

# IS THERE ANY PROBLEM WITH GAMBLING?

## INTRODUCTION:

- A. Archaeologists sifting the sand of the Middle East have found evidence of gambling as far back as 3000 BC in Babylon. Two thousand years ago the Romans bet on the horses races held at the great Circus Maximus. Queen Elizabeth is credited with the first government supported lottery in 1566. Gambling is certainly nothing new. It has been around a very long time.
- B. You won't find the word, "gambling" in the Bible. The closest you will get to it is the practice of "casting lots." Remember how the Roman soldiers cast lots for Jesus' clothing at the foot of the cross (**Matthew 27:35**).
- Several Old Testament texts speak of pagans casting lots to divide up the spoils of war (**Ezekiel 24:6; Joel 3:3**).
  - In a spiritual context, casting lots was used as a device for choosing volunteers and for discerning the will of God. For instance, Matthias, the apostolic replacement for Judas Iscariot, was selected by prayer followed by the casting of lots. (**Acts 1:24-26**)
  - **Proverbs 16:33**, *The lot is cast into the lap, but its every decision is from the LORD.*
- C. It's been on the front page of our newspapers more than ever recently. There's the Husky coach gambling scandal, the opening of the huge Tulalip Casino just up the highway, and the embarrassing news about former Education Secretary, Bill Bennett, darling of America's conservatives.
- Just in case the story got past you, an investigative reporter broke the news that Bennett had lost \$8 million in a decade, generally on video poker and high-stakes slot-machine play in exclusive rooms at leading casinos. Last July 12 he lost \$340,000 at Caesar's Boardwalk Regency in Atlantic City. This past April 5-6, he lost more than \$500,000 at the Bellagio in Las Vegas. He claims that he really didn't lose that amount of money. He said that over the ten years, he has pretty much come out even.  
Bennett was quoted as saying, *I've gambled all my life, and it's never been a moral issue with me. I liked church bingo when I was growing up....I adhere to the law. I don't play the "milk money." I don't put my family at risk, and I don't owe anyone anything.* (David Von Drehle, "Ex-Cabinet official bets on far more than virtue," from *The Washington Post*, May 3, 2003 on seattletimes.com, 2003)
  - Focus Press Release: *We were disappointed to learn that our longtime friend, Dr. Bill Bennett, is dealing with what appears to be a gambling addiction. One of the reasons Focus on the Family continues to be strongly opposed to any form of gambling is because it has the power to ensnare and wound not only its victims, but also those closest to them. 'Gaming,' as the industry euphemistically refers to itself, is a cancer on the soul of the nation.  
We commend Dr. Bennett for acknowledging his problem and for stating emphatically, "My gambling days are over."*
- C. You can't have missed the stories about the new Tulalip Casino: 227,000 sq. ft. with a price tag of \$78 million. For their grand opening all 5,470 parking spaces were filled and employees had to direct overflow parking to a graveled area out back.
- D. So what are Christians to think of all this? Is there any problem with gambling???
- I. WHAT WOULD MOTIVATE ME TO GAMBLE?
- A. Entertainment
1. Seventy-five-year-old Rita Yost visits a New Jersey casino once a month. *"It's a day out," she says. "You can take your walk on the boardwalk, and you eat at the buffet. Then I usually gamble the nickel slot machines. I don't really spend*

*a lot. If I win on that, then I go on the quarter machines. I take \$100. I have to come home with \$30 no matter what.*” (Carole Fleck, “Are casinos preying on our elders?”, *AARP Bulletin*, March 2000, 11)

2. Did you catch that they don’t call it gambling anymore. They call it “gaming.” And it looks like playing games. They use cards and dice just like in your game cupboard at home. The casinos look like mini-Disney parks with fountains, restaurants, and shows. Some even have amusement rides to keep the kids happy while mom and dad play the slots.

B. Greed/Laziness

1. In the summer of ’98, Ernie Kovic stood in line to buy \$3000 worth of Powerball tickets. He was a 28-year-old Bronx waiter studying aircraft design at a trade school. The \$3000 was money he had been saving for school. Kovic told the *New York Times*: *If I win, I won’t have to go to school. Heck, I can buy my own aircraft.* He lost, along with 80 million other players. (*Family News From Dr. James Dobson*, citing Mike Allen, “For \$250 Million, Convenience Stores Beat Day at Beach,” *New York Times*, July 27, 1998)
2. Most of the state lottery ads I hear play this theme up. *How would you like to retire young and do whatever you want the rest of your life?* Or how about this recent ad: *Win a \$25,000 shopping mall spree. Why buy just one book...you can have the whole fiction section...*as if anybody would ever want that.
3. The Bible provides a potent antidote to this kind of advertising: **I Timothy 6:9**, *People who want to get rich fall into temptation and a trap and into many foolish and harmful desires that plunge men into ruin and destruction. 10 For the love of money is a root of all kinds of evil. Some people, eager for money, have wandered from the faith and pierced themselves with many griefs.*

C. Desperation

1. Robert Goodman, a student of gambling, calls it “the pathology of hope.” (George Will, *Washington Post* Columnist, “A hand of cards seems to determine the game of life,” *Everett herald*, 1/4/96)
2. One of America’s legendary business risks concerns a package delivery CEO who couldn’t make payroll. So he cleaned out the cash box, flew to Nevada and put the wad on the line. Incredibly, he won big, flew home, made payroll, and saved the business. However, I assume if he had lost his stake, he likely would have been a jailbird heel instead of a business section hero.
3. I think we all know that the prospects of solving desperate cash problems via gambling are doomed to failure and even more desperate problems. Gambling research is full of anecdotes about losers who commit suicide rather than face humiliation or ruthless bookies.
4. God has a superior scheme for desperate people. It has two components:
  - Call the first component divine providence. **Matthew 6:31**, *So do not worry, saying, 'What shall we eat?' or 'What shall we drink?' or 'What shall we wear?' 32 For the pagans run after all these things, and your heavenly Father knows that you need them.*
  - Call the second component community. **Acts 4:34**, *There were no needy persons among them. For from time to time those who owned lands or houses sold them, brought the money from the sales 35 and put it at the apostles' feet, and it was distributed to anyone as he had need.*

II. WHERE DO MY WINNINGS COME FROM?

A. Other people

1. Let’s put a face on gambling. What if you and a friend each put up a hundred dollar bill and risk it on one roll of the dice. One of you walks away with \$200. The other walks away \$100 poorer.

- ❑ How does that feel to you? It doesn't feel good to me.
  - ❑ When you put a face on gambling like this it shows it up for what it is: *Robbing other people with their consent.*
  - ❑ What do you think of that lingo change from **gambling** to **gaming**?
    - It's really not a game. It's not about playing. It's about taking. The money looks like it comes from a ticket or a slot machine or a cashier's window. It doesn't. It comes from other people just like you and me. Laundering the money through the machinations of the gambling industry can't change the fact that there are still human faces behind every nickel and quarter that people insert in the slots and every dollar that buys a ticket at the mini-mart.
2. *To entice someone to gain money at the certain loss of another violates many principles Christ taught.* (Larry Burkett, "Money Sense," *Moody*, May 1994, 36)
  3. *Jesus commanded, "Love your neighbor as yourself" (Mark 12:31). Gambling, meanwhile, is predicated on the losses, pain, and suffering of others. For one to win at gambling, others must lose.* (Ronald A. Reno, "Gambling and the Bible," *Citizen Link*, 6/16/03)
  4. The Bible has a word for people who have stolen from others: **Ephesians 4:28**, *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.*
  5. There's a big difference from the gains of honest work vs. the gains of gambling. When we work, both parties get something of fair value. When people gamble, only one person gets value. The other person is diminished...
- B. Especially certain kinds of other people
1. *Some casinos send charter buses to nursing homes and senior centers right after beneficiaries receive their Social Security checks. The industry has even coined such as "the third-of-the-month" club to describe these sought-after patrons.* (Carole Fleck, "Are casinos preying on our elders?", *AARP Bulletin*, March 2000, 9)
  2. *A February [1999] University of Chicago National Opinion Research Center...nationwide study of 2,400 adults comparing data between now [1999] and 1974 shows the highest increase among gamblers has been among those 65 and older.* (John W. Kennedy, "Gambling Away the Golden Years," *Christianity Today*, May 24, 1999, 43)
  3. CAGE stands for Washington's Citizens Against Gambling Expansion. Membership includes King County Executive Ron Sims and King County Prosecutor Norm Maleng. House Democrats want to expand Keno games to raise an extra \$102 million for the state in 2005-2007. Sims says that the *money would be made on the false hopes of the poor... "Gambling preys upon the poor. It says to them that if you gamble, it will turn your life around.* (Nicole Brodeur/Times staff columnist, "Betting on the hopes of the poor," *seattletimes.com*, May 8, 2003)
  4. God gets pretty upset with people who take advantage of the poor.
    - **Proverbs 14:31**, *He who oppresses the poor shows contempt for their Maker, but whoever is kind to the needy honors God.*
    - **Proverbs 29:7**, *The righteous care about justice for the poor, but the wicked have no such concern.*
    - **Isaiah 3:14**. *The LORD enters into judgment against the elders and leaders of his people: "... the plunder from the poor is in your houses.*
    - Here's a good one for the people who write the Lotto ads: **Isaiah 32:7**, *The scoundrel's methods are wicked, he makes up evil schemes to destroy the poor with lies...*

- And this one is for us all: **Jeremiah 22:16**, *He defended the cause of the poor and needy, and so all went well. Is that not what it means to know me?" declares the LORD.* [ re. King Josiah]
5. Dr. Bennett understood the problem of illicit drug purchases. Joel Belz writes that he was right to point out that *casual drug users cannot maintain the argument that they're harming no one when in truth they are "driving the whole [illegal drug] enterprise."* *It's too bad he didn't recognize the connection between recreational gambling and the corrupt industry.* (Joel Belz, "The Buzz: The hypocrites," *World*, May 17, 2003)

### III. WHAT ARE THE RISKS TO ME?

#### A. Abuse

- This is the realm of simply making bad decisions.
- Like kids gambling away their lunch money.
- Or a young husband denying his wife a haircut and then blowing \$100 in a poker game.
- Jeff in Salem

#### B. Addiction

- This is the level of loss of control.
- Gambling becomes a compulsion; an obsession.
- The person no longer can help himself. He or she runs up impossible debts. Relationships begin unravel because trust is violated again and again.
- Impossible pressures begin to mount.
- The New Testament warns every Christian to be wary of any behavior that exposes him to the risk of compulsion. The more liberal Corinthian Christians had a catch-phrase that went like this: *"Everything is permissible for me"*  
The Apostle Paul had a reply to that. He wrote, **OK**, *--but not everything is beneficial.* **OK**, *--but I will not be mastered by anything.* **OK**, *--but not everything is constructive.* (**I Corinthians 6:12; 10:23**)
- Like the Bible says, *No one can serve two masters, Matthew 6:24.* *Either he will hate the one and love the other, or he will be devoted to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve both God and Money.*

#### C. Distraction

1. **II Corinthians 11:2**, *I am jealous for you with a godly jealousy. I promised you to one husband, to Christ, so that I might present you as a pure virgin to him. 3 But I am afraid that just as Eve was deceived by the serpent's cunning, your minds may somehow be led astray from your sincere and pure devotion to Christ.*
2. There is the distraction of unrealistic dreams, misplaced hopes, the disappointment of another worthless ticket and the silly temptation to buy another one.
3. Why risk getting distracted by a "pathology of hope" when you have a Heavenly father of substance with 100% faithfulness?!

### IV. ARE THERE ANY RISKS TO OTHERS?

#### A. The Weaker Brother

1. James Dobson spent two years serving on the National Gambling Impact Study Commission for the U.S. Congress. *A mountain of evidence presented to our Commission demonstrates a direct link between problem and pathological gambling and divorce, child abuse, domestic violence, bankruptcy, crime and suicide. More than 15.4 million adults and adolescents meet the technical criteria of those disorders. That is an enormous number – greater than the largest city in this country. When other activities, such as smoking, have been shown to be harmful, the hue and cry for regulations to warn and protect the*

*public has been loud and long. Today, the silence of most of our leaders about the risks of gambling is deafening. (James Dobson, Family News From Dr. James Dobson, July 1999, 1)*

2. **I Corinthians 8:13**, *Therefore, if what I eat causes my brother to fall into sin, I will never eat meat again, so that I will not cause him to fall.*
3. In light of what we know about the risks of gambling, and the spiritual power of example, I don't see how any wise Christian can conscientiously involve himself in gambling. The hazards to others are too great. Too much is at stake.

B. The Losers

1. *A Gamblers Anonymous survey found that 44 percent had stolen from work to support gambling debts; 34 percent had lost or quit a job; 26 percent had divorced or separated; 21 percent had filed for bankruptcy; 18 percent had gambling-related arrests. (Colson, 96)*
2. Losers are probably not going to be helped by fellow gamblers. The principle is established in **Galatians 6:1**, **Brothers, if someone is caught in a sin, you who are spiritual should restore him gently. But watch yourself, or you also may be tempted.**

V. HOW DOES GAMBLING SQUARE WITH CHRISTIAN "STEWARDSHIP"?

A. Is It an Appropriate Way to Use God's Money?

1. Parable of the talents. **Matthew 25:14-30**, *"Again, it will be like a man going on a journey, who called his servants and entrusted his property to them. 15 To one he gave five talents of money, to another two talents, and to another one talent, each according to his ability. Then he went on his journey. 16 The man who had received the five talents went at once and put his money to work and gained five more. 17 So also, the one with the two talents gained two more. 18 But the man who had received the one talent went off, dug a hole in the ground and hid his master's money. 19 "After a long time the master of those servants returned and settled accounts with them. 20 The man who had received the five talents brought the other five. 'Master,' he said, 'you entrusted me with five talents. See, I have gained five more.' 21 "His master replied, 'Well done, good and faithful servant! You have been faithful with a few things; I will put you in charge of many things. Come and share your master's happiness!' 22 "The man with the two talents also came. 'Master,' he said, 'you entrusted me with two talents; see, I have gained two more.' 23 "His master replied, 'Well done, good and faithful servant! You have been faithful with a few things; I will put you in charge of many things. Come and share your master's happiness!' 24 "Then the man who had received the one talent came. 'Master,' he said, 'I knew that you are a hard man, harvesting where you have not sown and gathering where you have not scattered seed. 25 So I was afraid and went out and hid your talent in the ground. See, here is what belongs to you.' 26 "His master replied, 'You wicked, lazy servant! So you knew that I harvest where I have not sown and gather where I have not scattered seed? 27 Well then, you should have put my money on deposit with the bankers, so that when I returned I would have received it back with interest. 28 "Take the talent from him and give it to the one who has the ten talents. 29 For everyone who has will be given more, and he will have an abundance. Whoever does not have, even what he has will be taken from him. 30 And throw that worthless servant outside, into the darkness, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.'*
2. What if the unfaithful servant had said,
  - ***I was afraid and went out [gambled with] your talent. [The bad news is that I didn't win anything. But the good news is that I didn't lose anything either. I broke even.] See, here is what belongs to you.'*** I think the worthless servant would have been thrown out anyway.

- *I was afraid and went out and [gambled with] your talent. [Unfortunately, I had a run of bad luck and I lost your money. But you know master, you can't win if you don't play! Just think of what could have happened!* I think the worthless servant would have been thrown out even faster and farther.
3. You wouldn't be happy if the Elders gambled away the church Benevolence Fund, even if their motives were noble – to win even more money to help the needy! Because Elders are supposed to be trustworthy as managers of the resources of God's people. Well, same deal with me and with you: God entrusts us to be worthy managers of the resources he has entrusted to us.
- B. Is It the Same as Eating Out or Seeing a Movie?
1. **I Timothy 4:4**, *For everything God created is good, and nothing is to be rejected if it is received with thanksgiving, 5 because it is consecrated by the word of God and prayer.*
  2. Christianity is not a religion of asceticism. Fun and relaxation is are not dirty words.
    - We are called to hard work for Jesus. We are called to stick out neck for Jesus, even to suffer if required.
    - But we are not called to self-inflicted harsh treatment of the body.
    - Jesus knew when it was time for R&R. Jesus attended dinner parties. His first performed miracles was at a wedding reception.
    - **Colossians 2:21, 21** *"Do not handle! Do not taste! Do not touch!"?*  
*22 These are all destined to perish with use, because they are based on human commands and teachings. 23 Such regulations indeed have an appearance of wisdom, with their self-imposed worship, their false humility and their harsh treatment of the body, but they lack any value in restraining sensual indulgence.*
    - **I Timothy 6:17**, *God, who richly provides us with everything for our enjoyment.*
  3. So, I think it's pretty clear that there's nothing sinful about using a reasonable amount of time and money for recreation. That is not inconsistent with Christian stewardship. But it is a world apart from the dynamics of gambling. Recreation expenses only become sinful when they are excessive and self-indulgent, and when they compete with our investing in the Kingdom of God.

## VI. ARE THEY TELLING US THE TRUTH?

- A. About the Odds?
1. *Statisticians say lottery players are more likely to be eaten alive by piranhas than to hit the jackpot...* (Tom Watson, Jr., "Playing the Lottery Is Idolatry," *Christianity Today*, .n.d., 8)
  2. *The odds of winning lottery numbers games... six number games give you only a 1 in 10 million chance; seven numbers, 1 in 100 million.*(Carol Silverman Saunders, *Straight Talk About Teenage Gambling*, Facts on File, Inc. NY, 1999, 44)
  3. Think about it. Institutionalized gambling is always rigged for the house or the state to profit. There is no way for the gambling public to theoretically break even in the end. They have to predominately lose or the industry would collapse.
- B. About the Marketing?
1. *[L]ottery ads are the only form of advertising to which state and federal truth-in-advertising standards do not apply.* (Carol Silverman Saunders, *Straight Talk About Teenage Gambling*, Facts on File, Inc. NY, 1999, 40)
  2. *Casinos often go far beyond offering free bus rides and free food to attract older gamblers, says Gosker in the Elder Law Journal article. Some casinos use*

sophisticated video tracking systems to identify and lure back those who gamble heavily. Some casinos pay credit card companies for information about income and spending habits of consumers so they can identify and contact potential high rollers.

Gosker says that about 20 percent of gamblers generate about 80 percent of the earnings of the gambling industry. (Carole Fleck, "Are casinos preying on our elders?", *AARP Bulletin*, March 2000, 11)

3. There is something deeply sinister about all this!

C. About the Value to Society?

1. Mike Benhow is Business Editor for the Everett Herald. On May 26, 2003, he wrote these glowing words about the new Tulalip Casino: *What impresses me is the potential for economic development and for jobs - both for tribal members and for the rest of us. Even more impressive is how these jobs have the potential to transform the lives of an entire group of people.*

*In addition to direct jobs, the casino is providing opportunity for young people who want to further their education. A program funded with gambling income pays tuition, books and a small stipend for living expenses to any young tribal member accepted into a two- or four-year institution..*

*Providing jobs and funding dreams....those are two things to get excited about in connection with the new casino.*

2. Sound like the arguments in favor of state-run lotteries. Almost every state has one, ostensibly as a no-cost, no-risk way of paying for public services, like schools. But take a closer look... "A lottery is the most regressive of taxes," Michael Kelly explains in the *Washington Post*: *It's a way a way of saying, "You want better schools but you don't want to pay for them? No problem, we'll get the poor folk to pay your freight."* (Charles Colson, "Beating the Odds," *Christianity Today*, January 10, 2000, 96)

□ *The National Gambling Impact Study Commission found that those with incomes less than \$10,000 spend more on lottery tickets than any other income group. High school dropouts spend four times as much as college graduates. .* (Ronald A. Reno, "Gambling and the Bible," *Citizen Link*, 6/16/03)

3. Charles Colson says, *Consider the irony....the people submit to being governed, in trust that those who govern them will act in their benefit. Instead, the government is actively seeking to legitimize a vice that destroys people and wrecks homes.* (Colson, 96)

4. *Legalized gambling is responsible for a host of social ills. Take Atlantic City: During the first three years of casino operation, it jumped from 50<sup>th</sup> to 1<sup>st</sup> on the nation's per capita crime chart. A university of Illinois professor of commerce and legal policy (John Kindt, Ph.D. in a statement before a hearing of the U. S. House of representatives Committee on Small Business, 21 September 1994) asserts that for every \$1 of revenue generated by gambling, taxpayers must dish out at least \$3 in increased criminal justice costs, social-welfare expenses, high regulatory costs, and increased infrastructure spending. Countless studies show a direct link between legalized gambling and gambling addictions, as well as drug and alcohol abuse and suicide.* (Focus on the Family's *CitizenLink WEBSITE*, 2003)

D. Sounds to me like we have been sold a bill of goods.

VII. DOES GAMBLING DIFFER FROM OTHER FORMS OF RISK?

A. Stocks?

1. I think that most of us have figured out that investing in business is a credible venture. Of course, there are extreme investments that are just as dicey as a go at the roulette table. Brokers call these investments volatile, and reputable brokers won't even help people buy those products.

2. But to buy into solid businesses is about the same thing as buying a home and enjoying the appreciation of your investment. I'm not rolling the dice when I buy stock. I'm buying something. I'm buying a little part of a company that produces a real product or service - unless the name happens to be Enron!!!
3. Of course there is a level of risk. But just getting up in the morning entails a degree of risk, doesn't it?!
  - [A] *person is more likely to be kicked to death by a donkey than die in a plane crash.*
  - [A] *person is eight times more likely to die while playing a sport than to be shot by a stranger.*
  - [W] *e are at greater risk getting in our car every day than we are in surgery. One in forty thousand die in surgery; one in four thousand die in auto accidents.* (Max Anders, *The Good Life*, Word, 1993, 113)

B. Sports?

1. You could break your neck playing high school football. Superman is in a wheelchair because he loved to ride horses. Any sports entails degree of risk. If you've ever run a 10K, you remember the release form you signed accepting the risks inherent in road-running.
2. But almost everybody recognizes that the risks are far outweighed by the benefits of sports: health, self-esteem for kids, relationship-building, maybe a college scholarship.
3. The relative risks of wholesome sports are nothing like the certain foolish risks of gambling.
4. To avoid all forms of risk is to become a bland person...
 

*There was a very cautious man  
Who never laughed or played.  
He never risked, he never tried,  
He never sang or prayed.  
And when he one day passed away,  
His insurance was denied.  
For since he never really lived,  
They claimed he never died.*

CONCLUSION:

- A. These are the Lottery claims from the "Everybody Wins" brochure from the Washington State Lottery.
  - Mega Millions: *Buy whatever you want.*
  - Lotto: *What's your dream?*
  - Quinto: *Match and win.*
  - Scratch Tickets: *The cure for the common day.*
  - Lucky for Life: *The longer you live, the more you win.*
  - Daily Keno: *The game that gives you the best chance of winning a cash prize.*
  - The Daily Game: *You could be a winner every day.*
- B. Do you believe all that?

Timothy G. Walton  
Snohomish Community Church  
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