

## Is Gambling Sinful?

**Summary:** *We are called to eat and drink and do all things to the glory of God (1 Corinthians 10:31). If you choose to exert the freedom to gamble, you are called to do so in a manner which is in subjection to this command. Is gambling or another "gray area" a means for worship? If so, then engage in it to the glory of the Lord. If not, then happily refrain.*

In all areas where the Scripture does not explicitly condemn or condone an activity, we hope to apply the principle of Christian liberty. This is true in watching certain movies (whether rated R or not), drinking alcohol, smoking and gambling, just to name a few of the more common historic hot-button issues.

As in each of these areas, there is a theological approach which can be quite simple. If someone asks whether or not gambling is explicitly condemned as being sinful, one could answer "no" and this would be accurate. However, we think that a better and more faithful answer would be "not necessarily."

As pastors, our desire is not only to awaken our people to the liberties of the Christian life, but also to the dangers. It is definitely true that we would be best served to refrain from some things which are not inherently evil. 1 Corinthians 6 and 10 both say, in effect, that "all things are permissible, but not all things are profitable." Now, these passages are in reference to issues of conscience, those "gray areas" of the Christian life, so don't take this verse to mean that adultery or murder or drunkenness or other explicitly condemned behaviors are included in the "all things" which Paul mentions. Those things are not "permissible."

The fact is that the wise man or woman recognizes that with freedom comes the need to be discerning. Is a certain behavior pure and pleasing to the Lord? Does it stir one's affections for Him? Will it lead toward particular temptations?

Gambling in and of itself is a gray area within the context of Scripture and thus there is freedom to partake. However, one should be aware of the addictive nature of the activity, the tendency to instill false hope, the advantage it takes of others and the propensity toward a lust for money.

As believers, we are called to "keep [our lives] free from love of money, and be content with what [we] have, for he has said, "I will never leave you nor forsake you." (Hebrews 13:5). Gambling can certainly contribute to a thirst for money which is disobedient to this command of Scripture.

In addition, after quoting "all things are permissible" the Scripture says "but I will not be enslaved by anything" (1 Corinthians 6:12). After the second use in chapter 10, it is followed by these words, "Let no one seek his own good, but the good of his neighbor." Is it possible for you to gamble in such a way as to not be enslaved by it? Can you do it in such a way that you do not damage another? If not, then your "right" must be replaced by your responsibility to adhere to God's revealed will.

Our hope is not to prohibit gambling, but rather to promote deep reflection as to the risks. As the Scripture says, "do not be deceived." Search yourself to know your desires and weaknesses. Examine your motives. Do not take liberty lightly! At the end of the day, we are called to eat and drink and do all things to the glory of God (1 Corinthians 10:31). If you choose to exert the freedom to gamble, you are called to do so in a manner which is in subjection to this command. Is gambling or another "gray area" a means for worship? If so, then engage in it to the glory of the Lord. If not, then happily refrain.

Your greatest joy is ultimately not found in hitting a jackpot or flopping a nut straight (for those who choose to play hold 'em), but in obeying the Lord Who Himself is our treasure.

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