

MORAL & BIBLICAL REASONS CHRISTIANS SHOULD BE OPPOSED TO GAMBLING IN ANY FORM

Material in my much more extensive (73pp) paper “*Lotteries, Casinos, and Other Forms of Gambling*” written in 1994, gave a number of common sense reasons why any person, from Christian to atheist, should oppose the introduction of lotteries, casinos or other forms of gambling. In the latter part of that paper I also presented some biblical reasons why Christians should oppose gambling, and I’m excerpting them here. I have found that most Christians are hard pressed to supply any biblical arguments for opposing gambling. Even more distressing is the fact that many denominations and religious groups are even part of the problem! *U.S. News & World Report* bluntly commented: “*Few Americans are seriously questioning the morality of an industry that is expected to help gamblers lose a record \$35 billion in 1995 alone. Religious leaders have been oddly silent, perhaps because so many churches and synagogues rely on bingo revenues.*”¹ Arnie Wexler, who is the executive director of the Council on Compulsive Gambling of New Jersey, has said: “*The biggest things we have to help people are churches and temples and the government...And now they’re all in the gambling business.*”²(!) Obviously there is a glaring deficiency of biblical knowledge and application in regard to this subject. Hopefully these notes will help remedy that deficiency. –Rev. Mike Edwards, P.O. Box 127, St. Vincent, West Indies. (Revised, Oct. 2008 & Nov. 2012)

1. PROFITING AT ANOTHER'S LOSS IS WRONG.

"The Bible indicates certain uses of money or property that are in accord with the intention of God. Thus money may be used to provide for our basic needs (2 Thess. 3:10), support one's family (I Tim. 5:8), contribute to the Lord's work (I Cor. 16:1-3), meet human needs (2 Cor. 9:6-15; Eph. 4:28), give to the poor (John 13:29), and pay taxes (Matt. 22:21; Rom. 13:7).

"There is ground for wise investment of one's wealth with a hope for a sensible return (Mt. 25:14-30), but this can hardly be used to sanction gambling risks. The injunction to ‘*lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven*’ invites the most careful attitude toward expenditures of any kind (Matt. 6:19-21).

"The word gamble is often used loosely and inaccurately of other activities, such as unavoidable risks taken by farmers or business persons. There is, however, a difference between such a ‘*risk*’ and a true ‘*gamble*.’ For, while in farming and in business one attempts to REMOVE the element of chance as much as humanly possible, the objective in true gambling is exactly the opposite.”³

Particularly reprehensible are those attempts to gain property through dishonest or exploitative practices. In the Bible, stealing is condemned (Ex. 20:15; Matt. 19:18; Eph. 4:28), as is the accumulation of wealth through the exploitation of others (James 5:1-4).⁴

2. CHRISTIANS SHOULD AVOID GAMBLING IN ORDER TO NOT BE A STUMBLING BLOCK TO OTHERS - Romans 14.

A Christian must be careful not to engage in something which though perhaps not enslaving to him personally, can become a stumbling block to someone else. What if someone should decide to participate in gambling after seeing your example and then become addicted to it? A Christian who drinks alcohol may not personally be enslaved to it, but if because of his example another decides to drink and winds up an alcoholic, they will answer to God for it! After all, it’s a fact that 1 in 10 who begin drinking

¹U.S. News & World Report, 1994, op cit., p. 46.

²Ibid.

³Encyclopedia of Bib. & Theo. Ethics, Gambling, op cit., p. 165.

⁴Braidfoot, op cit., p. 22.

eventually become alcoholics. Likewise, studies reveal that at least 1 in 20 who begin gambling eventually become addicted to it. Thus Christians should avoid gambling and gambling establishments. Otherwise we aid the evil and by our example potentially destroy other lives as well!

An example of a violation of this principle occurred when the Southern Baptist Convention held their yearly convention in Las Vegas several years ago. To quote Eric Cooper, Under Sheriff of Las Vegas: "We Las Vegans have been living under the stigma of Sin City for so long that we are desperate to prove that this is a very conservative, God-fearing, average American community that just happens to have gambling. The best thing that ever happened was when the Baptists had their convention here four years ago."⁵

How sad, that a Christian denomination (due to their violation of the Romans 14 principle and appearance in Las Vegas), has been used to promote and improve the image and business of this bastion of gambling, greed and materialism.

Christians should do everything in their power to oppose the spread of casinos, lotteries, etc. A secular publication gives a graphic reason why: "The consequences (of gambling) can be damaging. Wexler (head of the Council on Compulsive Gambling of New Jersey) says he got a phone call late last week (3/94) from a man in his 70s who ran up \$150,000 in debt just by buying lottery tickets. Although most gambling experts believe that only 1 percent to 3 percent of Americans have a serious gambling problem at any given time, a July 1993 Gallup Poll funded by Wexler's group suggests that the figure may be closer to 5 percent. Regardless, now that casinos are no longer located just in Atlantic City and Nevada it's reasonable to assume that the total number of problem gamblers will soar...'When you make gambling legal and socially acceptable, people will try it and some of them will get hooked.'"⁶

"The Bible teaches that individuals are to use both their freedom and their influence wisely. We are urged to `abstain from all appearance of evil' (I Thess. 5:22), to `abhor that which is evil' (Rom. 12:9), and to work faithfully as our Lord Himself, who `went about doing good' (Acts 10:38). Paul's view that freedom must be exercised responsibly is particularly relevant. The actions of the individual Christian are to be disciplined toward the moral and spiritual welfare of others for whom Christ died (Rom. 14:13-21; I Cor. 8:1-13). All forms of conduct need to be subjected to a single controlling motive: `Do all to the glory of God' (I Cor. 10:31)...Accordingly, our influence as Christians is to be exerted in a positive and aggressive fashion for the building of community life in which the young, the weak, the aging, and the needy are protected."⁷

A Christian is not to be controlled or mastered by anything cf. I Cor. 6:12; 9:24-27; 10:23. To participate in, work for, or promote a vice that addicts and enslaves a portion of the population is wrong.

3. THE MOTIVATIONS TO GAMBLE ARE CONDEMNED IN SCRIPTURE:

A. COVETOUSNESS.

"its (gambling's) promoters and managers have to appeal to the sinful motivation of covetousness (Materialism/Greed) in order to make it repay their own very often considerable investment."⁸ cf. Ex. 20:17-Thou shall not covet.

"The clearest Biblical statement against gambling is the tenth commandment: '*Thou shalt not covet*' (Ex. 20:17). Why do people gamble? Because they hope to strike it rich. They covet money and the things it

⁵Time, 1/10/94, op cit., p. 51.

⁶U.S. News, op cit., p. 46.

⁷Braidfoot, op cit., p. 22.

⁸Harrison, Ency. of B & T Ethics, op cit., p. 165.

can buy. In America today most people, including Christians, worship at the altar of materialism. For this reason the lottery is so popular. However, the Bible teaches that seeking to be rich is wrong... (I Tim. 6:9-10)...*'a man's life consisteth not in the abundance of the things which he possesseth'* (Luke 12:15)."⁹

"Greed ruins lives. Setting materialistic gain in the dominant place in a person's life is one sure way to engage in self-destruction. For the Christian, greed runs counter to Jesus' insistence that we cannot at the same time love God and embrace materialism (Mt. 6:24; Lk. 16:13). Even the occasional bettor is flirting with a pattern of greed and materialism."¹⁰

"The essence of life consists in the love of God and neighbor (Mt. 22:34-40), in friendships (John 15:13), in contentment and gratitude (Phil. 4:11), in peace (I Cor. 14:33), and in enriching family relationships (Matt. 19:4-5). The love of money becomes the source of many kinds of evil that are in direct conflict with these values (I Tim. 6:10). *'Beware of covetousness,'* said Jesus, *'for a man's life consisteth not in the abundance of the things which he possesseth'* (Luke 12:15).

"Greed, materialism, and covetousness are contradictory to these qualities of life. Some of the more explicit moral teachings of the Bible are those regarding covetousness. *'He that is greedy of gain troubleth his own house.'* (Prov. 15:27). *'The desire of the slothful killeth him; for his hands refuse to labour, He coveteth greedily all the day long'* (Prov. 21:25-26).

"All the criticisms leveled against gambling in general apply to lotteries also and perhaps even more pointedly, since the appeal to the individual's greed for instant wealth is so crass. The true Christian prefers to acquire money by honest labor (Eph. 4:28) and strives to avoid avarice and covetousness in all its forms."

"...during Christ's dying agonies on the cross, Roman soldiers were gambling for his seamless robe, with no other concern than that of trying to satisfy a momentary covetousness (John 19:23-24)."¹¹

"Byron Rohrig quoted Oakes as saying, *'I believe that the gospel has something important to say when at the foot of the cross we find gamblers.'*"¹²

B. A DESIRE TO BECOME RICH QUICK.

"The desire to win big bucks fast is clearly dangerous. The Apostle Paul warned, *'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.'* (I Timothy 6:9; see also v. 10)."¹³

C. A DESIRE TO BECOME RICH WITHOUT WORK OR EFFORT.

Work is praised in Scripture, and laziness, sloth and getting something for nothing is strongly condemned. "Instead of listening to the lottery promise of 'something for nothing,' we'd be far wiser to heed this advice: *'He who works his land will have abundant food, but the one who chases fantasies will have his fill of poverty'* (Proverbs 28:19 NIV)."¹⁴

⁹Pulliam, op cit., p. 16.

¹⁰Braidfoot, op cit., p. 20.

¹¹Harrison, Ency. B & T Ethics, Lottery, op cit., p. 238.

¹²Smith, op cit., p. 25.

¹³Youthwalk, date uncertain, c. 1992-93.

¹⁴Ibid.

"Gambling violates the principle of fair return for labor and investment, and the ethics of stewardship and work (Eph. 4:28; 2 Thess. 3:9-12)."¹⁵

"The Bible teaches that man is to earn his living by the sweat of his face (Gen. 3:19). Paul wrote that if a man will not work neither should he eat (2 Thess. 3:10). Work is the divinely ordained method of producing wealth (Eph. 4:28). As the commercial says, the only real way to make money is the old-fashioned way-'earn it.' Gambling, on the other hand, offers 'something for nothing.'"¹⁶

"State lotteries are government-sanctioned laziness, offering an illusory bypass sign on the road of life that reads: 'Avoid working. Try gambling.'"¹⁷

"Honest work and honest wages go together, for *'the labourer is worthy of his hire'* (Luke 10:7). The Biblical view of work affords no room for the practice of gambling. The divine command rings clear that one should labor and do one's work (Ex. 20:9; Eph. 4:28; 2 Thess. 3:10-12). Work has a functional value; it is rooted in necessity and also rooted in creation. Each person is obligated under God to work. Work affords the means of sustaining one's life and supporting one's dependents. Work is related to the use of the earth's resources. No one is to 'sponge' off others.

"Through the medium of work humans express their essential being and creativity. God is a worker; and we are to work (John 5:17). Work adds to personal fulfillment and self-respect. Work is sharing in God's activity in the world. Thus the type of employment whereby a living is gained must agree with the purpose of God and must form a part of the world's needed work. Some forms of work may be socially and morally degrading and, therefore, inconsistent with the divine intention or with human good.

"Gambling is a behavior, a 'business,' that is completely antithetical to this view. It encourages a view of life based on a system of activities that express an essential nature of greed and materialism (see above) not productivity and service. Neither the laborer within the industry nor the participant is engaged in an activity that fulfills the Christian concept of vocation."¹⁸

4. GAMBLING VIOLATES THE BIBLICAL TEACHING ON STEWARDSHIP AND ECONOMIC RESPONSIBILITY.

"In the Bible, property and goods are provided in trust by a gracious God. Ultimately, all things belong to God (Ps. 24:1; 50:10-12; I Cor. 10:26). The recognition that God owns all things in the world is the beginning of a right relationship to things (possessions)."¹⁹

Definition of a steward: A caretaker, overseer, foreman, house ruler, manager, etc. "A person who manages another's property or financial affairs, or who administers anything as the agent of another or others...A person who has charge of the household affairs of another...An employee on a ship, train, or airplane who waits on and is responsible for the comfort of passengers."²⁰

¹⁵Harrison, op cit., p. 165.

¹⁶Pulliam, op cit., p. 16.

¹⁷Geisler, cited by Pulliam, ibid.

¹⁸Braidfoot, op cit., p. 22.

¹⁹Ibid, p. 20.

²⁰Random House Dictionary, c. 1970, p. 1288.

We get the word stewardess from steward. A stewardess is "A woman who works as a steward, esp. on an airplane, ship or train."²¹ A steward was one put in charge of property, possessions business, etc., by a "well to do" owner.

The word "*Steward*" occurs 13 times in the N.T., its plural 4 times and Stewardship 3 times (the latter 3 all in Luke 16 and the parable of the unjust steward).

The concept of God as the owner of everything and we as his stewards is a very biblical concept.²² We are told that the earth is the Lord's.²³

In the O.T. Joseph served as a steward and later had one in his employment.²⁴ We have examples of stewards who were poor influences,²⁵ and Christians are exhorted to be good stewards, using their talents and abilities for the glory of God.²⁶

The one key prerequisite for stewards was Faithfulness (i.e. Reliability, Dependability, Consistency, etc.). Every believer should examine him or herself in a number of areas to see if they are being good stewards, such as: our personal life, our family (if we have one), employment/school, service for God, treating of the creation, and handling of material belongings. Another has succinctly put it: Our time, talents & treasure.

With the above background on stewardship in mind, it should be pointed out that "The odds of dying in a car crash are 6,000 to 1. They are 500,000 to 1 that you will die in an airplane disaster. The odds of winning a typical state lottery, however, are 5 million to 1. (Florida, at the time of the writing of my original paper in 1994, was 14 million to 1-mwe) A person has a greater chance of being struck by lightning than winning the lottery. How then can buying a lottery ticket be an act of good stewardship?"²⁷

5. GAMBLING VIOLATES THE BIBLICAL TEACHING ON LOVE.

"The central moral imperative of the Bible is love-love of God and love of neighbor (Mt. 22:37-40; Mark 12:28-34). Love imposes strong demands on us every day of our lives. Love never allows us the luxury of self-interest to the exclusion of the others person's interests and needs (Rom. 12:10; 13:10; Phil. 2:3-4). Love refuses to engage in actions that mistreat or exploit others. Love is surely violated when personal pleasure and profit are gained through another's pain and loss.

"Love leads us to seek the welfare or interest of the other. Love is the royal law (James 2:8), the law of Christ (Gal. 6:2), and the principle by which our lives are to be regulated (Rom. 14:13-21). Gambling, with its exploitation of others, ignores the nobler qualities of humans, among which are reason, justice, compassion, and a sense of responsibility. Gambling weakens the foundations of a responsible community life. Love's work, on the other hand, is always to build up, never to tear down."²⁸

²¹Ibid.

²²e.g. Ps. 24:1; 50:10-12.

²³I Cor. 10:26.

²⁴Gen. 39:4; 43:19.

²⁵I Kings 16:9; Luke 16:1-13.

²⁶I Pet. 4:10.

²⁷Pulliam, op cit., p. 16.

²⁸Braidfoot, op cit., p. 22.

6. GAMBLING OFTEN HARMS & DESTROYS FAMILIES.

"Gambling also can lead to neglect of family responsibilities, a grievous sin in the eyes of God (I Tim. 5:8; 2 Cor. 12:14)." ²⁹ For example, our next door neighbor in Papua New Guinea a few years ago was named Philip. His daughter Lucy played with our children. Her dream was to get a bicycle. Her father was always going to "buy her a bike", but instead used up his money betting on horse races in Australia.

"Instead of making money for the state, the lottery increases the welfare and dependent child subsidies needed by the community."³⁰

7. RAFFLES, ETC., ARE NOT LEGITIMATE WAYS FOR CHURCHES AND BELIEVERS TO RAISE FINANCES, EVEN FOR "GOOD" CAUSES.

A) In both the Old & New Testaments, God's work was supported by God's people-not outsiders, heathens, or followers of false religions.³¹

B)"*It is a matter of faith...not to offer that to God which has cost us nothing* (2 Sam. 24:24)."³²

C) God condemned the Israelites for offering to God anything less than their best, even though it was a sacrifice. Does He expect anything less from us?³³

²⁹Harrison, Gambling, op cit., p. 165.

³⁰Pulliam, op cit., p. 15.

³¹e.g. Ex. 25:1-9; 35:21; Ezra 2:68; I Chron. 29:1-3; II Cor. 8:11-12; 9:7; etc.

³²Harrison, op cit., p. 165.

³³Mal. 1:6-14, esp. vv. 8, 13, 14.