



CHRISTIAN INFLUENCE IN A SECULAR WORLD

What we believe

Gambling is wrong

Gambling is any activity in which wealth changes hands, mainly on the basis of chance and with risk to the gambler. Such activities include betting, fruit machines, lotteries, casino games, scratchcards and card games. Creative effort, useful skills, and responsible investment are not integral factors.

There are three legitimate ways in which wealth may change hands - by giving, by working for it, or by genuine exchange: anything else is virtual theft and so a breaking of the 8th commandment. As has been said: “Gambling is a kind of robbery by mutual agreement; but it is still robbery, just as duelling, which is murder by mutual agreement, is still treated as murder.”

Of the three impulses behind gambling – the desire for gain, the desire for a thrill and the desire for competition, the moral and ethical problems are focused on the desire for gain.

- (1) Gambling directly appeals to covetousness and greed “which is idolatry” according to the Apostle Paul (Colossians 3:5). Gambling breaches the 1st, 2nd and 10th commandments. It enthrones personal desires in place of God. Jesus warned: “you cannot serve both God and Money”. (Matthew 6:24) A greedy and unrepentant person is an idolater who cannot obtain salvation (Ephesians 5:5).

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- (2) Gambling directly depends on other people incurring financial loss. Jesus said that you should “do to others what you would have them do to you, for this sums up the Law and the Prophets.” (Matthew 7:12). But gambling depends on doing to others what we would *not* have them do to us. At that point no gambler desires the best for his fellow man. Instead he is indifferent to his fellow gamblers or wants them to lose so that he can win. In any honest business transaction it is the intention of both parties to benefit, yet with gambling the intention is to gain but the gain is at the other’s expense. We are called to do good to all people, not to do harm. (Galatians 6:10).

- (3) Gambling denies the biblical work ethic which links honest labour with reward. The Apostle Paul said “He who has been stealing must steal no longer, but must work, doing something useful with his own hands, that he may have something to share with those in need” (Ephesians 4:28). Gambling holds out the dream that it is possible to get something for nothing. It can encourage laziness rather than work. Laziness is condemned in Scripture (e.g. 2 Thessalonians 3:10).

- (4) Gambling is a reckless use of resources. It undermines the creation mandate to be stewards of creation and to work (Genesis 1:28; 9:1-2) The Bible teaches that all things belong to God (Psalm 24:1) and that man will have to give an account for his stewardship of all that he has been given (Matthew 25:14-30).

- (5) Rather than facing up to reality, gambling is a form of escapism. The Gambling industry trades on people’s vulnerability to temptation and relies on the fact that statistically it is the industry that wins practically every time. Those who gamble often are not thinking rationally about risk. Instead they are thinking about luck and superstition. Chance is glorified and God’s sovereignty denied (Job 42:2; Romans 11:36; Colossians 1:16, 17; Hebrews 1:3). Scripture makes clear that trust in God and trust in luck cannot co-exist (Isaiah 65:11).

- (6) There is evidence that gambling disproportionately affects the poor who face particular temptations because of their strained financial circumstances (Proverbs 30:8,9). It is very wrong to exploit this vulnerability.
- (7) Gambling is inherently addictive. As with alcohol or drug addiction, compulsive gamblers lose control of their lives. This is plainly contrary to the teaching of the Bible, which teaches us to be self-controlled. (Ephesians 5:18; Galatians 5:22,23; Titus 2:11, 12; 1 Peter 5:8).
- (8) Gambling is the very opposite of contentment (1 Timothy 6:6-10). Man's duty is to seek first God's Kingdom and trust that God will meet his needs. (Matthew 6:30-34; Philippians 4:19).

Mainstream Christian belief has always viewed gambling as incompatible with the Bible's teaching. Gambling was strongly opposed by Tertullian, Hugh Latimer, John Wesley, William Wilberforce, C H Spurgeon and William Temple. On this issue, Thomas Aquinas is not representative of mainstream Christian belief.

Gambling does not cease to be wrong because a proportion of the take is devoted to so-called good causes. Many are misled at this point, and persuaded of the legitimacy of the National Lottery, for example. The end does not justify the means.