tax the rich, tax the successful people, and let's give benefits to the poor." At the same time, in an absolutely clear act of hypocrisy, the government institutes government sponsored gambling and exploits the poor! [It] takes money right out of their hands, under the fantasy and the seduction that somehow they are going to get rich. Gambling exploits the poor and the undisciplined and the weak because it increases their debt, it demeans work, it robs families of their resources. It breaks up marriages. It leads to suicides; and it produces crime.

They used to say that, "If we bring in gambling, it will build up all the businesses." "If we create a big casino world," they said in Atlantic City, "It'll build up all the businesses." The fact of the matter is it doesn't do that; it doesn't do it at all. Since Atlantic City legalized gambling in 1976, its population has shrunk 20%, unemployment is higher, crimes are up 380%, the police force has doubled, half of the 2,100 businesses have closed, and four of the past six mayors have been indicted for corruption--three are currently serving jail terms. Gambling doesn't alleviate social ills, it just generates them. One writer says, "Atlantic City used to be slum by the sea, now it is a slum by the sea with casinos."

Gambling is a known promoter of organized and street crime. Everywhere around the gambling realm street crime is elevated. Connecticut attorney, Austin McGuggin (sp.) talks about that, "Central City, Colorado had to more than double its police force after more than five casinos opened." The New Jersey Casino Control Commission Report in '89, said that, "Casino gambling is a magnet for street criminals, and they have had nothing but a huge increase in assault, rape, prostitution and drug dealing."

And gambling, of course, now can be done on video games. You can gamble on the Internet. There is now a lottery channel in Rhode Island, and that will soon spread across the country, where you can gamble in your home with your credit card. TV gambling, telephone gambling, cyberspace casinos are coming--virtual gambling.

Wherever gambling goes, crime comes, because people need more money to gamble; they steal, and rob, and pillage. Las Vegas claims one of the nations highest crime rates. Nevada lists the highest incarceration rate in the nation, and 40% of the felons jailed in Nevada are from out-of-state; so you just invite felons in when you operate gambling. One in every 66 households in Nevada files for bankruptcy--the highest rate in the nation. They have the highest per capita consumption of alcohol in the nation and, by the way, these casinos give away alcohol because drunk people gamble more.

In 1994, the FBI found that criminals in Las Vegas committed five times as many violent crimes as police were able to solve; this is the worst ratio of any large city in the United States. And so it goes. And there are more statistics: the crime increases go up 300, 400, 500, 1,000 percent. In Atlantic City--on larceny, all kinds of larceny crimes, violent crimes, rape, aggravated assault, robbery--just out of sight, escalating crime.

Now, in spite of this--and I could just go on with all of the statistics, but I think you get the picture; it is a major problem, and it is destroying families. In spite of all of this, the Church hasn't really addressed this. The Church has been busy with abortion, pornography, family values and things like that, on its political face. But the Church hasn't done anything about gambling. There is a big "hue and cry" now about smoking; and there should be because smoking is a foolish thing to do to your body; and the government probably should have stepped in a long time ago and dealt with that, although people do have certain freedoms to do to themselves whatever they want. The government hasn't even decided to step in on the alcohol industry; that's another issue that should have been addressed long ago, if it really was a government for the people. But the government is in an advocacy position on this gambling thing, and the Church needs to stand up and declare the reality of what this stuff really is in relation to what the Word of God has to say.

There are no verses in the Bible; if you look for the word "gambling" in your concordance, you won't find it. There are no verses in the Bible that make a direct statement, "Thou shalt not gamble." So, the Church has kind of backed off on that, and maybe found it difficult to make a case against gambling. It also, I think, has backed off because you can tell a drunk staggering down the street and slobbering on himself, or hunched over in a park bench, or living in a cardboard box, but gamblers don't have visible evidences and so it doesn't look on the surface as bad. It's kind of a respectable look.

There is ignorance of the industry; that's why I have taken a few minutes to give you the statistics. You need to know how big this is. There is an ignorance of Biblical principles that apply to gambling, and there is so much materialism among Christians; they maybe, some of them would like to win the lottery--I'm sure they would. All this kind of apathy feeds the exploding exploitation of the weak and makes government bigger and more powerful; and the Church needs to stand up and say what needs to be said.

Well, so much for a look at the problems; so, let's turn to some of the principles that you have to deal with, and I am going to give you just a few; and then next week I am going to take you right into the Word of God, and we are going to go step-by-step-by-step into what the Bible says about gambling. But let me just give you some broad sweep to start with. All right?

Number one that I want to share with is, "the moral issues in Gambling." And we are looking now at a broad moral sweep, obviously supported by the general teaching of Scripture. Gambling is immoral for the following reasons:

1. It drains the economic provision that God makes for people.

Gambling is immoral because it is God who gives you the power to get wealth and everything we have comes from God, and gambling drains that.

2. Gambling is immoral because it undermines philanthropy, in fact, it reverses philanthropy.

It is a "light for dark," and "black for white," and "bitter for sweet," reversal, if we use the words of Isaiah five. Instead of giving to the poor, and helping the poor, it exploits the poor. It is the destruction of philanthropy. Instead of taking any discretionary money that you might have and giving it to someone with need, you take your discretionary money and gamble it, so that you can take the biggest amount from those who have the least and who made the foolish investment in the first place.

3. It is immoral because it erodes the Biblical work ethic.

God has honored and exalted work. Man is to earn his bread by the sweat of his brow. "Six days shall you work," Exodus 20. The whole of the work ethic is demeaned by this, and the American work ethic is getting worse and worse as we speak. It's sinking in deeper and deeper, and as it goes, people demand more; they demand the government give them more, though they work less. The [gambling] fantasy becomes more seducing all the time, and so the work ethic is further eroded.

The American dream used to be, that, "if you work hard enough you can make a good, comfortable life in this great nation." The American dream now is, "Win the lottery." That is a seductive fantasy that doesn't come true. And even if you win it, by the way, you get \$50,000 a year, and that's after the government taxes it, and it is spread out over who knows how many years. It isn't what it appears on the surface.

Sociologist, Mark Abrahamson (sp.) explains, and I quote him, "The same state that urged people to stay in school, seek job training, and persevere through hard work and sacrifice, also encourages the fatalistic belief that people's lives can change dramatically, if their numbers come up in the lottery. The state is selling one message with its right hand and another with its left."

4. It is immoral, also, because it promotes irrationality.

One of the things that we have always tried to promote in America is the use of the mind. I can remember seeing advertising on television, "A mind is a terrible thing to waste." Rationality, [is] the God-given distinction that makes us human, rather than animal. The ability to think and to reason, and to sort out, and to plan, is a part of our God-given image, and that kind of rationality is important to being what men and women should be. Gambling promotes irrationality, it promotes fantasy, and thus it promotes despair, because there is no guaranteed goal, there is no guaranteed achievement at the end of the thing. If you work hard and you apply yourself, and you exercise your work ethic, there is a guaranteed benefit to that: you will produce. But the irrational fantasy of gambling leads only to nothingness and then despair.

5. It is immoral because it preys on the weak and the vulnerable, mostly elderly.

Many, many elderly, particularly older women, who gamble. [It] preys on the weak, teenagers, now we know, and even children. It preys on those who are not rational, who aren't the smartest and the brightest, who have the least.

6. It is immoral because it attracts the undisciplined and pushes them deeper and deeper into difficulty.

Now that's a general look at its immorality. Let me give some specific sins that gambling is built on. If you eliminate these sins [then] gambling doesn't exist. Here they are and I'll give you several.

1. Gambling is built on the sin of materialism.

The whole appeal of gambling is that you can get rich, that you need more material things. 1 Timothy 6:10, [says,] "The love of money is the root of . . ." what? "All kinds of evil." "The love of money," is just another phrase for materialism, and gambling is built on the "love of money." "Win money. Win money. Win money," that's all you hear--it's the whole thing. It appeals to the materialistic lust.

2. It is built on the sin of greed.

It is built on the idea that whatever you have is not enough. It appeals to greed with outrageous prizes--outrageous prizes. You know the truth of the matter is, I often ask myself why they can't spread that stuff out among a lot more people. The answer is because they couldn't make the appeal, they know that, in the marketing strategy. They couldn't make the appeal if they didn't make the prize staggeringly outrageous; and then they break it all down so it amounts to about \$50,000 a year which, in the end, is not much at all when you think about it. But it appeals to greed with its outrageous prizes, and the Bible has so much to say about greed.

Proverbs talks so repeatedly about what happens to greedy people. Jesus talked about what happens to greedy people in Luke, chapter 12. Just mentioning, I think it's verse 15, if I remember right--Luke 12:15 says, "Beware and be on your guard against every form of greed, for not even when one has an abundance does his life consist of his possessions." I mean, avoid greed, because even when you get what you have been greedy for, you haven't got anything.

3. Gambling is built on the sin of materialism, greed and discontent.

Discontent--you don't have enough; there's a lot more. It's the very opposite of Philippians 4:11, where Paul says, "Not that I speak from want; for I have learned to be content in whatever circumstances I am. I know how to get along with humble means, and I also know how to live in prosperity; in any and every circumstance I have learned the secret of being filled and going hungry, both of having abundance and suffering need. I can do all things through Him who strengthens me." Paul says, "If I have it, I have it; if I don't have it, I don't have it, and that's fine. In either case whatever God chooses to give me is enough; I will not be discontent." Gambling is predicated on discontent.

4. It is built, as we have already seen, on exploitation.

You have to understand this folks: for every winner, there are millions of losers who have been exploited, who have been sucked into the marketing scheme and turned into victims. They couldn't do it any better if they walked up and down the street with guns and held people up and took money out of their wallets. If they knocked on every door and said, "Give me your \$10, give me \$20, give me \$50, give me a \$100," whatever it is. I mean, it wouldn't be any less robbery. It is a violation, some writers say, of the eighth commandment, "Thou shall not steal," because it takes money away--it is a subtle form of thievery. It exploits the poor. You can read James 5 about how God feels about the rich who exploit the poor.

5. Furthermore, gambling is predicated on this lust, this lazy lust for entertainment.

For some people gambling is a high; it's a fix, it's a ride, and they are lazy. Rather than work they want this form of entertainment which gives them a rush and a high. So it's sort of a combination of a lust for the thrill and laziness. Read, starting in Proverbs, chapter 6, chapters 13, 15, 21, 24, read everywhere you find the "sluggard"

mentioned (the lazy person), and you will begin to see what God says about the lazy person who tends toward poverty, who is the brother of the one who brings death.

6. Gambling is built on the sins of materialism, greed, discontent, exploitation, and laziness--lust for entertainment. I would say, further, it is built on the sin of distrusting God. Distrusting God.

To put it another way, I believe God knows what I need, and I believe that God will provide what I need. Do you believe that? "My God shall supply . . ." what? "All your needs according to His riches in glory, by Christ Jesus." I trust in God's provision for me, that I can earn through work, through savings, through wise investments, through reasonable risk that's part of life. But I will not distrust, I will not demean what God has provided for me by being driven by greed and lust for more, in an illegitimate attempt to gain what God hasn't provided.

7. Then as we have said, it is built on the sin of disdain for work and careful planning.

It appeals to people who just want a quick track to wealth. Another thing I would mention, just quickly and I'll close.

8. Gambling is built on the sin of irresponsible stewardship.

You know, you have to be careful even in laying up treasures on earth. Right? "Where moth and rust comes in, and thieves break through and steal." You have to be very careful about that, because, "where your treasure is there your heart will be also." You want to lay up your treasure in heaven. There are some things in this life you can have and you can enjoy, and God has given us all things richly to enjoy, but all of it should bring glory and honor to God. Throwing it away in an appeal to sheer chance brings Him no glory. I'll say more about that next Sunday morning, in the most important point that I make. It is an irresponsible act of stewardship with God's provision, and there is much about that in the New Testament, about being a good steward.

9. Another sin that it is built on is the failure to meet the needs of family.

Divorce rates are high, family breakup is high among gamblers, because they squander all the family's resources. In some ways they are worse than alcoholics. Children don't have the food, the wife doesn't have what she needs to run the household, and then the children sometimes turn to crime. The daughters are turned into prostitutes to get the money to pay the bills, to gamble more money in the hope that the ship will come in. It is predicated on irresponsible family leadership. "If a man doesn't take care of his family, he is worse than an unbeliever." Right? (1 Timothy 5:8)

10. It's built on the sin of not loving your neighbor.

I said this earlier and I say it again, if you have some extra, give it to somebody who needs it; don't throw it away in some appeal to chance. It is built on a failure to give to others generously. If you really love your neighbor, you are going to give him what he needs. If you see your neighbor have a need, give him what he needs. "Look not on your own things, but on the needs of others." Gambling exploits the needy.

If our society was built on Biblical standards, it would work against materialism. It would prioritize people over things. It would build strong families. It would exploit no one. It would let the hardest working people prosper, so that they could spread their money around to those who have need. It would honor work; it would honor hard work. It would strengthen values and virtue of the group, rather than the individual; and we are cursed with all this individualism, where everybody has the right to be whatever he wants to be and nobody else can tell him what he should be or shouldn't be.

If our society was built on Biblical standards, it would deal with reality and not give people false hope based on fantasy. If our society was based on Biblical standards, it would call the weak to use their God-given resources in honorable effort with responsibility and rationality to improve their condition. If our society was built on Biblical standards, it would instill in us care for family, care for friends, and care for the poor and the needy. If our society was built on Biblical standards, we would be content with what we have and be grateful for all of it, and we would honor the source of it, namely God Himself.

Gambling always corrupts. It just brings in a wave, a sea of corruption; and we are in the middle of it right now. Addressing it demands that we understand what the Scripture says. Next Sunday I am going to help you with that, and I am going to start next Sunday by preaching to you a portion of a 2nd century sermon. I am talking about the one hundred ADs. A 2nd century sermon against gambling, and how the Church has always taken its stand where it should. Then I am going to show you, in the Bible, why we have to stand where we have to stand. That's next Sunday morning.

Let's pray. Father, thank You for the instruction that You have given us in Your Word this morning. Thank You for the insights that we have been able to bring on this issue, which is so ubiquitous in our society. And Lord, we grieve over the many broken lives, the many shattered homes, the many people who are in prison, the messed up lives, ruined cities and communities. We think of all the Native American, Indian people, who have been so further corrupted by all that goes along with this stuff. So many lives have been devastated by it. And Lord, You have been dishonored in so many ways by these appeals to sheer chance, as if there was no God, as if You were not sovereign, as if you were not in control.

And Lord, we regret all of that, and we sorrow over all of that, and we ask that in our own case, wherever that has occurred, You would grant us forgiveness. And Lord, I pray that You will continue to instruct us, that we might know how to handle the resources You've given us, how to bring righteousness to our own lives and the lives of those around us as we obey Your truth and honor you in every area, particularly with the resources You've given to us. Father, continue to instruct us and we will continue to thank You in Christ's name. Amen.

This message was delivered by John MacArthur Jr., of Grace Community Church in Panorama City, California. It was transcribed, by permission, from the tape, GC 90-164, titled "Gambling: The Seductive Fantasy" Part 1. A copy of the tape can be obtained by writing, Word of Grace, P.O. Box 4000, Panorama City, CA 91412 or by dialing toll free 1-800-55-GRACE.

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