

# Gambling

## By Jeremy Sweets

Gambling has been a scourge upon every culture that has embraced it. Economically and morally, gambling is a detriment to the whole of society by negatively affecting the lives of individuals. Yet our society has embraced this vice with open arms. Gambling is no longer only sponsored by a few financiers in Las Vegas. It is supported by various state governments in the form of the lottery with Tennessee recently becoming the 48<sup>th</sup> state to legalize gambling. Raffles are offered by organizations from schools to churches! Open support by various societal institutions has led to approval and participation by many in the public. A Gallup poll released in 1999 said that nearly two-thirds of Americans approve of legalized gambling and seventy-five percent approve of gambling as a means of collecting taxes.

### **A Definition of Gambling**

A clear definition will properly illustrate what constitutes gambling. The American Heritage Dictionary defines gambling as “to bet on an uncertain outcome, to play a game of chance for stakes.” The World Book Encyclopedia says, “Gamblers usually bet money or something else of value as a stake on the outcome they predict. When the outcome is settled, the winner collects the loser’s stakes.” From the above definitions gambling involves three key elements: a predetermined chance, a stake or a bet, and a winner and a loser.

### **Approved Methods of Acquiring Money**

As in everything that we do, we should only use methods of acquiring money that are approved by God (Col. 3:17). God has given us everything that we need to know to live this life in a godly way (2 Pet. 1:3).

*Honest Labor is approved in scripture.* Ephesians 4:28 states, “He who steals must steal no longer; but rather he must labor, performing with his own hands what is good...” God wants man to work with his hands. Laboring in an honest, upright way is commended.

*Selling something of value is approved in scripture.* Early Christians individually acquired funds by selling their property (Acts 4:34-35). Their proceeds were given to the apostles for distribution among the poor. A legitimate sale of an item of value is approved by God in scripture.

*Investing money is approved in scripture.* The bible commends the ant because she “prepares her food in the summer and gathers her provision in the harvest” (Prov. 6:8). We must work today in order to reap the harvest later. Part of the process for preparing for the future may involve investing. Jesus also gave an approved example of wisely using money so as to accrue interest (Matt. 25:27). Although the point of emphasis was spiritual, the use of monetary funds would still be appropriate.

*Receiving a gift or inheritance is approved in scripture.* The parable of the lost son tells of an inheritance that is divided between two sons (Lk. 15:11-32). The prodigal son wasted his inheritance, a practice that showed his foolishness, but the inheritance itself was a valid way of obtaining money. Spiritually, our Father in heaven has promised the Christian an inheritance of greater value than money (Acts 26:18). Furthermore, a gift is approved of God. Paul commends labor so that the Christian “may have something to give him who has need” (Eph. 4:28, NKJV).

## **Gambling is Not...**

Understanding the definition and divinely approved methods of acquiring money will remove confusion on the activities that some define as gambling.

*Life is not a gamble.* Gambling is not merely participating in something that involves a chance. Some have touted that life is a gamble. They say that everything we do is a gamble, therefore gambling must be justified. Life lacks a stake, a winner and a loser.

*Engaging in a business venture is not gambling.* Others have claimed that farming or other business ventures can be classified as gambling. "After all," the gambler says, "there is a chance that the business will fail." Many things in life are uncertain, including business ventures, but that does not mean they constitute gambling. Engaging in business and working with our hands is approved by God.

*Playing the stock market is not gambling.* Many attempt to categorize the stock market as gambling. The bible says that it is lawful to buy or sell something of value – in this case, a share of a company or business. There is a chance that money will be gained or lost, but the profit does not come at the expense of another based upon a predetermined chance. The factor determining the prices in the stock market is basically the performance of a particular company. The stock market is ownership in a company.

*Buying insurance is not gambling.* Buying insurance is gambling according to some, but insurance is simply a service that is bought and rendered based upon predetermined contingencies. Profit is not made at the expense of another.

## **The Associations of Gambling**

An individual can be known by his associations. The same is true for a particular activity. Note the following associates of gambling that are identified in scripture:

*Gambling promotes greed.* A strong desire or lust is not sinful by itself; it depends upon the object of desire. The bible states that we are to strongly desire the righteousness of God (Psa. 42:1-2; Matt. 5:6; 6:33). Greed, literally "a desire to have more," stifles our desire for spiritual things and turns our lust to physical things. The gambler is incessantly striving to strike it rich. His desire is not directed toward God but toward money. Gambling takes from man what rightfully belongs to God: a strong desire and yearning. Greed, promoted by gambling, should never be found in the Christian (Eph. 5:3). Jesus rightly stated, "You cannot serve God and mammon" (Matt 6:24).

*Gambling ruins contentment.* Greed and contentment cannot reside in the same heart. The gambler, fueled by greed, always wants more of this world's riches – always wanting, but never satisfied. The bible says, "And if we have food and covering, with these we shall be content" (1 Tim. 6:8). Money is not sinful. It is essential in this life and should be used for necessary provisions (1 Tim. 5:8; 2 Thess. 3:12), but it must be kept in its proper context. Satan says that money will make you happy, but God says that "godliness is a means of great gain, when accompanied by contentment" (1 Tim. 6:6). Our treasures need to be in heaven rather than on earth (Matt. 6:19-21; Col. 3:2).

*Gambling is addictive and destroys self-control.* The fact that gambling is addictive should be readily apparent. Two million Americans have fallen to the addictive nature of gambling and gamble uncontrollably ([www.ncpgambling.org](http://www.ncpgambling.org)). Addicted mothers will gamble baby food money. Fathers squander money that would otherwise support their family. Homes and full retirements are lost. Gamblers Anonymous was an organization created to address the problem. Their website [www.gamblersanonymous.org](http://www.gamblersanonymous.org) states, "Our primary purpose is to stop

gambling and to help other compulsive gamblers do the same.” Gambling is a tool of Satan that leads people away from Christ. Notice Paul’s admonition to the young evangelist in 1 Timothy 6:9-10. “But those who want to get rich fall into temptation and a snare and many foolish and harmful desires which plunge men into ruin and destruction. For the love of money is a root of all sorts of evil, and some by longing for it have wandered away from the faith, and pierced themselves with many griefs.” The desire to get rich has led many down a dishonest path. Those that crave riches will do anything to attain their goal. It is no wonder that crime rates in casino communities are 84% higher than the national average (*U.S. News & World Report*, 1/15/1996). Gambling, along with any type of addiction, destroys a person’s self-control and leads him further into ungodliness (1 Pet. 5:8; 2 Pet. 2:19).

*Gambling promotes selfishness.* One can not practice the golden rule and gamble at the same time (Matt. 7:12). The gambler does not have his neighbor’s best interest in mind. Rather, the gambler wants others to lose. He wants to profit at the expense of others. This attitude is inexcusable in the sight of God.

### **Conclusion**

Gambling is not specifically mentioned in the bible by name, but when you read and apply the commands and principles of God’s word, gambling is plainly condemned as sinful. Gambling does not fall under the category of approved methods of monetary acquisition. Gambling promotes and engenders a worldly mindset. The definition of gambling states that there is a winner and a loser. Monetarily, there are many losers and very few winners. Spiritually, all gamblers are the losers. It has been rightly stated that in gambling, the only real winner is the devil.