A Christian View of Gambling

Do Christians really gamble? Some do. Some see it as just another form of entertainment. Not everyone attends casinos. Some gamble their money on the lottery, bingo games, horse racing, sports bets, and other forms. Some feel that 'controlled gambling' is like spending any other form of recreational money – merely playing a game.

Startling Statistics

- ☹ South Africans bet R 358 359 106 940 in 2016. That's a figure equal to 20% of the country's total budget.
- ☹ Gambling addiction in South Africa continues to grow, with the National Responsible Gambling Programme (NRGP) instituted to help people 'recover from gambling addictions'
- ☹ Gambling produces social and economic problems across the board, destroys families, further impoverishes the poor, and only benefits two parties: Casino Owners, and Government coffers.
- ☹ Casinos, while ostensibly supporting 'responsible gambling', do their utmost to encourage repetitive and sustained gambling. Many casinos make gambling effortless – open 24 hours a day, seven days a week; offering smoking and non-smoking gaming facilities; even supervised crèches. Most casinos are built without windows so that players aren't aware of the time and happily play on. Some casinos even offer free drinks and food to keep people content and focused on the task of gambling – if a gambler grows hungry, they may leave the premises to get a meal and so fall back to reality.

What does the Bible have to say about gambling?

1. The Bible condemns the desire and the approach of trying to 'get-rich-quick', which is at the heart of gambling.

A faithful man will abound with blessings, But he who hastens to be rich will not go unpunished. (Prov. 28:20)

Pro 28:22 A man with an evil eye hastens after riches, And does not consider that poverty will come upon him.

At the heart of get-rich-quick is actually get-rich-easy, which is a combination of covetousness, discontent, and laziness.

The soul of a lazy man desires, and has nothing; But the soul of the diligent shall be made rich. (Prov. 13:4)

Luke 12:15 And he said unto them, Take heed, and beware of covetousness: for a man's life consisteth not in the abundance of the things which he possesseth.

Heb. 13:5 Let your conversation be without covetousness; and be content with such things as ye have: for he hath said, I will never leave thee, nor forsake thee.

2. **Gambling is a genuine example of profiting through another's loss**. Pro 13:11 Wealth gained by dishonesty will be diminished, But he who gathers by labor will increase. In legitimate economic activities, one gains money in exchange for providing goods or services valued by others. By adding value to other's lives, you are remunerated. In gambling, you profit entirely from the "voluntary" loss of others. It is true that others have foolishly thrown their money away, accepting the odds that they are most likely going to lose their money. But when you win in gambling, it is not because you have given anything to others. You are taking money you did not earn, or provide anything in exchange for.

   "But it's by consent!" There are many things that sinful people consent to do, which Christians should not participate, simply because it's "legal". When someone shames her own body, produces immoral entertainment, provides morally destructive products or services, Christians should not encourage and support that behaviour by participation.

3. **Gambling rebels against God's commands for how we are gain our money.**

Work is pre-fall, not part of the curse. Man is designed to work to earn his living. The Bible teaches the benefits of disciplined work habits, thrift, and prudence, and that hard work merits reward. Working, saving and investing are the biblical means of achieving wealth. Gambling destroys the work ethic.

1 Thes 4:11 Study to be quiet, and to do your own business, and to work with your own hands, as we commanded you.

19 In the sweat of your face you shall eat bread Till you return to the ground, For out of it you were taken; For dust you are, And to dust you shall return." (Gen. 3:19)

10 For even when we were with you, we commanded you this: If anyone will not work, neither shall he eat. 11 For we hear that there are some who walk among you in a disorderly manner, not working at all, but are busybodies. 12 Now those who are such we command and exhort through our Lord Jesus Christ that they work in quietness and eat their own bread. (2 Thess. 3:10-12)

23 And whatever you do, do it heartily, as to the Lord and not to men, 24 knowing that from the Lord you will receive the reward of the inheritance; for you serve the Lord Christ. (Col. 3:23-24)

4. **Gambling rebels against God's ownership of us and our goods.**

17 Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, and comes down from the Father of lights, with whom there is no variation or shadow of turning. (Jas. 1:17)

19 Or do you not know that your body is the temple of the Holy Spirit who is in you, whom you have from God, and you are not your own?

20 For you were bought at a price; therefore glorify God in your body and in your spirit, which are God's. (1 Cor. 6:19-20)

All the money you have represents two things: God lovingly giving you the means to eat and be sheltered, and God giving you the time, ability, and opportunity to earn that money. All the money in the bank represents hours God gave you, talents God gave you, and specific doors God opened for

you. To take that and gamble it is the equivalent of subtracting days from your life with poison pills, or insulting God once He gives you opportunities to earn money.

5. Gambling perverts the truth of God's sovereignty. The Bible emphasizes God's providential control over all things. 33 The lot is cast into the lap, But its every decision *is* from the LORD. (Prov. 16:33)

The gambler usually depends on luck. But some have the temerity to pray and ask God to help them to win. This is like asking God to help you successfully mug someone. 3 You ask and do not receive, because you ask amiss, that you may spend *it* on your pleasures. (Jas. 4:3)

6. Gambling turns into an idolatrous addiction for many people, producing disastrous social and economic effects.

12 All things are lawful for me, but all things are not helpful. All things are lawful for me, but I will not be brought under the power of any. (1 Cor. 6:12)

- ☹ Sibongile Simelane-Quntana, executive director of the SA Responsible Gambling Foundation, says that, over the past 17 years, 18 100 people had been helped by the NRGP. The programme is a public-private sector initiative that was founded in June 2000. It is funded by the gambling operators.

- ☹ Two million adults (1% of the population) meet the diagnostic criteria for pathological gambling. Another 4-8 million adults (2-4% of the population) can be considered problem gamblers who are experiencing direct problems as a consequence of gambling.

The promise of 'the next round I'll win" becomes greater with every successive loss, because the greater the losses, the more determined the gambler becomes to recover his losses. Dr Heidi Sinclair of the SA Responsible Gambling Foundation says the National Responsible Gambling Programme (NRGP) has reported that mothers have even left their newborn babies in the care of preteen children when they go out to get their gambling fix, and men have been known to turn violent when they discover their partners have been hiding money from them in an effort to keep them out of the casino. Women have turned to prostitution to maintain gambling habits. Children are sometimes forced to become caretakers for ruined parents. Gamblers have been known to resort to criminal activity in their desperation to feed their addiction. Sometimes they will be physically injured, sell all their possessions and even borrow money from loan sharks. David Briskham, clinical and development director of Twin Rivers Addiction Recovery and Codependency Centre, says: "At Twin Rivers, I worked with a gambler who lost R30 million and also owed money to the Chinese mafia."Gambling in South Africa, involving legal and illegal gambling halls, is at epic proportions and, next to alcohol, is the biggest addiction in this country."

Gambling absorbs money that would have been spent on consumer goods (e.g., food, clothing, appliances, automobiles, etc.), investments and loans. Money that could be invested, loaned, and recycled through the local economy is instead risked in a legalized gambling scheme. Gambling often devastates local economies near gambling establishments.

Who gambles the most? Poorer people, hoping to 'strike it rich'. Instead, money that could have been invested I their own education, in buying tools to enhance their value to the market, in transporting them to job interviews, is literally thrown away.

7. Gambling is naïve. Imagining that places set up to take money from the gullible are going to be thoroughly honest in their dealings with people is breathtaking foolishness. A fool and his money are soon parted, and if one is foolish enough to believe that casinos want you to win, then you deserve the loss that comes to you. I have heard enough anecdotal evidence from Christians who formerly worked in casinos, or unbelievers who continued to gamble, that casinos have been known to cheat (magnetic dice, trick decks, limits programmed into one arm jacks; escorting/ banning people who win too often). What are your chances of winning? You have about 9x better chances of getting hit by lightning than you do of winning the lottery.

What about gambling for 'good causes'? Doesn't the lottery support all kinds of charities and needy causes in the country? It is wonderful to see needy groups receiving assistance. But we should ask two questions.

First, if South Africans are so concerned about non-profit organisations receiving money, why did they not simply give some of their R 358 359 106 940 to those charities directly? Why did they need to throw their money into a big-loser pot?

Second, should Christians support the idea of "Let us do evil that good may come" (Rom. 3:8)? Of course not. Using a method which promotes dishonesty, covetousness, laziness, addiction, recklessness, poor stewardship, and which associates us with evil is not how we should do good. If we have been faithful stewards in our giving to our local church, and still have money we wish to give to certain groups, then we may do so directly.

What about 'gambling' games in the home? This depends what we mean. All games include the element of 'chance', and only a wooden understanding of sovereignty would dismiss that. In fact, Luke 10:31 even uses the term. Games would not be interesting without chance, and so the roll of the die, the random card from the shuffled deck, the unexpected bounce of the rugby ball, the sudden gust of wind, are what make games interesting. A consistent outlawing of all games with 'luck' would necessarily outlaw all games.

Some games are only played in the casino, and 'home versions' of these should be considered carefully: Might it encourage curiosity and desire for the real thing? Will it implicate us in trivialising and playing at something which God hates in its real-world manifestation?

22 Abstain from every form of evil. (1 Thess. 5:22)

11 And have no fellowship with the unfruitful works of darkness, but rather expose them. 12 For it is shameful even to speak of those things which are done by them in secret. (Eph. 5:11-12)

We should certainly not teach our children the idea of playing with our money. Money represents hours of our lives given in toil. To play with money is to treat your own life as weightless, and dismiss the precious gifts of God as worthless.