

GAMBLING YPS January 21, AD 2001

1. What is gambling?

The American Heritage Dictionary defines gambling as: 1. a. *To bet on an uncertain outcome, as of a contest.* b. *Games. To play a game of chance for stakes.* 2. *To take a risk in the hope of gaining an advantage or a benefit.* 3. *To engage in reckless or hazardous behavior.* The three essential elements in gambling are:

- The element of *uncertainty*—no one but God knows how things are going to turn out.
- The element of *risk*—something of value usually money is wagered (put in jeopardy).
- The element of *inequity*—someone (often just *one*, or only *a few*) will gain while someone else (often *many*) will lose.

2. Does the Bible forbid gambling?

The Ten Commandments have a broad area of application, containing principles that cover every area of life.

Heidelberg Catechism

Q110: What does God forbid in the eighth Commandment?

A110: God forbids not only such theft and robbery as are punished by the government, but God views as theft also all wicked tricks and devices, whereby we seek to get our neighbor's goods, whether by force or by deceit, such as unjust weights, lengths, measures, goods, coins, usury, or by any means forbidden of God; also all covetousness and the misuse and waste of His gifts.

Westminster Larger Catechism

Q142: What are the sins forbidden in the eighth commandment?

A142: The sins forbidden in the eighth commandment, besides the neglect of the duties required, are, theft, robbery, man-stealing, and receiving anything that is stolen; fraudulent dealing, false weights and measures, removing land marks, injustice and unfaithfulness in contracts between man and man, or in matters of trust; oppression, extortion, usury, bribery, vexatious lawsuits, unjust enclosures and depopulations; engrossing commodities to enhance the price; unlawful callings, and all other unjust or sinful ways of taking or withholding from our neighbor what belongs to him, or of enriching ourselves; covetousness; inordinate prizing and affecting worldly goods; distrustful and distracting cares and studies in getting, keeping, and using them; envying at the prosperity of others; as likewise idleness, prodigality, wasteful gaming; and all other ways whereby we do unduly prejudice our own outward estate, and defrauding ourselves of the due use and comfort of that estate which God hath given us.

3 The Bible warns against greed and the lust for money.

Proverbs 28:19-20

*He who works his land will have abundant food,
but the one who chases fantasies will have his fill of poverty.*

*A faithful man will be richly blessed,
but one eager to get rich will not go unpunished.*

Luke 12:15

Then he said to them, "Watch out! Be on your guard against all kinds of greed; a man's life does not consist in the abundance of his possessions."

1 Timothy 6:6-10

But godliness with contentment is great gain. For we brought nothing into the world, and we can take nothing out of it. But if we have food and clothing, we will be content with that. 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. 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.

4. Are games of chance (e.g. involving dice) gambling if nothing of value is put at risk?

Older theologians condemned all games of chance as a violation of the third commandment. It was believed that natural forces had no influence on the outcome and that God determined the outcome directly and immediately. Therefore every throw of the dice was looked upon as a prayer to God for a favorable outcome. Such prayers (the rolling of the dice) were condemned as unrighteous prayers (selfish and trivial) and therefore a taking in vain of the Lord's name. But God is no more, or less, involved in the outcome of dice than He is in any aspect of our lives. Everything we do, we do before the face of God. In His providence, God controls both our actions and the outcomes of those actions. Rolling dice is no more a prayer than putting one foot in front of the other to walk. The use of dice in a game of chance adds surprise and excitement to a game because we cannot control the outcome. But just because we cannot control the outcome does not mean God controls it directly. He controls the results through the laws of nature, as He controls most other aspects of our lives. Therefore, most modern theologians say it is perfectly acceptable to play games that involve various levels of uncertainty (provided there is no money wagered), whether through the random distribution of cards in a deck, the blind distribution of tiles or the uncertain outcome of the roll of the dice.

5. Gambling is stealing by mutual consent.

W. E. Bierderwolf observed that: *Gambling bears the same relationship to robbery that dueling does to murder. One man will meet another in a dark alley and take his life at the end of a pistol and you call it murder; two men will meet each other in an alley and agree to shoot each other until one or both fall dead and you call it dueling. But the only difference is that in the first case there is one murder and in the second there are (possibly) two! One man will meet another in a dark alley and take his money at the end of a pistol and you call it robbery; two men will meet each other round a table and agree to take each other's money with dice or cards and you call it gambling. But the only difference is that in the first case there is only one robber and in the second there are two* (Quoted in *Christianity Magazine*, Sept. 1990 p. 10).

6. The consequences of gambling are often devastating.

Gambling is wrong because it violates the eighth commandment. The fact that it is wrong is demonstrated by its evil consequences: addiction and poverty. Don't think that if you only gamble a little, just for fun, and are able to avoid the addiction and poverty, that it's alright. God often lets the wicked get away with their wickedness in this life (see Psalm 73 "I envied . . . the prosperity of the wicked"). It is His own children to whom God teaches painful lessons.

7. Gambling is contrary to the Biblical work ethic.

Ephesians 6:28 *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.*

Question to ponder: Is farming gambling?