

A CSBQ resource

Approved for website, May 2002

Gambling - a Bible Study

Introduction.

Not all Christians agree on the issue of gambling. Some think that all gambling is sinful. Others say that gambling is not always sinful, but carries danger. There isn't a commandment, "You shall not gamble!" But the Bible does contain important and relevant information to help us make decisions about gambling. This study will not say that all gambling is wrong, but it will challenge the motives for many gambling activities. Our goal is to work out a Christian response to the many different issues that are involved in gambling.

Gambling in Australia.

- In 1996 Australians spent 9.4 billion dollars in legal gambling.
- The gambling industry is often called the "gaming industry". Gaming activities are legalised and regulated by state governments. Illegal gambling is a criminal offence, but is still common.
- State governments average 12.5% of their revenue from gambling. The Victorian State government gets the most - 14.6%.
- Proceeds from the "gaming" industry support charities, welfare, and community projects (including church projects).
- Recently casinos have opened in Cairns, Brisbane, Canberra, Christmas Island, Melbourne, and Sydney. More are on the way!
- Around 1 percent of gamblers develop a problem with gambling. "Compulsive gambling" can lead to financial problems, bankruptcy, broken families, loss of job, depression, theft, fraud, blackmail, violent crime and sometimes suicide.
- Around 3% of Australian household spending goes into gambling.

Promoters of the "gaming industry" tell us that it has created much good, but what other effects have the growth of gambling had?

What is Gambling?

A definition of gambling:

- (1) Gambling is an agreement between two or more people,
- (2) with conscious risk of loss and hope of gain,
- (3) whereby the transfer of something of value
- (4) is made dependent on an uncertain event
- (5) in such a way that one party will gain and another lose.

Discuss the importance of each aspect of the definition.

Which of the following activities could come under the label of gambling: car insurance, lotteries, bingo, farming, staking a carton of beer on a football game, playing poker for matchsticks.

Why Do People Gamble?

Have you gambled before? What was it like? What motivated you most?

Research has identified key reasons for gambling:

- People may gamble for excitement.
- People may gamble for social contact.
- People may gamble for fun/recreation.
- People may gamble to win money.
- People may gamble as a reaction to frustration/stress.
- People may gamble for the competition.
- People may gamble to celebrate.
- People may gamble to escape problems.
- People may gamble because of boredom.
- People may gamble to get back what they already lost.

Which of these reasons are not healthy?

Which of these reasons would Christians reject? Why?

Which of these reasons could lead to addiction or other problems?

Are all gamblers motivated by money?

What about the retired lady who plays bingo for social contact?

Can we conclude that there is a difference between gambling activities?

Gambling and Greed.

Wanting to win and wanting to get money often go together. Sometimes people may gamble for fun and just enjoy the thrill of winning, but often gamblers are motivated by greed. Greed has the potential to take our lives over and make us slaves of sin...

Where does greed lead? (Luke 12:15-21)

If money doesn't give us hope and meaning, what does?

(Hebrews 13:5, Philippians 4: 10-13)

What is the basic cause of greed? (Romans 1:25, Colossians 3:5)

Living for "things" rather than for "Christ" can be spiritually damaging. How? (1 Timothy 6:9,10)

Gambling and Caretaking.

Christians recognise that humans are not the owners of the world. We know that everything has been made by God and belongs to him. God has made us caretakers of this world and of all that we have. So we are responsible to look after our world and use our money and possessions wisely - for the good of everyone...

It is not wrong to have money because money is a gift from God
Everything is a Gift of God. (Ecclesiastes 5:19, Genesis 1:26-30)

How does God call us to use our possessions and money? (1 Timothy 6:17-19)

Someone takes their pay cheque and stakes it on a horse when they know that it is needed to feed the children and pay the bills. Is this good caretaking?

Gambling and Work.

Work is important! The Bible teaches that work is actually a special gift from God. But work is not valuable only for its own sake - work is important because it is a way in which we all contribute to each other. No matter what our job is, when we work we all do something for someone in some small way. Work actually builds up our community. If we gamble for a living, then we bypass the community-building aspect of work...

What makes work valuable?
(Ephesians 4:28; 2 Thessalonians 3:6-13)

What would happen if we/everyone gambled for a living?

Gambling promises riches. But the odds always run against the gambler. What are the most likely results of gambling for gain?

Gambling and Justice.

When Christians talk about "upholding justice" we don't mean, "making sure everyone gets what they deserve" (if God did that, we'd all be in a pickle). Our main concern with justice involves protecting all people from oppression and exploitation. We are interested in helping people and protecting them from harm...

How do we act justly toward each other? (Romans 13:9,10, I Thess 3:12)

The modern spread of poker machines and casinos has caused incredible harm to many people. Club owners exploit compulsive gamblers by making sure that they have good access to credit, eftpos, cash and pokies. There is a lack of legal guidelines to protect gamblers from over-indulging (whereas bartenders cannot serve a drunk person). Many people are vulnerable to the lure of gambling. Some forms of gambling have a terrible effect on many Australians.

Can or should we participate in activities that harm other people? Where do we draw the line?

Gambling and Addiction.

Anyone who gambles more than they can afford or cannot stop gambling has a problem. Compulsive gamblers take unreasonable risks, become obsessed by the game, don't learn from loss, and are unable to stop. They may think they are in control, but they have become slaves of gambling. If you are worried about gambling, seek help now to make sure you are safe from this slavery.

Christians have been given freedom from the slavery of sin.

We should be wary of entering slavery again! (Galatians 5:13 & 5:16) How should we use our freedom? (1 Corinthians 6:12)