

What Does the Bible Say About Gambling?

Gambling has never been easier or more respectable than it is today. The lottery is sold at every corner store, the casino advertises on television, and a man can now bet on a ball game from his phone in his own living room. It is called harmless fun, a bit of entertainment, even a way to help schools and charities. So a Christian has to ask an honest question. Is gambling something he can do with a clear conscience before God?

We should admit at the start that the Bible never uses the word gambling, and there is no verse that says, in so many words, "thou shalt not gamble." But that does not leave us without an answer. God has given us principles that cover far more ground than any list of named sins could, and when we lay gambling beside those principles, it does not stand. Let us look at them one at a time.

What Gambling Is

First we should be clear about what we are talking about, because the word covers a great deal. To gamble is to risk something of value on an outcome decided by chance, in the hope of winning something that belongs to someone else. That last part is the key. In gambling, no new thing is made and no service is given. The money on the table simply moves from the losers to the winner. A man can win only because others lose. Keep that picture in mind, because the Bible has much to say about each piece of it, about the craving for easy money, about gain without work, and about profiting at a neighbor's expense.

Gambling Feeds the Love of Money

The engine that drives gambling is the desire to get money without earning it, and usually the desire to get a great deal of it. The Bible has a sharp warning for exactly that desire. *"But they that will be rich fall into temptation and a snare, and into many foolish and hurtful lusts, which drown men in destruction and perdition. For the love of money is the root of all evil"*

([1 Timothy 6:9-10](#)). Gambling is built on the very longing Paul says drowns men.

Jesus warned in the same direction. *"Take heed, and beware of covetousness: for a man's life consisteth not in the abundance of the things which he possesseth"* ([Luke 12:15](#)). The gambler stakes his money because he covets more, and covetousness is a sin God names again and again. Against it the Bible sets contentment. *"Let your conversation be without covetousness; and be*

content with such things as ye have" ([Hebrews 13:5](#)). A heart at rest in what God provides does not go looking for a fortune at the gaming table.

Gambling Seeks Gain Without Work

God built work into the world. From the beginning He said, *"In the sweat of thy face shalt thou eat bread"* ([Genesis 3:19](#)), and the New Testament keeps the same rule. *"If any would not work, neither should he eat"* ([2 Thessalonians 3:10](#)). The honest way to gain is to work for it.

And notice what God says a man should do with his earnings. *"Let him that stole steal no more: but rather let him labour, working with his hands the thing which is good, that he may have to give to him that needeth"* ([Ephesians 4:28](#)). That is the pattern God blesses. Work, and then give to others. Gambling turns it backward. It seeks to gain without working, and to take from others rather than give to them. Solomon saw the difference long ago. *"Wealth gotten by vanity shall be diminished: but he that gathereth by labour shall increase"* ([Proverbs 13:11](#)), and again, *"He that hasteth to be rich hath an evil eye"* ([Proverbs 28:22](#)). Easy money is not God's way.

Gambling Profits From a Neighbor's Loss

This may be the heaviest charge against gambling. By its very nature, it requires someone else to lose. The winner's pile is made up of the dollars the losers walked in with. You cannot win at gambling without your neighbor being poorer for it, and in truth you are hoping he loses, because that is the only way you can win.

Set that beside the second great commandment. *"Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself"* ([Matthew 22:39](#)). *"Love worketh no ill to his neighbour"* ([Romans 13:10](#)). A Christian is told to seek his neighbor's good, not his loss. *"Look not every man on his own things, but every man also on the things of others"* ([Philippians 2:4](#)). Gambling asks a man to do the opposite, to sit down across from his neighbor and try to take what is his. We cannot love a man and at the same time hope to win his paycheck away from him by the turn of a card.

Gambling Wastes What Belongs to God, and It Enslaves

What a Christian owns is not finally his own. He holds it as a steward, on trust from God, and *"it is required in stewards, that a man be found faithful"* ([1 Corinthians 4:2](#)). He is to provide for his family, for *"if any provide not for his own... he hath denied the faith"* ([1 Timothy 5:8](#)), and to have something to give to those in need. To throw that money away on a game of chance is to be an unfaithful steward of what God entrusted to him.

There is also the matter of bondage. Gambling does not stay small for many who start small. It grips them. Paul said, *"all things are lawful for me, but I will not be brought under the power of*

any" (1 Corinthians 6:12), and Peter warned that "of whom a man is overcome, of the same is he brought in bondage" (2 Peter 2:19). Ask the families that have lost homes, savings, and trust to someone who could not stop. What is sold as harmless fun has made slaves of more men than we could count.

But It Is Only a Raffle for a Good Cause

Most people would never call themselves gamblers, yet they think nothing of buying a raffle ticket, joining the office pool, or playing for money at a bunco night. Because these are small, social, and often tied to a good cause, they seem harmless. But look at the raffle closely. You pay your dollar for a chance, a winner is drawn, and the prize is bought with the money everyone else paid in. The losers' dollars fund the winner's reward. That is the same machine as the lottery, only smaller and dressed in friendlier clothes. The size of the stake does not change what it is.

We should say plainly that the game itself is not the problem. Friends may roll dice or play cards for an evening's fun, and a free drawing that costs nothing to enter takes no one's money. It is the wager that makes it gambling, the staking of money on chance to win what others have put up. Where that is present, calling it fellowship does not change it.

And neither does a good cause. Many a raffle is held to help a church, a school, or a ball team, and the cause may be a worthy one. But we are never permitted to do wrong in order to do good. Paul flatly rejected the idea that we should "do evil, that good may come" (Romans 3:8). The end does not sanctify the means. If gambling is wrong, then it is wrong when the proceeds go to a good cause, and it is most out of place of all when it is used to support the work of the Lord. God does not need money raised by a means He condemns, and the church dishonors Him when it gathers funds the way the world does at the casino.

But Isn't All of Life a Risk?

Someone will object that all of life involves risk. The farmer risks his seed in the ground. The merchant risks his money on a new store. The family buys insurance. A man buys stock in a company. Is this not gambling too? It is not, and the difference is plain once we look. When a farmer plants, a merchant opens a store, or a man buys a share in a business, he is putting his money into something that produces goods and serves people, and he takes a real part in owning it. If the work prospers, his neighbors are better off, not poorer, because the whole enterprise has grown and others have been served along with him. Insurance spreads a loss so that a stricken family is helped, not stripped. In all of these, value is created and people are served. In gambling, nothing is produced and no one is served. One person simply takes what another loses, by chance, for nothing.

The stock market, then, is not gambling. To own a share of a company is to own a piece of honest work, and to profit when that work serves people well. It is true that a man can turn even the market into a gamble, if he stops investing in the real worth of a business and merely wagers on the rise and fall of prices, as a man bets on a game. The principle is the test, not the name on the door. Honest labor and honest investment carry the risk of serving and building, and that is no sin. Gambling carries a different hope altogether, the hope that someone else goes home with empty pockets so that I do not.

The Better Way

So the Christian does not need the gamble, and he is better off without it. He has a Father who has promised to provide, and *"godliness with contentment is great gain"* ([1 Timothy 6:6](#)). He has honest work to do, and a neighbor to love rather than to fleece. He has been taught, as Paul was, to be *"content"* in *"whatsoever state I am"* ([Philippians 4:11](#)), and to *"seek ye first the kingdom of God"* ([Matthew 6:33](#)), trusting God for the rest.

There is one thing more. A Christian is watched, and his example either points men to God or away from Him. We are told to *"Abstain from all appearance of evil"* ([1 Thessalonians 5:22](#)) and to let our light shine *"that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father which is in heaven"* ([Matthew 5:16](#)). A man who trusts God for his daily bread, works for what he has, loves his neighbor too much to want his money, and is content with what God gives will preach a better sermon by his life than the lottery ever could. Lay the dice down. You have a better hope than chance, and a richer treasure than money.

Every Scripture reference in this study links to the King James Version. Open it and read for yourself.