

SUNDAY SCHOOL LESSON

GAMBLING

Theological Framework

Westminster Confession of Faith 1:6: “The whole counsel of God, concerning all things necessary for His own glory, man’s salvation, faith, and life, *is either expressly set down in Scripture, or by good and necessary consequence may be deduced from Scripture.* . . .”¹

Definition²

Gambling is a type of transaction between two parties in which something of value is transferred from one to the other solely on the basis of an uncertain outcome of some event or on mere chance.

In other words, gambling denotes a game in which winners are created at the expense of losers through the wagering of money or valuables. Playing a game of chance for pure amusement is not necessarily considered gambling. Rather, it is the betting—the staking of money on an outcome that is in doubt—that is at the heart of gambling.

Gambling is ordinarily sinful.

Whoever works his land will have plenty of bread, but he who follows worthless pursuits will have plenty of poverty. A faithful man will abound with blessings, but whoever hastens to be rich will not go unpunished. (PROV. 28:19-20).

Why Gambling is Sinful³

1. **It Promotes a Dependence on Chance**: Gambling assumes a world of random chance, for which the chief virtue is luck. “The worldview of the Bible affirms the active sovereignty of God over all events, persons, and time—and thus there is no place for luck. The Christian trusts in God, not in the vain hope of a winning lottery number or a favorable roll of the dice.”

Proverbs 13:11

¹The whole statement reads, “The whole counsel of God, concerning all things necessary for His own glory, man’s salvation, faith, and life, is either expressly set down in Scripture, or by good and necessary consequence may be deduced from Scripture unto which nothing at any time is to be added, whether by new revelations of the Spirit, or traditions of men. Nevertheless we acknowledge the inward illumination of the Spirit of God to be necessary for the saving understanding of such things as are revealed in the Word; and that there are some circumstances concerning the worship of God, and the government of the church, common to human actions and societies, which are to be ordered by the light of nature and Christian prudence, according to the general rules of the Word, which are always to be observed.”

²Pocket Dictionary of Ethics.

³Much of this is from <https://albertmohler.com/2012/02/20/when-the-accounts-are-called-a-christian-understanding-of-gambling>.

Wealth gained hastily will dwindle, but whoever gathers little by little will increase it.

Proverbs 20:21

An inheritance gained hastily in the beginning will not be blessed in the end.

2. **Gambling is a Direct Attack on the work Ethic Presented in Scripture.** Both the Old and New Testaments consistently teach the dignity of honorable work, and the proper reward for labor and industriousness. “The worker worthy of hire is rewarded. Lazy, slothful, and unproductive persons are undeserving of financial rewards, and were a scandal to the early Church. Gambling severs the dignity of work from the hope of financial gain, offering the hope of riches without labor, and reward without dignity.”

Proverbs 21:5

The plans of the diligent lead surely to abundance, but everyone who is hasty comes only to poverty.

3. **Gambling Preys on the poor:**⁴ “Rather than offering genuine hope and a way out of poverty, gambling operators prey on those who are most desperate. The Old Testament prophets proclaimed God’s devastating judgment against those who “devour” the poor, and yet gambling proponents entice those at the bottom of the economic ladder to risk everything, though they end up with nothing. The concentration of lottery ticket outlets in lower-income neighborhoods is no accident”⁵
4. **“The Basic Impulse Behind Gambling is Greed**—a basic sin that is the father of many other evils. Greed, covetousness, and avarice are repeatedly addressed by Scripture—always presented as a sin against God, and often accompanied by a graphic warning of the destruction which is greed’s result. The burning desire for earthly riches leads to frustration and spiritual death.”

Ecclesiastes 5:10

He who loves money will not be satisfied with money, nor he who loves wealth with his income; this also is vanity.

5. **Desire to be Rich: 1 Timothy 6:9-10**
But those who desire to be rich fall into temptation, into a snare, into many senseless and harmful desires that plunge people into ruin and destruction. For the love of money is a root of all kinds of evils. It is through this craving that some have wandered away from the faith and pierced themselves with many pangs.

⁴ <https://cnsmaryland.org/2022/07/01/state-lotteries-transfer-wealth/>

⁵ https://archive.nytimes.com/opinionator.blogs.nytimes.com/2014/06/21/gaming-the-poor/?_php=true&_type=blogs&_r=0

Wealth is not in itself sinful, but the love of money is.

6. **Gambling Undermines Self-Control in Some Cases**: gambling can develop into a psychological compulsion. It can become addictive

Proverbs 23:4-5

Do not toil to acquire wealth; be discerning enough to desist. When your eyes light on it, it is gone, for suddenly it sprouts wings, flying like an eagle toward heaven.

7. **The Ramifications** of the practice are negative whether on others, such as family members, the community in which gambling occurs and society as a whole.

Proverbs 15:27

Whoever is greedy for unjust gain troubles his own household, but he who hates bribes will live.

GAMBLING IS NOT INVESTING OR WORK

A. Gambling isn't work:

DARIN WHITE and ROBERT BROOKS⁶ write: "Gambling isn't work: "Instead, gambling commits God-given resources to an activity that has minimal benefits and involves a significant chance of loss. The bettor takes on risk for which he's not likely to be compensated. Thus, sports betting isn't a restorative or creative activity and doesn't align with God's provisional plan for humans."

B. Gambling isn't investing.

DARIN WHITE and ROBERT BROOKS, again, write "Investing deploys capital to firms that exercise God-given creativity that hopefully leads to common-grace human flourishing. The focus is more others-minded and long-term than betting. Additionally, money invested in God-honoring companies leads to restorative work. Work and investing are both activities that, when done properly, add value to the world. Gambling, on the other hand, is a zero-sum game. In other words, the amounts won by some people (game winners and game providers) equals the combined losses of the other people (game losers). As such, gambling doesn't help us to bring order out of chaos or advance the creation beyond where it was when we found it."

C. John Frame's nuanced view

⁶ <https://www.thegospelcoalition.org/article/bet-sports/>

“This is not to say, however, that it is always wrong for an individual to gamble. There are cases in which not one of the above six arguments applies; that’s why I use the words “can” and “often” in them. Participation in an office football pool, for example, may involve none of those evils (although at times it too may involve covetousness, etc.). If one enters the pool using only money earmarked for recreation, without addiction or false worship, it can be a harmless bit of fun, strengthening personal relationships. It does not necessarily involve covetousness, because (1) most people expect to lose their money in the process, and (2) if they win, the money becomes theirs legitimately (so they are not coveting anything that is not theirs).”⁷

Conclusion

D. Principles.

- Can you glorify God in participating?
 - i. Review the 7 principles mentioned above and assess your heart
 - ii. Review the 7 principles mentioned above and assess the situation
- Can you give thanks to God?
- Can you participate without putting another brother at risk? (Romans 14).

Gambling glorifies chance, undermines the sense of stewardship, generates profits from the losses of others and appeals to the vice of covetousness.

1 Corinthians 10:23 “All things are lawful,” but not all things are helpful. “All things are lawful,” but not all things build up.

⁷ John M. Frame, *The Doctrine of the Christian Life*, A Theology of Lordship (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R Publishing, 2008), 806–807.