

# A biblical case against gambling



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A dear pastor friend of mine who, like me, finds himself of necessity involved in trying to keep casino gambling out of Kentucky asked me to share some biblical reasons why I believe gambling is wrong. I actually wrote most of the following in 2005 and it was published in the Western Recorder. In order that it might contribute to the debate that now consumes our state, as well as inform some of my students who think it an adiabherous avocation, I share it once again with the conviction that a follower of Christ has no business gambling.

Simply put, gambling is sin.

If no passage of Scripture explicitly forbids it, can we with confidence claim that gambling is wrong, a moral evil, sin? With good reason, Christians are hesitant to label sins that the Bible doesn't mention, yet we often have to distill principles from the Bible that we apply to contemporary situations. Pornography, computer hacking, or cheating on tests aren't mentioned in the Bible either, yet believers who want to live like Jesus know intuitively and correctly that these behaviors run counter to the will of God. While biblical texts may not mention them explicitly, biblical principles speak to them directly.

In the same way, the ethics of Scripture clearly teach that gambling is wrong and a sin against God, not for one single reason but for many. The slot machine, casino, or poker table are not for believers submitted to the Lordship of Christ.

Many Christians object that if they budget a certain amount of their discretionary entertainment funds for gambling and don't go beyond that, what's the harm? After all, Christian people waste money on all kinds of diversions. Far from convincing me that gambling is not necessarily wrong, this particular argument actually confirms it in my mind, because it reveals a complete disregard for what one's participation in gambling does to others. This argument reveals a self-centeredness and lack of concern for weaker brothers and sisters that believers ought to find disturbing (Rom. 14:21). In reality, even Christians who are not personally hurt by it are not free to participate in an industry that preys on the weak and the poor.

The Bible is full of references to God's view of economics. In the garden of Eden, even before sin entered the world, God established a work ethic by which humanity was to exist (Gen. 1:28-30) Part of God's creation of man in his own image was that man would work for

his food. While God provided it, Adam and Eve had to exercise “dominion” over the plants and animals and till the soil, working for their sustenance. After they sinned, work changed to a more laborious task, but it remained the way God provided for them. In other words, God’s way is that we should earn what we get.

Think about these reasons why gambling violates Christian principles:

- Working and investing for a living is based on a win/win scenario, but gambling is always win/lose. God put his stamp of approval on commerce and work. When a carpenter builds a cabinet and gets paid, both parties win. One of them gets the cabinets she wanted, and one of them gets the money he desired. They can both feel good about the transaction. Not so with gambling. Someone always loses and pays a price.
- Gambling is motivated by greed. Let’s be honest and admit that greed lies at the heart of all gambling. The desire to get something for nothing is really another name for covetousness (Exod. 20:17; Prov. 21:25-26).
- Gambling is a wasteful use of the Lord’s money. I doubt that many Christians who gamble tithe, but even if they do, New Testament Christians understand that God doesn’t have the right to only ten percent of our money, but all of it. Even though I am a tither, I am still required to be a steward of all I have because it belongs to God. I am no freer to gamble with God’s money than I am with anyone else’s. Even though others might waste the Lord’s money on equally frivolous things, their sin doesn’t excuse mine.

Gambling shows a lack of love for my neighbor. If I really love my neighbor, I want only what is for his good (Matt. 22:39, 1 Cor. 10:24). When legislators talk about putting casinos on the state line so we can prey on the greed and weakness of our neighbors, they reveal the harmful assault that gambling really is. Can I in good conscience support something that preys on the weaknesses and indulges the worst instincts of the precious people around me? Gambling fails to consider innocent families. We might be tempted to think that if a person gambles away all of his money, then that is his problem and serves him right. But what of his ten-year-old son who can’t afford school supplies? What of his wife who has to work to pay off the credit cards she didn’t even know she had? What of his ailing parents who cannot count on his help in their senior years? What of his daughter’s college education? Proverbs 15:27 says “A greedy man brings trouble to his family,” and nowhere is that more obvious than in the gambling industry.

Gambling shows no concern for God’s glory. A Jesus-follower should try to glorify God in everything (1 Cor. 10:31), and use his or her money to accomplish good for the kingdom (Matt. 6:19-21, 24).

Gambling is not an act of faith but a game of chance. Paul wrote that “Everything that is not of faith is sin” (Romans 14:23). The Christian life is to be lived in dependence on God to meet all needs according to his glorious riches in Christ Jesus (Phil. 4:19).

Jesus wouldn't do it. Can you picture Jesus sitting at a slot machine with a cup full of quarters? He was interested in doing his Father's business, alleviating suffering and grief, not contributing to it.