

### GAMBLING: HARMLESS PASTIME OR SINFUL ACTIVITY?

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Merriam Webster's online dictionary defines gambling as: 1 *a*: to play a game for money or property *b*: to bet on an uncertain outcome 2: to stake something on a contingency: take a chance. Edward C. Devereux wrote:

Gambling is betting on the outcome of a future event. A gambler usually bets money or something else of value as a stake on the outcome he predicts. When the outcome is settled, the winner collects the losers' stakes. People gamble most often on games of chance, such as dice or card games. But they also gamble on games of skill, horse races, and other sports, elections, and almost any event with an unpredictable outcome (Devereux, Edward C. "Gambling," World Book Encyclopedia, Chicago, Ill., 1976, pg. 21).

What are some of the reasons why one would say that they engage in gambling activities? Perhaps, it is to challenge one's skills at a given activity, the joy of stiff competition, or the satisfaction gained from being the victor in a game. All these reasons may be applicable and true, but without doubt the overwhelming reason that one decides to gamble is to obtain wealth.

If gambling is a sinful activity, what makes it sinful? The desire to better one's condition would never be thought of as sinful. The chance of winning or losing couldn't be considered a sin because we take chances every day. Living in the Memphis area, we take a chance with our lives every time we decide to drive up or down Germantown Parkway!

So, what makes gambling a sinful activity? In a word, "covetousness"; it is covetousness that makes gambling a sinful activity. Jesus said, "...for the labourer is worthy of his hire..." (Lk. 10:7). God has always required that a man work for his keep, after all, He did place man in the garden "to dress it and to keep it" (Gen. 2:15). So, from the very beginning, God expected man to labor and to earn what he received! The tenth commandment says, "Thou shalt not covet thy neighbour's house, thou shalt not covet thy neighbour's wife, nor his manservant, nor his maidservant, nor his ox, nor his ass, nor any thing that *is* thy neighbour's" (Ex. 20:17). The Lord carried this godly command into the New Testament when He said, "Take heed, and beware of covetousness: for a man's life consisteth not in the abundance of the things which he possesseth" (Lk. 12:15). The Romans learned, "For this, Thou shalt not commit adultery, Thou shalt not kill, Thou shalt not steal, Thou shalt not bear false witness, Thou shalt not covet; and if *there be* any other commandment, it is briefly comprehended in this saying, namely, Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself" (Rom. 13:9). It was Paul that told the Thessalonians, "...this we commanded you, that if any would not work, neither should he eat" (2 Thess. 3:10).

Untold families have been consumed by the passion for gambling. This happens when the desire for wealth becomes stronger than one's desire to follow God's commandments. Anything that comes between God and man is idolatry, and covetousness is defined as idolatry in the Scripture (Col. 3:5).

Let us consider with an open mind the evils of gambling. It is not wrong because a chance is being taken, but because of the desire to have another's property or possessions. This writer knows of an

instance when a family man received his pay one night and on the way home he gambled away his week's wages in a poker machine. He told his employer that he lost his check and was given a replacement. So, not only did he lose his week's pay, but he also lost his job when he cashed the second check. Gambling cost him his family! Our Lord would never have gambled and neither would any of His apostles. As we endeavor to follow in His footsteps, let us keep in mind the words of Peter, "For even hereunto were ye called: because Christ also suffered for us, leaving us an example, that ye should follow his steps" (1 Pet. 2:21).