

CAUSES FOR CONCERN ABOUT GAMBLING

by Robert D. Kettering

Used by permission of the **Brethren Revival Fellowship (BRF)**, published in **BRF Witness**, **March/April, 2001, Volume 36, Number 2**

Gambling in America is a national scourge—from the blatant forms of casino gambling to the secluded games of poker in small smoke-filled rooms; from the seductiveness of state lotteries to betting on horse races; from slot machines in bars and American Legion Posts to wagers at work on who will win the Super Bowl; from the bet on who will par the hole in golf to some who “play” the stock market. All of these things are, in one form or another, a kind of gambling.

According to the United States Bureau of Census, Americans gamble more money each year than they spend on groceries. In 1974, a little over \$17 billion was wagered legally in this country. By 1983, it was up to \$329 billion. In 1998, it was \$600 billion, and it is estimated that at least another time that amount is gambled illegally.

Studies show that two thirds of teenagers have gambled in the past year. Five to eight percent of our nation’s adolescents are addicted to gambling. Forty-five percent of male college football and basketball players admit to gambling on sports, even though rules explicitly prohibit it.

In Massachusetts, the total amount of lottery tickets sold each year is more than \$500.00 for every man, woman, and child in the state. No surprise that in Massachusetts, 47 percent of seventh graders and 75 percent of twelfth graders, have played the lottery. And is it any surprise that one out of every twenty high school students in Massachusetts have already been arrested for a gambling related offense? It is disappointing that the Governor of Pennsylvania has come out in support of expanded gambling in our state. I am outraged !

Ten years ago, only two states permitted casinos. Today, 47 of our states have legalized some form of gambling. Nevada has the longest history of legalized gambling, dating back to 1931. Is it a coincidence that today Nevada has the following distinctions among all of the fifty states?

- highest level of gambling addictions
- highest suicide rate
- highest in high school dropouts
- highest in divorces
- highest in homicides against women
- highest per capita consumption of alcohol

Nevada is third highest in abortions, third highest in bankruptcies, fourth highest in alcohol related deaths, fourth highest in out of wedlock births, fifth in crime (this in sparsely populated Nevada), sixth in the number of prisoners incarcerated, and Nevada ranks in the top third of states in child abuse. In southern Nevada, ten percent of the population are alcoholics, and the Las Vegas Yellow Pages lists a whopping 136 pages of advertisements for prostitution. Is all this coincidental? Gambling has had its impact on Nevada.

More than six percent of our nation's population are considered problem gamblers. Some of these persons are compulsive gamblers. Should Christians be concerned about the expansion of gambling? Surely the answer is yes. I am thankful that the Church of the Brethren has spoken out officially against gambling at the 1986 Annual Conference in Norfolk, Virginia. Note the concluding paragraph of this three-page position paper:

The Church of the Brethren believes gambling encourages service to mammon rather than God. We believe that gambling violates Christ's teachings regarding stewardship and mutual responsibility. We believe that for a government to promote gambling is immoral and violates its obligation to protect the best interest of its citizens. Therefore, the Church of the Brethren opposes the legalization of and participation in any form of gambling.

Thus far, we have seen what statistics say about gambling. And we have noticed what the Church of the Brethren has had to say about gambling. But what does the Bible say about gambling? And based on Biblical principles and the teachings and example of Jesus, what should our response be to the experience and expansion of gambling in our society? We want to notice some causes for concern about gambling, based upon the Scripture passage found in **1 Timothy 6:6-10**.

1. GAMBLING PROMOTES PROFITEERING

The Scripture says, **"Those who want to be rich fall into temptation" (1 Timothy 6:9)**. Paul is talking about greed. Two of the Ten Commandments deal with greed—the eighth, **"Do not steal,"** and the tenth, **"Do not covet."** Bible students know that a large percentage of Jesus' teachings are related to money and material goods. The bottom line of gambling is that it is viewed as a way to get rich quick. The motivation is clearly

selfishness, covetousness, and greed. The philosophy which permeates the thoughts of the gambler is this: What can I get? How much can I get out of this?

The Apostle Paul hits the problem of gambling head-on when he says, “Those who desire to be rich fall into temptation.” Gambling emphasizes getting, never giving. Do you really know of people who bought a lottery ticket because they were motivated out of their compassionate spirit to help meet the needs of the elderly in Pennsylvania? How many bought lottery tickets because they wanted to help senior citizens? People play the lottery to **WIN**. People play the lottery to get, not to give. People play the lottery out of greed—win, win, make it big, strike it rich, hit the jackpot—and to such motivation the Word of God thunders back at us, “What shall it profit people if they gain the whole world, but lose their own souls?”

2. GAMBLING BRINGS RUINATION TO PEOPLE

Nearly two thousand years ago, the Apostle Paul linked the passion for riches with the ruination of people. The passage in **1 Timothy 6:9** says, “Those who desire to be rich fall into temptation, into a snare, into many senseless and hurtful desires that plunge people into ruin and destruction.” Paul may not have specifically mentioned gambling in that verse, but those who study human behavior will back Paul’s statement one hundred percent! The desire for riches which gambling promotes, often brings the ruination of the people involved, and destroys the families of which they are a part.

Gambling destroys many people who get entangled in its web before they realize it, just like drug addiction does. There is a support group in the United States called “Gambler’s Anonymous” which estimates that there are ten million compulsive gamblers in our country. Think of the homes that have been ruined, the children who have gone hungry, and the families that have had to live in abject poverty because of a gambling member of the household. In short, gambling can easily become a habit – a way of life which only produces losers in the long run.

3. GAMBLING PREYS UPON THE POOR

In **1 Timothy 6:9**, Paul implies that the end result of a lust for money is destruction, which we can identify as poverty. Political leaders in Pennsylvania would have us believe that the lottery benefits senior citizens and helps to keep the taxes low. This may be true to a degree, but there is another side to the story. Some senior citizens may be the winners, but poor people are clearly the losers in the lottery.

Two psychologists at the University of Connecticut released a report on the lottery in their state and found that the lottery attracts the unemployed, the less educated, and lower income people. They found a marked increase in lottery ticket sales on the

weekends when welfare checks were distributed. The poor buy into the lottery just as people do drugs as an escape from the situation they are in, with the belief that their only chance for getting out of poverty is to strike it rich in the lottery.

And so, while we may experience slightly lower taxes in Pennsylvania, we must ask ourselves, “Has it been at the expense of the poor”? Property tax is the tax for the rich; the lottery is the tax for the poor. A person in poverty is more tempted by get rich quick schemes. Would you put liquor in front of an alcoholic? Should we put the deceptions of a lottery in front of the poor? With the Pennsylvania State lottery, the poor place the bets and the rest of us take home the winnings. This is a justice issue.

4. GAMBLING PRODUCES EXPANDED POLICE FORCES

Continuing with the text from **1 Timothy 6:10**. Paul’s famous quote says it all, “**The love of money is a root of all evil.**” Every study ever conducted on the effects of gambling always shows that with the introduction of legalized gambling there is a dramatic rise in crime.

The public safety commissioner of Atlantic City, Edwin Roth, states that within the first two months of gambling casinos’ opening in Atlantic City, street crime increased 25 percent. A study of embezzlement shows that 30 to 40 percent of embezzlements are directly related to people who got into trouble as a result of gambling. The FBI crime report shows that gambling states have a much higher crime rate than non-gambling states. The facts are that for every dollar raised for taxes as a result of gambling, several dollars more will be spent in higher police costs, higher court costs, higher penitentiary upkeep costs, and much higher welfare costs. Is it worth the gamble? None of this even begins to scratch the surface regarding the lure of organized crime and the mafia which will have its sticky fingers in the gambling business somewhere along the line. There is a definite link between gambling and increased crime.

5. GAMBLING PROVIDES A FALSE CURE-ALL

In **1 Timothy 6:10**, we read, “**in their eagerness to be rich, some have wandered away from the faith and pierced themselves with many pains.**” Some see gambling as a panacea. They are blinded by the lure, the lust, and the luxury which they believe winning through gambling can produce. Some have forsaken the shady green pastures of fellowship with believers, for the lush green felt of a casino blackjack table.

Every blackjack table, every roulette wheel, and every slot machine are devised in favor of the house. Gambling is big business. There are many more losers than winners. A neon sign blinked in front of a gambling house with these words, “We never close.” But

the “c” in the word “close” was burned out, and so the sign read, “We never lose.” That sign was closer to the truth than the owners would have wanted to admit.

The hopes and expectations raised by the gambling business are false hopes, false expectations, and a false panacea. Paul’s words to the Colossians are timely for us:

“Seek the things that are above, where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God. Set your minds on things that are above, not on things that are on earth...Put to death therefore whatever in you is earthly: fornication, impurity, passion, evil desire, and greed, which is idolatry. On account of these the wrath of God is coming on those who are disobedient” **(Colossians 3:1-2, 5-6).**

As Christians, our ultimate destiny is not determined at the blackjack table, but at the Lord’s table. Our hope is not found in the Queen of spades, but in the King of kings. True community is not through the casino, but through the church. Our reward is not found in getting, but in giving. Our major duty is not in hoarding, but in sharing.

We may not be able to eradicate gambling from our land, but we should be concerned about its effects, and stand up against its expansion. Most important of all, Christians are to refuse to participate in this destructive practice. Good stewards of God’s resources will have no part in this great societal cancer. Heed the words of Scripture to be good stewards. Help those enmeshed in the destructiveness of gambling. Let politicians know of your views because no one can serve both God and materialism.

Note: This article was written several decades ago. The truths within it, however, remains. If anything, gambling has gotten worse, even chronic, in the United States and other places in the world since this was written. The Internet provides the tools and television/social media promote it with abandon.