

THE CHRISTIAN AND GAMBLING

A Statement of Position

Gambling falls into the category of behaviors that have the potential to become addictive. The dictionary definition of "addicted" is very general: "applying or devoting oneself habitually." This definition could include good activities, although it is typically applied only to negative behaviors. The Latin root is *addicere* - "to give assent, to assign or surrender". In ancient times it was used to describe someone (usually an enemy) who was captured and kept in captivity. That is still a good description. A person can be considered addicted, then, when an overpowering, repetitive, excessive need exists for some substance, object, feeling, act, milieu, or personal interaction."

In the book *Healing Life's Hidden Addictions*, Dr. Archibald Hart identifies common traits between addictive behaviors and substances:

- Addictions serve the purpose of removing us from our true feelings and provide a sense of escape.
- Addictions take control and transcend all logic and reason.
- In the long haul, all addictions are destructive and unhealthy.
- Addictions always involve pleasures.
- Addictive behavior always takes priority over other life issues.
- Addicts deny their addiction.
- In a sense, all addictions are substance addictions.
- All addictions involve psychological dependence.

Who is prone to addiction? There are at least nine personality characteristics that indicate a propensity toward addiction.

1. Impulsive behavior
2. Difficulty in delaying gratification
3. Sensual seeking personality
4. Antisocial personality
5. Nonconformist values
6. Sense of alienation
7. Deviant behavior
8. Heightened feeling of stress
9. Little regard for goals generally valued by society

Addictive behavior can be extremely difficult to overcome without the help of others. People can become addicted to a wide variety of behaviors, some of which include: food, sex, exercise, various forms of entertainment, alcohol, drugs, gambling, gossip and pornography.

While certain addictions may become a serious problem for some, others seem unaffected by their influence. Obviously, while every addiction can be harmful, not everything potentially addictive is wrong.

Is gambling named as a sin in Scripture? The answer is no. There are characteristics of gambling that cause concern, however, and the potential for sin is great. Gambling is a wide and varied issue involving topics as diverse as: bingo, lotteries, raffles, cake walks, financial investments, office pools, golf outings, pari-mutuel betting, sports events, dice and cards. Christians might disagree about the relative danger of one form against another, but all contain an element of risk.

What are the potential areas of concern?

- Gambling can lead to greed.
- Some consider it a sin against the 7th commandment, taking from others that which they do not want to freely give.
- It has the potential of destroying absolute reliance on God for His provision.
- It can cause some to place behaviors or goals ahead of God; i.e. idolatry.
- It can fuel the sin of coveting.
- It has the potential of leading people to lie or deceive others.
- It can serve to further the cause of crime.
- It may be regarded as poor stewardship of resources since the likelihood of success is so minimal.
- The exercise of my freedom in this area may cause a troubled brother or sister to fall into temptation.
- Gambling is often found in association with other questionable activities; i.e. sexual immorality, abusive drinking and the carnage that it entails.

If gambling holds so great a potential for abuse, why not simply declare it a sin? Many have, but the Lutheran Church has been very careful not to "teach as doctrine the commandments of men." (Matthew 15:9) Many fundamentalist churches have declared any form of dancing, smoking, alcoholic consumption, the cinema, card games, certain forms of music and the like as sinful because they can (and often do) lead to sinful behavior. The Lutheran Church Missouri Synod has resisted such declarations because the Bible does not speak directly against them. We have always taken the position that the Scripture addresses the abuse, not the moderate or proper use of potentially abusive behaviors and/or substances.

It is not an unimportant position of our Church. The entire book of Galatians was written largely to combat the intrusion of legalism in the church. In its worst form, legalism stands opposed to the Gospel and makes "godly behavior" (the avoidance of evil, and the doing of good) the standard of faithfulness. This kind of thinking grew to surprising proportions in the Church of Jesus' day. Pharisees concerned about protecting religious people from "potential evil" would prescribe the number of steps they could take and the kinds of activities people could or should not do before sinning by "working on the Sabbath Day."

For this reason, I encourage staff to refrain from making commandments for individual members of the church where none exist in the Bible. It is acceptable and proper to decide what is good and

acceptable on our campus since the majority has freedom to restrict or grant permission on matters of adiaphora. For instance, because we do not forbid the drinking of alcoholic beverages in moderation, and have even enjoyed parties and wedding receptions where such have been served, we have collectively decided we could serve alcohol served on our campus by adhering to certain guidelines set by our congregation. Other congregations could exercise their right, and pass opposite guidelines for their fellowship. This is similar to an individual deciding to restrict themselves while still acknowledging the right of others to participate in activities not expressly forbidden by Scripture or public law.

In restricting a certain behavior on our campus, we should be clear in our statement of reason. Our members should know that it is either a position required by Scripture or an issue deemed most appropriate as a matter of personal opinion. We have the obligation to do the first, and the freedom to do the latter.