

THE SINFULNESS OF GAMBLING

Mike McDaniel

In the April 1996 edition of Reader's Digest there was an eye-opening article entitled "Gambling's Toll In Minnesota." They began the article with this true story.

Hour after hour, the blackjack cards flipped past, and still she played. Friday afternoon blurred into Saturday. Through the ringing of slot machines and chattering of coins dropping into tin trays, Catherine Avina heard her name paged. "Are you coming home tonight?" It was her 21-year old son, Joaquin, on the phone. "Probably not," she answered. Avina didn't go to Mystic Lake Casino in Prior Lake, Minn., as much as she escaped to it. That weekend in May 1994, the depressed 49 year old mother of three was escaping the worst news yet - she was in danger of being fired after almost 11 years as an **assistant state attorney general**. On Monday, her fourth straight day at the casino, she dragged herself back to her St. Paul home, broke and more depressed than ever. Two days later, Joaquin confronted his mother about her gambling, and they argued. The next morning, when she didn't come out of her bedroom, he peeked in. Two empty bottles of ant-depressants and a suicide note were near her body. Later the family found debts of more than \$7000, and Avina was still making payments for gambling-addiction therapy received a year earlier.

Having lived for a number of years in Caruthersville, Missouri where a riverboat casino is located, it is not difficult to see the tragic effects of gambling. Gambling can result in ruined lives, families, and businesses; in bankruptcies and bad loans; in suicides, embezzlements and other crimes committed to feed or cover up gambling habits - and increases in costs to taxpayers for investigating, prosecuting and punishing those crimes.

What is gambling? In the strict sense of the term, gambling refers to the playing of a game as well as the staking or risking of money to be lost or won on the outcome. For example, the United States Postal Service has stated that a lottery always has three factors: "a consideration contributed by the participant, the element of chance in the selection of winners, and a prize." There are many forms of gambling that will fit these three criteria. The lottery, pari-mutual betting on horses and dogs, punchboards, poker machines, slot machines, playing bingo, cards or dice for money, betting on ballgames and boxing, raffles and the selling of chances are all forms of gambling. Gambling is sinful no matter how it is packaged and sold to the public. Let us see some Biblical principles that reveal its sinfulness.

(1) THE PRINCIPLE OF ATTITUDE

Gambling is sinful because it violates the golden rule of Matthew 7:12, "Therefore all things whatsoever ye would that men should do to you, do ye even so to them: for this is the law and the prophets." Gamblers are not practicing the golden rule by any stretch of the imagination. They are seeking all others to lose while they win. It does not matter if others are willing participants or not, the result is the same. People may agree to commit fornication with each other but their agreement does not make it right. Fornication is still sin (1 Cor. 6:18). The same is true with gambling.

Gambling also violates the attitude of Galatians 6:10, "As we have therefore opportunity, let us do good unto all men, especially unto them who are of the household of faith." Are you doing good to someone when you take his money in gambling? We ought to be able to see the sinfulness of gambling in the principle of attitude.

(2) THE PRINCIPLE OF AFFECTION

Gambling violates the first of all commandments, to love God with all our heart, soul, and mind (Mt. 22:37). There is no way a person can be a lover of gambling and a lover of God at the same time. Both are masters of men and men cannot serve two masters at the same time (Mt. 6:24).

Gambling also violates the second of the greatest commandments, to love our neighbor as ourselves (Mt. 22:39). One is not loving his neighbor when he is feverishly trying to win his neighbor's paycheck, his house, or his car. His love, his affection, is centered in self and self alone. Romans 13:10 says "Love worketh no ill to his neighbour...." Such cannot be said of the practice of gambling. It is seen to be sinful in light of this principle of affection.

(3) THE PRINCIPLE OF ACQUISITION

It is important to understand the principle of acquisition. There are four ways to acquire money. (1) Money may be earned through labor (Prov. 13:11). (2) Money may be received as a gift (Phil. 4:15). (3) Money may be found with no way to determine who may have lost it. (4) Money may be stolen (Eph. 4:28). The money one receives from gambling is not earned, it is not a gift, and it is not found. Thus it is not acquired through the three legitimate ways of obtaining money. That only leaves one other way, theft. The money received is stolen by consent.

Gambling goes against God's plan for man to earn his living by honest work (Gen. 3:19; 2 Thess. 3:7-10). Paul said in Ephesians 4:28- "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." Gambling violates the principle of acquisition.

(4) THE PRINCIPLE OF AVARICE

In 2 Timothy 3:2, Paul said that in the last days people would be covetous. Thayer says the Greek word for covetous means "loving money," avaricious." Avarice refers to an "insatiable greed for riches, and inordinate desires to gain and hoard wealth, covetous." Gambling is a form of covetousness (cf. Eph. 5:5; Lk. 12:15; Col. 3:5). So many today love money and the things money will buy. They have the mistaken idea that the more they possess the happier they will be. Is that not one of the main reasons why people gamble? Is it not covetousness and avarice? Second Peter 2:14 speaks of "an heart they have exercised with covetous practices." If gambling is not a covetous practice, what is?

(5) THE PRINCIPLE OF ADDICTION

Gamblers Anonymous estimates that there are 6-10 million compulsive gamblers in the U.S. today. Some become so obsessed with gambling that they will readily yield to any temptation in order to get money to indulge their habit. Compulsive gamblers attempt suicide at a higher rate than any other group.

Knowing what we know about the addictive power of gambling, one is certainly at risk to be brought under its addictive power. Paul said in First Corinthians 6:12, "All things are lawful unto me, but all things are not expedient: all things are lawful for me, but I will not be brought under the power of any." Jesus said in John 8:34, "Whosoever committeth sin is the *servant* of sin."

(6) THE PRINCIPLE OF ACCOUNTABILITY

"Moreover it is required in stewards, that a man be found faithful" (1 Cor. 4:2). As stewards, we must be faithful. We will be held accountable for our stewardship. Gambling is not good stewardship, because the gambler wastes his substance in riotous living (Lk. 15:13).

The sinfulness of gambling is seen in the Biblical principles of attitude, affection, acquisition, avarice, addiction, and accountability. The only remedy for this sin or any sin is the blood of Christ applied (Acts 2:38; 22:16; Rev. 1:5; 1 Jn. 1:7-9).