

WHY IS GAMBLING WRONG?

Gambling isn't wrong just because it is taking a risk in the hope of getting back more than you risk. A farmer gets 60 points of rain, and decides to risk putting in his seed. More rain comes, he gets a good crop, and he says, "You see, farming is a gamble." However, the very thing that makes gambling wrong is not there. He does no harm to others when he gets a good crop.

There are basically three ways of getting money in an honest way: earning it, being given it, or inheriting it. When people buy something, they give the seller what they consider a fair exchange. Getting the property of another person without giving anything in exchange, and against his wishes, is the essence of stealing.

Imagine a very simple form of it. Six people sit around a table, and each puts 50 cents in the middle. They roll a dice, each betting on a number on the dice. The one whose number comes up gets the whole \$3. The rest get nothing — they get no return for their 50 cents. The harm done to those who lose is the essential point that makes gambling wrong. The amount of money involved doesn't affect the principle. Stealing an apple from a stall is still stealing.

Some people argue: "But those who went into it agreed in advance that things would work that way." That doesn't make it right. When two men fight a duel, the one who kills the other is still liable to be charged for murder, though they were both agreed to settle their dispute in that way.

No gambler ever said, "It is better to lose than to win." He wants to win on the basis that he gets the others' stakes without giving anything in return. The Scriptural principles are that, if a person does not want to work, he should not eat, either, and that each should look not only to his own interests, but also to the interests of others. Wanting something that is "Wrong to have is what coveting is. The love of money is a root of all kinds of evil. Paul laments, "Some people, eager for money, have wandered from the faith and pierced themselves with many griefs." Gambling is wrong because it is essentially stealing and coveting (against the seventh and ninth commandments).

What about complicity in gambling? If a person receives goods that have been stolen, he is liable to be charged under the law. Proverbs 29:24 says, "The accomplice of a thief is his own enemy." People whose business is gambling often make a portion of their profits available to good causes, like supporting hospitals. That acts as a salve to people's consciences. It gives an aura of respectability to gambling. The person thinks, "Even if I don't win, at least the money goes to a good cause."

If someone won the lottery, and came to the church and offered to give part of his winnings to the church, the church ought to refuse it. Accepting it on such terms would appear to condone gambling. Of course, much of the money that we handle has passed through the hands of thieves and people who covet. If we wanted to avoid touching tainted money, we would have to go out of this world (1 Cor 5:9-10). However, when we have been explicitly told that money comes from a casino, and when we know that casino operators want to give an aura of respectability to their operations by contributing to good and needy causes, we ought to have the integrity to refuse it.

Accepting money that is openly said to be casino money has the consequence of blunting people's consciences. Non-Christians perceive from the church's action that gambling can't be so very wrong. Christians are also more likely to say, "At least, if I go to the casino and lose, some of the money will go to the church, or to some other worthy cause." A good end does not justify sinful means. Paul said: "Why not say — as we are slanderously reported as saying, and as some claim that we say — 'Let us do evil that good may result'? Their condemnation is deserved"(Rm 3:8).