

Question: Why do some churches condemn gambling, and what about buying a chance on winning a prize to benefit some worthy cause?

So far as I know, the Bible does not say anything specifically about gambling. However, I do believe that Jesus would point us to some important principles that gambling often violates. A clear definition of gambling along with consideration of these biblical principles should help us examine the issue properly.

Gambling generally involves taking unnecessary risks with goods or money with the aim of getting a larger gain in return. There are risks in almost every activity in life; but unlike risks involved in activities like farming, operating a business or investing in the stock market, gambling brings no equitable return to all who participate. These business activities are designed to bring a fair profit or benefit to all who may be involved in the business. However, gambling is a game of chance where one or a few gain while others involved in the game must lose.

In addition, Christians are concerned about the way gambling tends to be motivated by the love of money and the way it feeds sinful greed (Exodus 20:17; Ephesians 5:5; 1 Timothy 6:10). Unless he is unable, a Christian is told he should “work, doing something useful with his hands, that he may have something to share with those in need” (Ephesians 4:28). Jesus also urged that we trust in God to provide for us while we concentrate on doing good (Matthew 6:25-34).

Following Jesus also means exercising self-control for the sake of righteousness (Galatians 5:23; 2 Timothy 3:3). But one does not have to know the Bible to know that gambling can be highly addictive. With the hope of gaining the American dream, many have gambled away almost more than they could hope to earn in a lifetime. Just as with other addictions, gambling has often led to lying and stealing, as well as serious emotional problems. It is not uncommon to hear of gambling addicts who have lost their homes, jobs, families and have become so depressed that they commit suicide.

Perhaps the saddest consequence of gambling is the way it has hurt the poorest and most disadvantaged among us. In their desperation to survive, these people are sometimes led to believe gambling can help them

quickly overcome their poverty. God's heart has always been filled with a deep passion for justice toward the poor and disenfranchised (Isaiah 1:18-19; Matthew 23:23). But, all too often it has brought financial losses and dire social consequences to individuals and families who have taken unnecessary risks with money they cannot afford to lose.

Almost everywhere we turn, we can see how gambling has led to abuses and violation of godly principles designed for the life and health of righteous and unrighteous people. Does this mean it would be wrong to buy a raffle ticket to benefit a worthy cause? It is possible to look upon this action as only making a donation to charity. Even if only one person were to win the prize, all who gave received the equitable benefit of helping a worthy cause.

At the same time, we need to examine our motives. Are we buying a ticket to help others or selfishly hoping to win something for almost nothing? If I were to win, would I donate the prize to a worthy cause or keep it? It is unfortunate that funds must be raised for worthy causes at the risk of appealing to the baser motives in people. Is this really the best way to help people in need? You will have to answer these questions for yourself and examine your own motives. But I do suggest that in light of biblical teachings and of the often tragic consequences of gambling, ask yourself, "What would Jesus do?"

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