



The  
**PROPHETIC**  
**CONDITIONS**  
Series



The New  
**GAMBLING**  
**PLAGUE**



**ABOUT THE COVER**

Gambling is spreading throughout society and is becoming an addiction among many players.

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# The New GAMBLING PLAGUE

Gambling is exploding in popularity, and for many, has progressed from a pastime to a PLAGUE! How—why—has this happened? Should you be concerned? What is the biblical perspective on this activity?

**T**HE PRACTICE of gambling can be described as “staking something of value on the outcome of an event that involves chance, in hopes of gaining the objects of value that have been staked on the event by others.” In other words, risk motivated by riches.

The history of this practice stretches back nearly to the beginning of human history. And, in the modern age, as technology expands and the character of individuals and nations declines, gambling is quickly becoming a virtual epidemic.

## Types of Gambling

Modern gambling exists in many forms, which vary in popularity among different cultures and groups. These include: (1) betting on sports or games of skill, including horse and dog races, football, baseball, basketball, hockey, prizefights and others; (2) card games, including poker and blackjack, which may be played at casinos or in private homes; (3) dice games such as craps; (4) lotteries and “scratch-off” games (typically sanctioned by state or federal governments, with tickets sold at outlets such as convenience stores); (5) bingo; (6) mechanized betting such

as electronic slot machines (known as “one armed bandits”) and video poker; and (7) other casino games such as roulette, big six, and keno.

In a world connected by instant communication, gamblers can also place bets on an endless array of world events, including even the recent election of a successor to the late Pope John Paul II!

A method of organized public betting often used at horse or dog tracks is the “pari-mutuel” system, which translates to “mutual stake” in French. This system pools bettors’ money and distributes winnings in proportion to the amount wagered. The intent of this method is to facilitate gambling tax collection and safeguard against theft (“Gambling,” Microsoft Encarta Online Encyclopedia 2005).

## A Growing Problem

The growth of gambling in wealthy, “developed” countries has exceeded overall population growth, as ever larger percentages of individuals in these nations yield to the temptation of this habit. Many of these nations are so prosperous that even those “below the poverty line” enjoy a standard of living that is higher than the majority in the “developing” world. Yet, these peoples still seek easy avenues to increase their “net worth.” Gambling, both in

its legal forms and otherwise, has long been one of the most popular methods of pursuing this goal. Recent statistics gathered in these countries bring the expanding scope of the problem into focus.

## In The United States

According to the National Gambling Impact Study Commission Report, legalized casino gambling in America grew 10 percent in 1975. Compare this to 29 percent growth in 1998. Meanwhile, playing the lottery increased from 24 percent to 52 percent.

The commission estimates that 125 million U.S. adults gamble, and 7.5 million of these are either problem or compulsive gamblers. Between 1993 and 2003, total gambling revenue in the U.S. more than doubled, from \$34 billion to \$72 billion!

Gambling in some form is legal in all states except Hawaii and Utah. 38 of the 50 states, as well as the District of Columbia, conduct lotteries. Also, many of these states participate in combined multi-state lotteries such as Powerball.

Figures from the U.S. Census Bureau show that the capital of the American gaming industry, Las Vegas, Nevada, was the fastest growing metropolitan area in the country between

1990 and 2000, with an 83.3 percent population increase. It is still the most rapidly growing major U.S. city, both in terms of population and in the amount of new construction. According to The Las Vegas Convention and Visitors Authority, the number of visitors to the city has increased from 6.7 million in 1970 to 35.5 million in 2003. During this same period, gross gaming revenue for greater Las Vegas grew steadily from \$3.6 million to \$7.8 billion, and overall visitor dollar contribution jumped from \$1.1 billion to \$32.8 billion! The city is now the top tourist destination in the country, as well as the most popular convention site.

The recently opened Wynn Las Vegas hotel is symbolic of the city's new "golden age." At a total cost of \$2.7 billion, it is the most expensive casino resort in the world, with *each room* carrying an average construction cost of \$1 million. It establishes a new benchmark of opulence, featuring a manmade mountain, a three-acre artificial lake with a 70-foot waterfall, a golf course, 18 restaurants, an art gallery, exclusive shops and an in-house Ferrari-Maserati dealership (*San Francisco Chronicle*).

### **In Canada**

Since 1992, net revenue from government-run lotteries, video lottery terminals and casinos has mushroomed from \$2.7 billion (CAD) to \$11.3 billion. In 1999 alone, government-run gambling generated \$8.6 billion—\$5 billion of which was profit. Sixty-four percent of households with incomes under \$20,000 spent an average of \$333 on gambling that year. And 76 percent of all Canadian households took part in at least one gambling activity, spending an average of \$499. In 2001, the average household spent \$257 on government lotteries alone.

According to the Canada Safety Council (a private charitable organization), up to 360 suicides per year are related to gambling, and other problems—such as domestic violence, breakup of families, and bankrupt-

cy—are also linked to the habit ([www.csmonitor.com](http://www.csmonitor.com)).

### **In Britain**

Britain takes a tolerant position regarding gambling. Betting offices have been licensed by the government since the early 1960s, and gambling devices such as slot machines are legal, as are games of chance in homes or private clubs ("Gambling," Microsoft Encarta Online Encyclopedia 2005).

According to the National Centre's British Gambling Survey, 72 percent of Britain's population—about 33 million adults—took part in some form of gambling activity within the one-year period ending in July 2004, and about two-thirds (65 percent) had bought a National Lottery ticket. However, the lottery is only the third most popular form of gambling in Britain, surpassed by horse racing and slot machines. Britain also supplies the highest percentage of foreign visitors to Las Vegas.

Despite Britain's passion for wagering bets, the survey reveals that three out of four British gamblers rarely ever win! The reason that most give for gambling is "fun and pleasure."

### **In Australia**

BBC News reports that, from 2001 to 2002, Australians wasted more than \$15 billion (AUD) on gambling—an average loss of \$1,017 per adult! This should not be surprising, since more than 20 percent of the world's poker machines are in Australia.

The Australian Bureau of Statistics reports that 330,000 Australians (2.3 percent of adults) have "significant gambling problems, with 140,000 experiencing severe problems." On average, such gambling problems can last nine years. Each of these 330,000 problem gamblers has lost an average of \$12,000 per year! Once again, as a result, the pressures of this mounting debt have led one in ten to contemplate suicide.

Yet, even though an astounding eight out of ten Australians gamble, two other Western nations—Sweden and New Zealand—have surpassed

this. There, nine in ten adults gamble!

### **From the Casino to the Computer**

The arrival of Internet gaming is a major factor in the recent explosion of gambling's overall popularity. The availability of gambling "at the click of a mouse," at any hour of day or night, equals increased convenience. Gone are the days when one needed to travel to a casino, or recruit players for a card game at home, to indulge an appetite for gambling.

Although difficult to accurately measure, it has been estimated that between 1997 and 1998, Internet gambling more than doubled—from 6.9 million online gamblers to 14.5 million. The generated revenue increased even more—from \$300 million to \$651 million. For 2004, this figure increased to \$6.6 billion, and industry experts project total revenue of \$20.8 billion in 2005 ([www.winneronline.com](http://www.winneronline.com))! The online poker industry alone grew threefold in 2004 ([www.rgtonline.com](http://www.rgtonline.com)).

Although online betting is illegal for American companies to offer, a U.S.-based company may still establish an overseas operation to dodge the law. Most online casinos are based in the Caribbean. In 2003, the United States accounted for an estimated 60 percent of all Internet gambling worldwide, despite the fact that wagering with U.S.-issued credit cards or checks is also illegal ([www.foxnews.com](http://www.foxnews.com)). The World Trade Organization, in a recent case brought against the United States by the Caribbean nation Antigua and Barbuda, ruled that American laws against cross border gambling are in violation of free trade standards (*BBC news*).

In a related development, the British Parliament is expected to approve Internet gambling soon, including specific provisions to allow gaming companies to accept bets from parties outside the U.K. This is viewed by some as purely a push for new tax revenue, and some observers expect America to follow in Britain's footsteps soon.

“...the lottery is only the third most popular form of gambling in Britain, surpassed by horse racing and slot machines.”



### **The Image of Gambling— New and “Improved”**

Even in the relatively recent past, the practice of gambling carried a sense of dishonor and was considered a vice. This is no longer the case. Social organizations—even religious groups—commonly sponsor bingo games, riverboat gambling trips, and other events that involve games of chance. Bingo and gambling “outings” are now common even at nursing homes and at group homes for the mentally disabled.

As with many social trends, this shift in public opinion may be to some degree influenced by media outlets such as television and motion pictures. Several cable television shows currently exist that are based on “Texas Hold ‘Em,” a newly popular version of the card game poker. The groundbreaking program “World Poker Tour” first appeared on the Travel Channel in 2003, and has since become the highest rated program in the network’s

history, drawing 5 million viewers per show.

Competing cable channels followed suit with their own variations on the theme, including Bravo’s “Celebrity Poker Showdown,” ESPN’s “World Series of Poker” and Fox Sports Network’s “Championship Poker at The Plaza.” The success of these shows encouraged the development of poker tours and tournaments co-sponsored by companies such as Harrah’s Entertainment, a casino gambling powerhouse, and networks such as ESPN.

Other current television programs featuring gambling themes include NBC’s “Las Vegas” and CBS’ “Dr. Vegas”, as well as “reality” shows such as “The Casino” on FOX and the Discovery Channel’s “American Casino.” A new cable channel devoted entirely to gambling is now reported to be in the works (*American Family Association*).

Prior to the television phenomenon, a remake of the 1960 film “Ocean’s

Eleven” appeared in theaters in 2001, boasting a number of top-flight actors in its cast. This highly successful movie, along with its 2004 sequel, follows a group of gamblers and professional con artists as they plan elaborate thefts in Las Vegas and Europe. The storylines of these films deliberately glamorize the gambling habit while blurring the roles of hero and villain—the audience is manipulated to cheer for the main characters as they commit robbery.

The increased interest in gambling, in particular “Texas Hold ‘Em,” has trickled down to the average American household. Home poker parties are on the rise, and the retail industry has responded enthusiastically to the demands of this lucrative market. Mainstream retail chains—including children’s toy stores—now carry equipment such as poker chips and portable game kits, as well as scores of books devoted to the subject. Even corporations seemingly separate from the gambling world have recognized

an opportunity for crossover market exposure. For example, professional baseball, football, and basketball leagues have licensed team logos and other proprietary images for use on items such as playing cards and poker chips (“NBA puts its logo on poker chips,” *USA Today*).

The image of Las Vegas underwent what has been called an “identity crisis” during the 1990s. The city spent much of the decade pursuing a “family-friendly” approach to the planning of resort properties, building amusement parks and other attractions appealing to those with children. This was partly due to competition from the many Indian tribe-operated casinos springing up across the rest of the country. One apparent result of this approach is the flood of permanent residents discussed above, which led to a 1994 *Time* magazine cover story proclaiming it the “New All-American City.” However, in recent years, the city’s marketing strategy has shifted back to a focus on vice, excess, and the appeal of the forbidden—with a determination to push the envelope on each of these elements. This is seen in Vegas’ new marketing tagline, “What Happens Here...Stays Here,” which is featured in suggestive television commercials promoting an “edgier” Vegas experience. According to the CEO of the agency responsible for these ads, “We need to set Las Vegas apart. When people are in Las Vegas, they are less inhibited” ([www.usatoday.com](http://www.usatoday.com)).

Likewise, the city’s tourist attractions are changing with the times. For example, Treasure Island, built in the mid-1990s as a Disney-style family resort, has changed its name to “TI.” It now hosts a racy theater piece titled “Sirens of TI,” as well as a burlesque bar. Also, a business promoted as “the world’s largest strip club” opened in Vegas in December 2004, one of several recent additions to the city’s adult entertainment industry.

#### **A Budget Remedy— Past, Present and Future**

Many nations of the western world struggle with worsening debt. In

America, more than 40 of the 50 states reported budget deficits in both fiscal years of 2003 and 2004. The shortfall totaled many billions of dollars in more populous states such as California.

This problem has prompted state officials to view revenue generated by casino taxes, lotteries, and other forms of legal gambling as a source of much-needed cash. In 2004 alone, ten states passed or enacted laws that maintained or increased gambling availability. Many other ballot proposals are in the works (*National Conference of State Legislatures*).

While some citizens oppose this approach on moral grounds, tolerance for funding government with gambling is increasing. This is especially true when it is presented as an alternative to increased taxes on the individual. Property taxes, used in many states to fund public education, are often reduced or stabilized using this alternate source of money. In many states, gambling now helps finance schools from elementary level through secondary education.

State governments have a long-standing love/hate relationship with gambling. Lottery profits were used in building Jamestown, Virginia, the first American colony, in the early 1600s. This type of funding has since been used to finance the United States colonial army, colleges (including Harvard, Yale, Columbia, and Princeton), courthouses, hospitals, libraries and many other public endeavors—including churches.

This lenient environment in early America led to the creation of many private lotteries by the 19th century. However, corruption became widespread in these games. Often, the “winner” would receive a lesser prize than advertised—or no prize at all! This sparked an eventual nationwide ban on state involvement in gambling, which lasted from approximately 1878 to 1964.

The dry spell ended in March 1964 with the introduction of a “sweepstakes” in the state of New Hampshire. This libertarian state’s avoidance of the term “lottery,” among other clever tactics, enabled lawmakers to evade

Federal anti-lottery laws. Other states followed New Hampshire’s example, and a trend of gambling expansion was underway.

America’s northern neighbor, Canada, has historically paralleled the U.S. in its gambling legislation. In 1817, a law to ban all games of chance failed to pass in Lower Canada (modern Quebec) due to intense popular opposition. However, in 1856, the Act Concerning Lotteries did pass, which banned this particular form of gaming. Interestingly, this law most directly affected the young nation’s Catholic clergy, who had been using lottery profits for nearly a century. Legal gambling returned to Canada in 1969, as the country’s Criminal Code was amended to allow provincial lotteries, casinos, and lottery licenses for charitable and religious organizations (North American Association of State and Provincial Lotteries).

#### **From Pastime to Pathology**

For some, gambling moves beyond a diversion and becomes an addiction. A segment of those who gamble fall into two related categories: Problem gamblers, and compulsive (also known as “pathological”) gamblers. According to *WebMD*, more than eight percent of new gamblers may end up having some type of gambling addiction.

*Problem* gambling has been described as “an involvement in risky gambling behaviors that adversely affects the individual’s well-being; this may include issues: of relationships, family; financial matters, social standing and vocational pursuits” (*Arizona Council on Compulsive Gambling – AZCCG*).

*Compulsive* gambling is more severe, defined as “...a progressive disorder characterized by a continuous or periodic loss of control over gambling; a preoccupation with gambling and with obtaining money with which to gamble; irrational thinking; and a continuation of the behavior despite adverse consequences” (*Psychiatric Annals*, Dr. Richard Rosenthal.).

Risk factors associated with problem or compulsive gambling include:

parents who gamble; availability of gambling (especially during the formative years of life); inadequate psychological coping strategies; and simply being male.

Research is underway to compare compulsive gambling to other addictions such as alcohol, and to examine brain chemistry among pathological gamblers. Similarities between the brains of compulsive gamblers and drug addicts have been documented, such as relative unreactivity to dopamine (a chemical neurotransmitter associated with feelings of reward or satisfaction) within both groups. However, researchers admit that these chemical irregularities may be a *result* of pathological gambling, rather than the *cause* (“Gambling Fever Starts in Brain,” *The Washington Post*).

Authorities on compulsive gambling have documented four phases through which a pathological gambler typically progresses. Phase one is called the “winning phase” or the “introductory phase.” This is a period, or sometimes just a single occurrence, of monetary gain from gambling. Second is the “losing phase,” in which losses begin to accumulate, and the gambler often pursues larger bets or greater odds, rationalizing that it is just a streak of bad luck. Third is the “desperation phase.” This is a phase during which gambling consumes most of an individual’s time and energy, sometimes to the point of neglecting physical health, habitual lying, and the loss of possessions and family. Finally, the fourth phase is called the “hopeless phase”—characterized by clinical depression, bankruptcy, nervous breakdown, prison, and, sometimes, suicide attempts.

### Types of Pathological Gamblers

Compulsive gamblers are divided into two categories: “action gamblers” and “escape gamblers.” The personality of the gambler, and thus the motivation to gamble, determine one’s type.

The typical *action* gambler is described as a domineering, manipulative male, who is confident, energetic, and has an IQ over 120. This is the

most pervasive type of compulsive gambler in both legal and illegal gambling. The action gambler’s motivation is tied to the goal of beating other individuals at his chosen game and “beating the house.” He seeks to gain wealth and status at the expense of other players and the betting establishment (for example, a casino). These individuals often believe that they can devise a personal “system” to achieve these victories.

Conversely, *escape* gamblers are typically female (according to some estimates, over 90 percent of female pathological gamblers fall in this category). Most are considered to be caring, nurturing, and introverted, with no apparent tendencies toward egotism or narcissism. Their profile is essentially opposite that of the action gambler. Here, the motivation is relief—escape—from emotional pain, which is a result of present or past trauma.

### High-Risk Groups

Organizations that provide help for compulsive gamblers have noted that the problem is growing fastest among two demographic segments: seniors and teenagers. The common denominators between these two groups are that each has relatively large amounts of free time and disposable income. However, the motivation to gamble among each of these groups is age-specific.

Seniors are usually described as “escape gamblers.” They typically gamble in order to escape pain or discomfort in their lives—for example, the loss of a spouse or feeling obsolete after retirement. According to the *AZCCG*, the casino machines in particular create an anesthetizing quality that temporarily releases them from emotional and even physical pain.

Teenagers most often fall into the category of “action gambler.” They generally gamble for excitement, that is, as an antidote to boredom. As games of chance increase in popularity among youth, peer pressure to follow the crowd is mounting—gambling is now seen as fashionable and trendy.

An additional appeal to certain teenagers can be summarized as a “reversal of the pecking order”: The best poker players are often studious introverts, the opposite of the “popular athlete” high school stereotype (“Poker for teens: How far is too far?”, *MSNBC*).

The *International Centre for Youth Gambling Problems and High-Risk Behaviours*, based in Montreal, Canada, found that gambling is more popular among teens than other high-risk pursuits such as alcohol abuse, illegal drug use and cigarette smoking.

A third group that has also experienced a dramatic increase in problem/pathological gambling consists of approximately one-half of the general population—women. Prior to the early 1980s, gambling among women was widely considered socially unacceptable, with the exception of local bingo games. Gambling was to a great degree a “men’s club.” Before this time, virtually all *Gamblers Anonymous* attendees were male. Currently, however, an estimated *one-third* of compulsive gamblers are women. The large majority of these female gamblers are, like seniors, classified as “escape gamblers.”

### What Does It Mean to Gamble?

Is all gambling wrong—or just certain types? Should Christians participate? What does the Bible teach?

First, recognize that God’s Word does not contain the specific command, “Thou shalt not gamble.” On the other hand, neither does it command, “Thou shalt not smoke cigarettes”—yet, it can be proven through the spiritual application of His Word that God forbids smoking. (To learn more, read our article “The Truth About SMOKING.”) In the same way, we can know God’s will regarding Christians and gambling. We simply need to study the laws, examples and spiritual principles found throughout the Bible.

As stated in Part One, gambling involves (1) relying on chance, while (2) risking the loss of something of value in order to (3) gain an advan-

tage—and achieve instant gratification. The higher the stakes, the more reckless the risk involved.

Does this seem compatible with Christ's statement, "It is more blessed to *give* than to *receive*"? (Notice Acts 20:35; also see Philippians 4:5.)

### Samson and the Riddle

Let's examine a biblical account of gambling: As a faithful servant of God, the mighty Samson was brave and had a gift of supernatural strength—yet he also had a weakness for foreign women of poor character. With his father's reluctant permission, Samson married a Philistine woman, one who had a tarnished reputation (Jdg. 14:1-3).

A grand seven-day wedding feast was held in honor of the bride and groom. Among the guests were 30 male "companions" provided for the bridegroom by the Philistines (vs. 10-11). According to the custom of the time, these Philistine "friends" were there to protect the wedding party from invading marauders.

Another popular custom of the day was to tell riddles at feasts and special occasions. Samson posed such a riddle to his 30 wedding companions: "I will now put forth a riddle unto you: if you can certainly declare it me within the seven days of the feast, and find it out, then I will give you thirty sheets and thirty change of garments. But if you cannot declare it me, then shall you give me thirty sheets and thirty change of garments" (vs. 12-13). The Philistine companions accepted Samson's wager.

Notice: Samson (1) played a game of chance—believing that the odds of the Philistines not solving the riddle were in his favor—and (2) risked the loss of something of value—"thirty sheets and thirty change of garments"—in order to (3) gain an advantage. In other words, Samson gambled big. And he *lost* big.

The Philistine companions cheated, coercing Samson's new bride into betraying her husband. In doing so, the wife revealed her true character: Given enough pressure, she would betray

her husband "in a heartbeat"—even deceiving him and wearing him down with her tears. Samson learned this the hard way. He honored his bet and paid off the cheaters—but he did it through slaughtering thirty other Philistines, taking their fine clothing and giving them to the thirty wedding companions (vs. 15-19).

These were the deadly and disastrous results of Samson's flirtation with gambling.

### "For the Love of Money"

It has been said that there are only two ways of life: The way of *GIVE*—helping, assisting, serving, showing outgoing concern for others—summed up by the word *love*. And the way of *GET*—taking, competing, loving oneself ahead of others.

Which way of life does gambling represent?

Las Vegas is often called "sin city." A close examination of its history reveals the fingerprints of organized crime, murder, gambling, theft, prostitution, adultery, fornication, drunkenness and illegal drug use. Empowering these are the attitudes of deceit, greed, lust for "instant wealth" and making the "big score," competition, selfishness and laziness—the way of *get*, as influenced by the "god of this world" (II Cor. 4:4) and the "prince of the power of the air" (Eph. 2:2).

Simply stated, gamblers seek to "get rich quick." But the apostle Paul warned, "they that will be rich fall into temptation and a snare, and into many foolish and hurtful lusts, which drown men in destruction and perdition. *For the love of money is [a] root of all evil:* which while some coveted after, they have erred from the faith, and pierced themselves through with many sorrows" (I Tim. 6:9-10).

As described by *Gamblers Anonymous*, "A desire to have all the good things in life without any great effort on their part seems to be the common character pattern of problem gamblers...time is spent creating images of the great and wonderful things they are going to do as soon as they make the big win...servants,

penthouses, nice clothes, charming friends, yachts, and world tours are a few of the wonderful things that are just around the corner..."

Investing one's heart, being and purpose in the single-minded pursuit of money will "drown" one's spiritual life. And it will truly lead to "many sorrows"—including death!

This is why, in verse 11, Paul warns the reader to "flee these things; and follow after righteousness"—to keep God's commandments (Psa. 119:10, 110, 172; 111:10). This fulfills His Law, through *LOVE* (Rom. 13:8-10), first toward God, then toward neighbor.

Proverbs 6 admonishes, "Go to the ant, you sluggard; consider her ways, and be wise: which having no guide, overseer, or ruler, provides her own meat in the summer, and gathers her food in the harvest" (vs. 6-8). The ant works and saves. She is productive. She does not waste effort, time or resources on "get-rich-quick" schemes.

The book of Proverbs has much to say about earning a living through hard, honest work:

■ "He becomes poor that deals with a slack hand: but the hand of the diligent makes rich" (10:4).

■ "The slothful man roasts not that which he took in hunting: but the substance of a diligent man is precious" (12:27).

■ "He that tills his land shall have plenty of bread: but he that follows after vain persons [emptiness, idleness, worthlessness] shall have poverty enough" (28:19).

■ "A faithful man shall abound with blessings: but he that makes haste to be rich shall not be innocent [unpunished]" (vs. 20).

■ "He that *hastens to be rich* has an evil eye, and considers not that poverty shall come upon him" (vs. 22).

Laziness and taking the "quick and easy" path to material wealth was a problem in the first-century Church. Circumstances among the brethren caused Paul to command that "if any would not work, neither should he eat...Now them that are such we command and exhort by our Lord Jesus



Christ, that with quietness they work, and eat their own bread” (II Thes. 3:10, 12).

Hard work and productivity yield patience, longsuffering, endurance and many other godly traits.

Nowhere does God’s inspired Word endorse gambling—foolishly risking something of worth to time and chance in order to get instant wealth! Nowhere do the Holy Scriptures support squandering money away in the pursuit of satisfying the appetites of the flesh!

The reason is simple: Gambling is *foolishness*. And the Bible teaches that even “the *thought* of foolishness is SIN” (Prov. 24:9).

Just a superficial investigation shows that the odds are definitely stacked against the gambler. For example, the odds of winning the Grand Prize in the largest multi-state lottery are listed as 1 in 120,526,770—astronomical! Also, gambling establishments such as casinos are assured to be “in the black” due to what is called the “house edge.” This is defined as the ratio of the gambler’s average loss to his or her initial bet. This percentage of loss on games such as blackjack and poker can vary from 0.02% to almost 19%. Slot machines are *programmed* to make a profit of up to 15 cents per dollar inserted,

and the house edge for Keno ranges from 25 to 29%! Whether “the house” is taking the gambler’s money in most cases is not a question—it is a mathematical certainty! It is foolish to ignore this reality in pursuit of a selfish fantasy.

Yet, human reasoning will ask, “What about low-risk gambling, like bingo, raffles and office pools? Surely, there’s nothing wrong with a ‘friendly’ wager now and then—right?”

Wrong!

ALL gambling is wasteful, unproductive and foolish—and contrary to what the Bible teaches. Even low-risk

## LOTTERIES AND CASTING LOTS

**W**hen playing the lottery, people buy tickets in certain combinations of numbers, hoping to win the multiple millions of dollars that await the next winner. The odds against winning are astronomical, but such logic never stands in the way of determined ticket buyers. Their eyes are on the “big prize.”

Believe it or not, this modern carnal use of lotteries is a perversion of the biblical practice of “casting lots.”

Leviticus 16 records how ancient Israel, “the church in the wilderness” (Acts 7:38), was to observe the Day of Atonement. During this annual Sabbath, two identical goats were to be brought before the door of God’s holy tabernacle (vs. 7). Then lots were cast: “...one lot for the LORD, and the other lot for the [e]scapegoat. And Aaron shall bring the goat upon which the LORD’s lot fell, and offer him for a sin offering” (vs. 8-9). This goat represented Jesus Christ, and was put to death (vs. 15).

“But the goat, on which the lot fell to be the [e]scapegoat, shall be presented alive before the LORD, to make an atonement with him, and to let him go for a [e]scapegoat into the wilderness” (vs. 10). This goat represented Satan and pictures a time when he will be cast away from civilization. One day soon, the devil will no longer be able to infect an unsuspecting humanity with his carnal attitudes.

There is a reason why God used lots to make His choice clear: Just as these two goats were identical in the eyes of the Israelites, men throughout history have confused Satan with Christ. As a result, people have also confused the ministers of this world with God’s true servants. “And



no marvel; for Satan himself is transformed into an angel of light. Therefore it is no great thing if his ministers also be transformed as the ministers of righteousness” (II Cor. 11:14-15).

When it comes to spiritual matters, people cannot rely on what *they* think or feel. They need God to reveal the difference between Christ and Satan—between the way that leads to eternal life in God’s kingdom and the way that leads to sorrow, misery and eternal death.

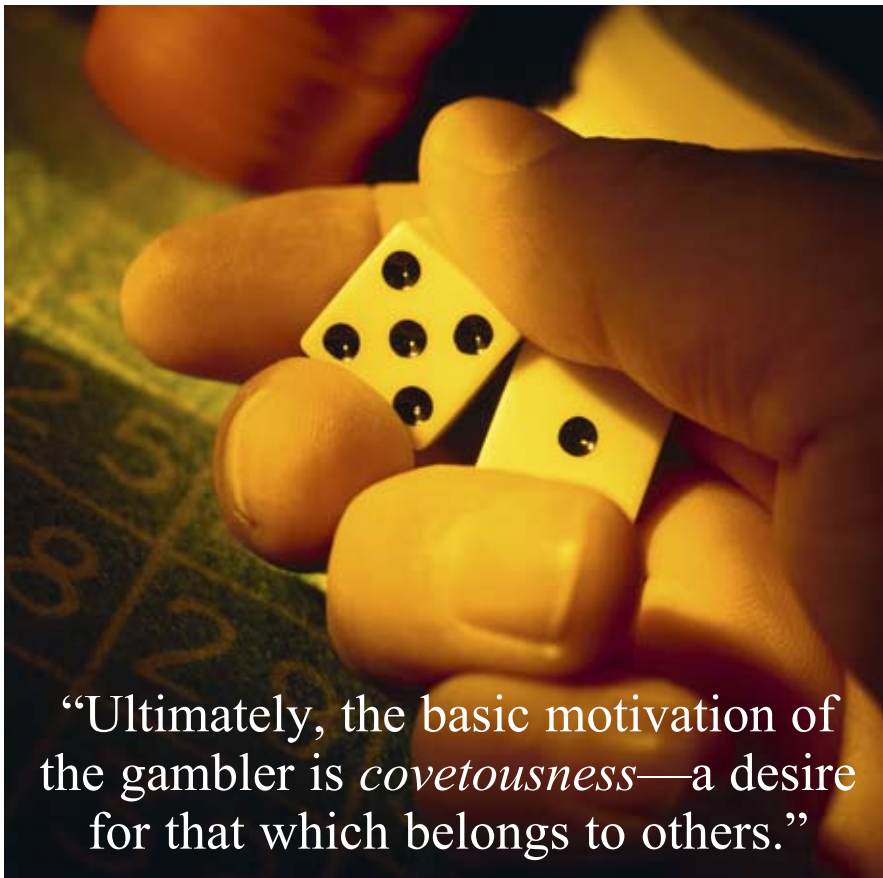
The Israelites cast lots to determine which portions of the Promised Land God wanted the tribes of Israel to take (Num. 26:52-56; Jos. 15; 18:10).

The original apostles (who had the authority to do this) cast lots to seek God’s will in filling the office left vacant by Judas Iscariot (Acts 1:22-26).

Unfortunately, lots have also been cast for devious and selfish purposes. As Christ bled to death on the cross, Roman soldiers cast lots for His clothing (John 19:23-24). And at the end of the age, the enemies of the U.S., Britain and the other modern-day nations of Israel will cast lots to commit evil. But God will not be in their decisions, which is why He will later punish these nations (Joel 3:1-3; Obad. 8-11; Nahum 3:7-10).

As you can see, the modern lottery craze is a satanic perversion of a tool once used to seek God’s will.

Today, we can know the will of God through daily Bible study (accompanied by fervent prayer, and fasting regularly), reading the literature of His Work, seeking a multitude of wise counsel (Prov. 11:14; 15:22; 24:6), and by listening to and applying the sermons God feeds us every Sabbath and Holy Day. □



“Ultimately, the basic motivation of the gambler is *covetousness*—a desire for that which belongs to others.”

gambling is sin; it breaks God’s Law. Notice that God’s Word states that even “a *little* leaven leavens the whole lump” (I Cor. 5:6).

Those who are led by God’s Spirit will seek to obey the spirit of the Law, not merely the letter. They will diligently follow God’s will and reject all human reasoning, for they know—and believe—that “the heart is *deceitful above all things*, and desperately wicked” (Jer. 17:9), and “the way of man is not in himself: it is not in man that walks to direct his steps” (10:23), and “There is a way that seems right unto a man, but the end thereof are the ways of death” (Prov. 14:12; 16:25).

Ultimately, the basic motivation of the gambler is *covetousness*—a desire for that which belongs to others. Speaking of the modern nations of the West, God states, “For from the least of them even unto the greatest of them, every one is given to covetousness” (Jer. 6:13). The possessions and status that the gambler longs for become his “god”! *Anything* that one

gives deference to above his Creator becomes his god (Ex. 20:3).

#### **What About the Stock Market?**

Some have wondered if purchasing stocks is wrong. Generally, no. When done in moderation, with conservative companies that have reliable financial track records, this can be a method of wise investment. But the motivation must not be to “get rich quick.”

Today, many employers provide the option of buying company stocks, sometimes at a discount. If you have the opportunity to take part in this, you would be investing in your employer’s future—as well as your own. Therefore, this would not be considered gambling. But, of course, you should be prudent and conservative.

Here is another example: In the world of newspaper and magazine publishing, most designers and artists use one particular brand of computer and its related software. Despite the fact that there are far more Windows-based computers and applications

available, and usually at a cheaper price, there is among these creative professionals a firm, diehard loyalty to this line. Therefore, it is no surprise that many designers, graphic artists and illustrators invest in the parent company that designs and manufactures this particular computer system. These publishing professionals have a vested interest in that company’s success. They want to ensure that this line will continue to “push the envelope” in producing better, faster, easier-to-use, cutting edge computers.

Investing in a company whose products you regularly use and trust is not gambling, but it must always be done in moderation.

Consider Christ’s example. In Matthew 25 and Luke 19, He expected His faithful servants to increase the talents that were given to them. In the parable, Christ saw nothing wrong with going to money exchangers—banks that handled money for profit—to get a higher return.

With these examples in mind, we must also understand this: While not gambling, buying stocks can, after a certain point, become just another “get rich quick” scheme. It must always be done with wisdom and restraint.

Any type of trading based on fast-paced rumor and innuendo, relying solely on time and chance (like day trading and commodity markets), is directly akin to gambling. These involve foolishly—and recklessly—risking money to accumulate quick wealth.

#### **It’s All in How You Play**

It is human nature to go to extremes. But Christians must be balanced in all things. Recognize that bingo, rolling dice, card playing, etc., are wrong only *if* they involve wastefully and foolishly risking something of value or worth (no matter how small) in order to make a quick profit.

For example, in most cases, bingo matches (especially those sponsored by the churches of this world) require players to pay a nominal fee in order to play. This is gambling, regardless of the size of the fee. However, play-

# QUICK GAMBLING STATISTICS

**United States:** Studies indicate that problem gambling in Nevada is at 8 or 9 percent—the highest rate in the nation. Casinos in Clark County, Nevada, (which includes Las Vegas, Laughlin, Mesquite, Primm and Jean) took in \$7.8 billion in gross gaming revenue; Las Vegas casinos took in \$6.1 billion. In 2003, the average Las Vegas gambling budget per trip was about \$480 per visitor. The average visitor gambled 3.9 hours per day; 87 percent of visitors say they gamble during their stay. Race and sports betting tops \$2 billion per year, including tens of millions wagered on single sporting events such as the Super Bowl (*Las Vegas Convention and Visitor Authority*).

*Gamblers Anonymous* chapters have nearly

doubled in the last eight years, with more than 1,200 meeting regularly across the U.S.

In South Dakota, a court-ordered temporary shutdown of video lottery machines resulted in a drastic reduction of people seeking treatment for gambling addictions. A study found that before the machines were shut off, the state's four gambling treatment centers received an average of 68 inquires and treated 11 gamblers per month. During the time that the machines were shut down, the average number of inquiries and clients treated plummeted to less than one per month. Once the machines resumed operations, the number of average monthly inquiries immediately increased to 24, while eight gamblers a

month sought treatment at the facilities.

In Oregon, within five years of video poker machines being introduced, the number of *Gamblers Anonymous* chapters increased from 3 to more than 30. Gambling addiction experts contend that video poker is among the most addictive forms of gambling ([www.family.org](http://www.family.org)).

**Canada:** In Ontario, 33 percent of youths aged 12-19 and 40 percent of youths aged 18-19 reported some gambling problems (*Canadian Foundation on Compulsive Gambling*, 1994).

Also, 24 percent of Quebec high school students reported having gambled at least once a week, and 5.6 percent reported being unable to stop gambling (*Ladouceur*

and *Mireault*, 1998).

**United Kingdom:** In a 1999 gambling study involving 10,000 British youths, aged 12-15, 19 percent surveyed had spent their money on slot machines and 13 percent spent it on the national lottery during the week prior to the survey.

**Australia:** It is estimated that more than one third of Australian problem gamblers live in Victoria, representing 2.14 percent of the state (or 101,733 people) and accounting for about 30 percent of Victoria's gambling revenue—about \$1 billion. The median gambling debt is \$1,700 for Victorian men and \$1,000 for Victorian women. The proportion of problem gamblers who were divorced or separated is twice the average in Victoria (*Problem Gambling Victoria*).

ing bingo is not gambling IF one is allowed to play *for free*, where nothing of worth or value is *at risk*.

Taking part in a raffle may appear harmless, but it can generate the desire to gain for yourself what others have contributed. Therefore, like all other types of gambling, this is self-centeredness and “covetousness, which is idolatry” (Col. 3:5).

On the other hand, a draw that comes as a *bonus* of purchasing tickets for a dance, for example, is not gambling, as long as it does not involve winning at someone else's expense. The same applies to a promotional draw, in which the winner is picked and purchasing a ticket is not required. Remember, gambling is the way of getting, competing, taking and focusing on self at the expense of others.

It is not practical to list every possible scenario involving games of chance. However, if one is required to “pay to play” (such as in lotteries) or risk losing something of value, then this is gambling.

## When All Is Said and Done

Gambling is not of God—and is clearly unchristian in purpose. It reflects the way of GET—the way of competition, strife, lust, greed, instant gratification, selfishness and laziness—the mindset of carnal human nature. All betting, from penny ante wagers to high stakes risk-taking, is reckless and foolish, and therefore, sin.

The principles found in Scripture make plain that God created man to be productive, to work, earn, save and build, and give to others—never to squander our resources or covet those of our neighbor.

In summary, Christianity and gambling are utterly incompatible. By God's standards, ALL gambling is pathological!

## The Coming Solution

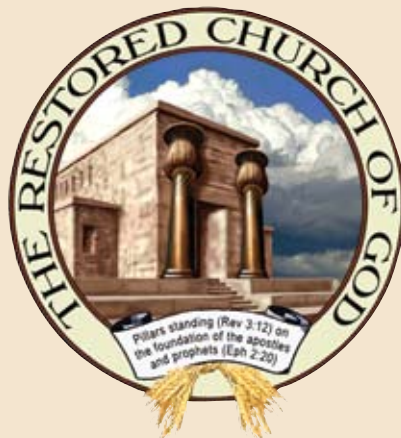
God's Word, from beginning to end, consistently points the reader to the hope of the kingdom of God. This is a literal world-ruling government to

be established by Jesus Christ at His Second Coming (Isa. 9:6-7).

At this time, God will begin to re-educate mankind, and human nature will finally change: “A *new heart* also will I give you, and a new Spirit will I put within you...And I will put My Spirit within you, and cause you to walk in My statutes, and you shall keep My judgments, and do them. And you shall dwell in the land that I gave to your fathers; and you shall be My people, and I will be your God” (Eze. 36:26-28).

Those called by God in this “present evil world” (Gal. 1:4) are given this “new heart” now: “Therefore if any man be in Christ, he is a new creature: old things are passed away; behold, all things are become new” (II Cor. 5:17).

After Christ's Return, gambling, with all its related problems, will cease to exist. All humanity will have access to the Spirit of God—the *power* of God. They will then be able to overcome *selfishness*—the source of this modern plague! □



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