

What Is Wrong with Gambling?

Dr. Adrian Rogers • Acts 19

Take God's holy word and turn with me tonight to Acts 19 and in a moment we're going to begin reading in verse 21. I want to talk to you on this subject, "What is wrong with gambling?" Now, I want to say something about the apostle Paul: he was quite a preacher and everywhere that Paul went there was either a revival or a riot. Something happened when Paul went to a town. In this particular instance there was a riot, but they knew he was there and they knew that the word of God had power when Paul went to Ephesus so long ago. Somebody has well said "when we preach something ought to happen - we ought to either make people glad or sad or mad, they ought to go out either glad, mad or sad." In the average church they just go out. Somebody said "the clock struck twelve and the church gave up for dead."

Paul had power in his life and because he had power in his life he found himself often in confrontation. We're going to see that confrontation right now in Acts chapter 19 verse 21. "And after these things were ended Paul purposed in the spirit when he had passed through Macedonia and Achaia to go to Jerusalem saying after 'I've been there I must also see Rome.' So he sent into Macedonia two of them that ministered unto him, Timotheus and Erastus, but he himself stayed in Asia for a season. And the same time there arose no small stir about that way." Now, in plain English there was a big stir about the Christians, for a certain man named Demetrius, a silversmith which made silver shrines for Diana, brought no small gain unto the craftsmen," in plain English, he made them a lot of money, "whom he called together with the workmen of like occupation and said, 'Sirs, ye know that by this craft we have our wealth. Moreover ye see and hear that not alone at Ephesus but almost throughout all Asia this Paul hath persuaded and turned away much people saying that there be no gods which are made with hands, so that not only this our craft is in danger to be set at nought, but also that the temple of the great goddess Diana should be despised, and her magnificence should be destroyed whom all Asia and the world worshippeth.' And when they heard these sayings they were full of great wrath and cried out saying, 'Great, great is Diana of the Ephesians' and the whole city was filled with confusion."

Now, you're going to find out that Christians that stand for Christ are going to cause conflict. We're the salt of the earth and not only does salt cleanse and purify and preserve but salt irritates and if you're a true Christian you're going to find out because you are twice born in a world of once-born people that most of the time you are going to be going against the tide, they're going to despise you. Now, if they don't despise you, if you don't find yourself going against the tide, if you find yourself getting along with most of the people most of the time you better check up, because you're so much like the world they cannot tell the difference.

What happened here was that Paul was preaching Christ and when he began to preach Christ it began to damage the occupation of those who served a false goddess and her name was Diana. Now, these people were not quite as religious as they seemed to be about Diana, this false goddess, but Diana had made them a lot of money because they made little shrines to Diana and they were selling these shrines everywhere. There were a lot of craftsmen who were making these little idols, these little shrines to Diana, and every time a person got saved he stopped that business. He didn't need a shrine, he didn't need an idol, he didn't need to worship Diana anymore.

And so these people were having their business hurt and because they were having their business hurt, they came against Paul and a riot ensued. As a matter of fact, twenty-five thousand of them filled up the amphitheater there. I've been to that amphitheater - it is still in existence and I thought when I stood there about this chapter in the Bible and old Paul so long ago.

Well, today we are in conflict and again we're in conflict with a false God. Isaiah 65 verse 11 is an interesting passage of scripture. I want to read it to you not in the King James because you do not get the meaning in the King James, I want to read it to you in the RSV.

And God speaks in Isaiah 65:11 of those who "forsake the Lord, who forget my holy mountain, who set a table for fortune and fill cups of mixed wine for destiny." Fortune was the name of one god, destiny was the name of the other god. The people of Israel were trusting the false gods of chance rather than the true God of glory. They had a god named destiny, they had a god named fortune and they worshipped that god just as they were worshipping a false god here in the nineteenth chapter of Acts.

Now, when Paul began to preach Christ he came up against people who were motivated and impelled and moved by three things. Number one, they were motivated and impelled by a desire for money. There was a profit motive behind their opposition to the gospel. Notice verses 24 and 25. "For a certain man named Demetrius, a silversmith which made silver shrines for Diana, brought no small gain unto the craftsmen whom he called together with the workmen of like occupation and says, 'Sirs, you know that by this craft we have our wealth.'" Now, Paul was in opposition with them and they were in opposition with him and when you let all of the air out of it, there was money behind it. These people who oppose the gospel in that day opposed the gospel on this basis - what buttered their bread determined their conduct. It was not the principle of the thing, it was the money.

But not only was there what I call a profit motive, but there was also that day a propaganda machine. Because of this prompted motive the propaganda machine got to going. I want you to notice how this man speaks. He pushes every emotional button that he could possibly push. In verse 25 already he spoke of money and then look in verse 26 and I'm going to read through verse 28. "Moreover you see that not alone at Ephesus but almost through all Asia this Paul hath persuaded and turned away much people saying that there be no gods which are made with hands." Now, he's pushing another button, he's calling Paul bigoted and narrow. He's saying Paul is very narrow minded. And then notice in verse 27. "So that not only this our craft is in danger to be set at naught but also that the temple of the great goddess Diana should be despised and that her magnificence should be destroyed." Now he's appealing to their patriotism and he's appealing to the religion, he's appealing to their pocketbooks, he's appealing to their patriotism.

Demetrius was a master at manipulating public opinion and you're going to find out that whenever you have anything to do with the gambling crowd they're going to first of all be dealing with a profit motive and secondly, they're are going to be dealing with a propaganda machine.

The propaganda on any gambling referendum always runs at full speed against what I consider to be the truth and the will and the ways of God. Now, we'll never trust this vile world to present the truths that we'll hear from our pulpit and perhaps we shouldn't expect them to. It's interesting to me that in 1982 Jane Fonda's book, her exercise book, was number one on the New York Times best seller list, number one for a month. Yet that same month Frances Schaeffer's CHRISTIAN MANIFESTO sold twice as many books as Jane Fonda's exercise book and it wasn't even mentioned, it wasn't even mentioned. This vile world is no friend of grace and don't expect them to tell the truth. They know the right buttons to push, they know how to use loaded terminology, they know how to speak of Christians as right wingers, fundamentalists, Puritans, Sectarianists, those with mindless orthodoxy, blue nose Puritans, censors and whatever. Demetrius did it here to protect his goddess. There are people who will do it to protect the god of chance.

But then on top of that, not only was there a profit motive and a propaganda machine, there was also a mob psychology - he got the people whipped up. Notice in verse 28. "And when they heard these things they were full of wrath and they cried out shouting or saying, 'Great is Diana of Ephesians!' And the whole city was filled with confusion." Can you imagine twenty-five thousand people in one place shouting, Great, great, great is Diana of the Ephesians! That's what they did. Oh,

you're going to see a lot of mob psychology, everybody is going to be asked to go along. I preached this morning that the biggest religion in America really is the cult of the crowd. They worship at the altar of conformity, their chief hymn is everybody is doing it. But I want to tell you something friend, twenty-five thousand people shouting alive doesn't make it the truth. There they were shouting, all of them, Great is Diana of the Ephesians.

Well, I've been asked to give a clear scripture concerning gambling and I will but before I do I want to tell you this, that the Bible is not a book of minute laws. The Bible is a book of great principles. For example, you'll not find any scripture in the Bible that says, "Thou shalt not drive through a school zone at a hundred and ten miles an hour," but you will find a scripture that says "thou shalt not kill." Now, if it were a book of minute laws you'd have to have a freight car to carry it around with you. So God doesn't give us minute laws, God gives us great principles and I'm glad because you can find loopholes in laws and rules are for kids.

The year was 1908. Carlyle Institute and Harvard University were football rivals. They were going to have the big game. The coach at Harvard University was a football purist - he believed in the fundamentals of football. He believed in playing football the hard- nose way, but the coach at Carlyle, he wasn't what we would call a purist, he depended upon what we call today razzle dazzle. In that day they called it whif whaf and that's what he depended on to win games. He would sit up all night with the rule books, studying the rules, studying the rules to see if there is some way that he could bend the rules to win a game.

The week before Carlyle had played Syracuse and Warner, who was the coach at Carlyle, Coach Warner thought of a scheme. It was an ingenious scheme. When the Carlyle team came on the field, Coach Warner had taken every jersey of his team and had sewed on every jersey a football made of cloth. It was about the size of a football, it was the color of a football, it looked like a football and it was just sewed on there in cloth. So when they came out of the huddle and broke, it looked like every man had a football.

Well, when Syracuse looked at them they couldn't tell who had the ball. They were always tackling the wrong man because the guy that had the ball looked like everybody else and everybody was running around just like this. Pretty smart. Before the big game the coach at Harvard, the Harvard coach said to the coach at Carlyle, "Are you going to use those trick jerseys?" He said, "There's nothing in the rule book against it." The coach at Harvard said "Alright." So the next day they came out on the football field and Coach Warner had all the boys at Carlyle and there they were with their fake footballs sewed on their jersey. Harvard came out and Harvard was wearing red, crimson red jerseys that they normally wear but it was a home game for Harvard and the home team supplied the footballs and when they reached in the bag and pulled out the first football it was crimson red and Harvard won the game.

Now, I tell you that silly story, it's a true story, but I tell you the story of how people can bend and manipulate rules. You see, you give me a rule and I'll show you a lawyer who can do something with it. The Bible is not a book of minute laws, it is a book of great principles and so when we're dealing with gambling don't expect to find a verse in there that says, "Don't play blackjack." You won't find it in the Bible but I'm going to give you some principles.

Before I do I want to define gambling because many people don't understand what gambling is. When you talk about gambling you're not talking about taking a risk; taking a risk is not gambling. You take a risk when you get out in the streets of Memphis. The Bible speaks of the quick and the dead. Life is a risk, business is a risk, even serving Jesus has a risk to it. In Acts 15 verse 26 the Bible speaks of men that hazarded their lives for the name of our Lord Jesus Christ. Moffatt translates that as they risk their lives for Jesus. It means that these men did not play it safe, they put their lives on the line for the Lord Jesus Christ. It's not wrong to live adventurously. Jesus Christ judged a man in a parable who

hid his talent in the ground because he wanted to play it safe. Every farmer who plants a crop takes a risk because there may be a drought. The Bible says, "He that considereth the wind will not sow."

Every man that ventures into a business or almost every man takes some kind of a risk. There are people who would tell you that buying stocks, buying bonds, investing in business is gambling. It is not gambling. There is a difference between betting on a horse race and investing money in stocks or planting a good crop. Let me tell you the difference. When you gamble in the classic sense of the word, for every winner in gambling there must be a loser. Now, get that in your mind, that's the difference. For every winner, there has to be a loser. Gambling is predicated on one person getting what another person has, that's gambling. When you invest in bonds or livestock or farming, something different occurs. The money that you invest goes to build factories, to pay wages, to create goods and services which in turn produces more wealth to reward the investor. In gambling, nothing is created: it is the exchange of money, it is one person attempting to get into his hands that which used to belong to someone else.

I'm going to talk to you therefore about some principles, not some rules that are transgressed by gambling. Number one, and by the way, when I'm finished you'll be able to understand why the father of our country, George Washington, said gambling is the child of avarice, the brother of iniquity, and the father of mischief, that's what George Washington said. Alright, what's the first principle? The first principle that gambling transgresses is the principle of honesty, honesty. Do you want a scripture? Exodus chapter 20 verse 15, "Thou shalt not steal." Another scripture, Exodus chapter 20 and verse 17, "Thou shalt not covet thy neighbor's house nor shalt thou covet thou neighbor's wife, nor his manservants, nor his maidservant, nor his ox nor his ass, nor anything that is thy neighbor's."

Now, I submit to you that gambling breaks the spirit of that command because in a sense gambling is robbery by mutual consent. It is the exchange of wealth, not as a gift with nothing given back in exchange. "Well," you say, "but both people agree to it, that makes it different." That doesn't make any difference. Suppose Mike and I decide to agree to get in a duel, suppose we take pistols and he put his back to mine and we go twenty paces and turn around and fire. Because I kill him and he agreed to be in duel, do you think that makes it right? That we have mutual consent to murder one another, that I have mutual consent from you that I'm going to try to get what belongs to you and you're going to try to get what belongs to me without either of us giving the other anything for it means simply that both of us have in our heart a desire to get what belongs to the other person into our hands, and it transgresses the spirit of the Bible that says, "Thou shalt not steal." That there's mutual consent makes no difference. That's the reason somebody said he who gambles and wins is a thief and he who gambles and loses is a fool.

Now, suppose two men meet in an alley, one of them goes into that alley with a gun and he takes what belongs to that other man in that back alley and comes out with what belonged to that other man. We say he's a thief. Now, suppose two men go into an alley and rather than one of them having a gun they have some dice and one of them comes out of that alley with what belongs to another man. What's the difference? In the first place there was one thief. In the second place there were two - both of them were trying to get what belonged to the other man, wanting what belonged to someone else, taking what belonged to someone else, only this time they believed in the God of fortune, the God of destiny, the God of chance to help them to do this. Gambling transgresses the principle of honesty.

Secondly, gambling transgresses the principle of love. Jesus said in Matthew 22 verse 37 and following, "Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul and with all thy mind. This is the first and great commandment and the second is like unto it, 'thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself.'" You cannot love your neighbor as yourself when you're seeking to take from your neighbor that which belongs to your neighbor. Do you know what gambling is? Gambling is pleasure and profit at the cost of someone else's pain and loss. Now, get it in your mind - gambling, winning in gambling is pleasure and profit at the cost of someone else's fame and loss. Remember this, and never

forget it, no one can win in gambling without someone else losing, do you understand that? It absolutely, totally transgresses the principle of love. To win is to lower yourself and to victimize your neighbor.

But love also tells us that gambling becomes a compulsive habit, such a compulsive habit that one out of every ten gamblers becomes a compulsive gambler and there are estimated in the United States today ten million gambling addicts whose addiction is as real as the addiction to alcohol. That is the reason that there is an organization known as Gambler's Anonymous to take care of these kind of people. The individual gambler almost always suffers financially with the result of hardship to his wife and his children. They're innocent persons but they're real victims and the law of love says they should not be real victims. Gambling prays upon the poor; those who can least afford to gamble are often the most tempted to gamble.

Our city has people near the poverty level. Many of them will see gambling as a chance for instant wealth, they spend their dimes, their quarters and their dollars for the million and one chance or whatever chance it might be, that they are going to have that magic moment that is going to make them wealthy and if you don't think that gambling is a form of regressive taxation you need to do some studying and see how many of these people who can least afford to gamble do gamble. It is not by incident or accident that the tables at Atlantic City do their biggest business on the days when the Welfare checks are cashed. It is a form of regressive taxation, it brings misery. Nevada is talked about as the gambling capital of the nation. It has a capital crime rate that doubles the national average and a suicide rate that triples it. Love says there is something wrong with something like that. Love says that gambling is a parasite which disproportionately victimizes the poor. Almost all taxes that come from gambling are regressive in that they fall almost heavily upon the poor.

I believe that when you get to the bottom line gambling costs, but I'm going to tell you something else, if you could show me that the coffer's of this city and this state would be better because of gambling I would still be against it. I would pity someone if you favor taxing men's weaknesses and profiteering from human misery. I am telling you dear friend that the principle of love says it is wrong and the principle of honesty says it is wrong.

I'll give you a third principle that teaches that it is wrong and it's the principle of old fashioned work, W O R K. Second Thessalonians chapter 3 and verse 10, "For even when we were with you this we commanded you that if any would not work neither should he eat." Ephesians chapter 4 and verse 28, "Let him that stole steal no more but rather let him labor, working with his hands the thing which he is good that he may have to give to him that needeth." Gambling is an economic fraud. It produces no real wealth. It is a social leech. It is a parasite. The revenues that go to the gambler must have first been created by legitimate business and therefore ought to go back to other legitimate business.

Virgil Peterson, while he was the crime director of the Chicago crime commission, said this and I quote, "Gambling produces no wealth, it merely redistributes it from the hands of the many into the hands of the few. Gambling invariably leads to higher police and welfare costs." Harry Reid, chairman of the Nevada game and control commission told U. S. News and World Report and I quote, "Any state trying to follow Nevada's league will find the social costs far outweigh any economic effects." That's the chairman of the Nevada Gaming control commission. Any city needs gambling for its economy like a drowning man needs a drink of water.

I want to mention the fourth principle that is transgressed. There's the principle of honesty, the principle of love, the principle of honest labor. Then fourthly, gambling transgresses the principle of providence and trust in God. Again I remind you of Isaiah 65 verse 11 where God warns against those "who forsake the Lord, who forget my holy mountain, who set a table for fortune and filled cups of mixed wine for destiny," that's wrong. I heard a laymen testify tonight that his life's verse was Matthew 6:33, "But seek ye first the kingdom of God and his righteousness and all these things shall be added unto you."

The gambler develops a dependence on the goddess of luck rather than the providence of God. And by the way, our very word luck comes from the name of a pagan goddess. Something that causes me to lose a blessing is for me to be going somewhere to preach or to a convention or whatever and somebody says to me, "Well, good luck." I say, "Whoa Toto! Brother, I don't want good luck, I want God." I want the blessings of God. The gambler worships at the shrine of the goddess of fortune. He puts his faith in luck.

"Well," you say, "now wait a minute, I believe it's good recreation." Well, what is recreation supposed to do? I believe in recreation; as a matter of fact, I'm planning on getting some. But real recreation will relax, real recreation will renew, real recreation will refresh, real recreation will restore. You see, legitimate sport has its place. People say, "I think it's beautiful to see the horses run." Indeed it would be if that's all there were to it. There are times when all of us need entertainment. Good recreation is a blessing to be enjoyed. Gambling is a curse that brings vice and crime as it grows in its power over an individual and the community. Anywhere where gambling holds sway, one is going to find immorality, greed, licentiousness, strife, jealousy, anger, selfishness, dissention, envy, drunkenness and crime. Those things are not the things that renew, restore, refresh and relax. Compulsive gamblers are unhappy people. The saddest faces you see on this earth are in the casinos, are those people who are trying to find recreation through gambling.

Friend, it puts a dependence upon the wrong god that can never satisfy the need of the human heart. This last point won't appeal to anybody except the Christian, but to the Christian, I'll tell you dear friend, you'll find your thrills in the Lord Jesus Christ. Let me wrap up this message. Gambling creates nothing, contributes nothing to the common good. It undermines values, it mocks work, it finances crime, it robs children, it enslaves people and it poisons whatever it touches.

Now, let me talk to you about two sure things. Number one, you can be sure your sin will find you out. Number two, you can be sure Jesus will save you if you ask him, that's a sure thing. No risk and no gamble. Jesus said, "Come unto me all ye that labor and are heavy laden and I'll give you rest." Seek him first, put him first, you'll be glad that you did.

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