

Dear Beth,

Thank you for writing us at Christian Questions Radio. You asked what the Bible has to say about gambling. You wanted to know if there is a scripture saying that gambling is wrong.

Although gambling is not specifically mentioned by name in the Bible, it does mention games of luck or chance. Some Old Testament examples are: casting lots to choose between the sacrificial goat and the scapegoat (Leviticus 16:8), determining the allotment of land to the various tribes of Israel (Joshua 18-19), and determining who would live inside the walls of Jerusalem (Nehemiah 10:34; 11:1). In the New Testament the apostles cast lots to determine the replacement for Judas (Acts 1:26). It is important to remember when looking at these examples that the casting of lots was never used by followers of God for entertainment or to gain riches.

But, gambling today, as defined by Webster, is “to play or game for money or other stake; to hazard; wager.” Three key points can be derived from this definition. First, something of value to be gained or lost is placed deliberately in hazard. Second, winning is determined by some arbitrary event of chance or uncertainty not inherent to the wager. And lastly, profits come at the loss of other participants without whom there is no gamble. Since games of chance require more than one player, the gambler, by definition, always stands to gain by the loss of others.

Some feel that if gambling is done in moderation and only on occasion, it is, at worst, only a waste of money, and not an “evil.” It is true that people waste money in all sorts of ways (eating in expensive restaurants, purchasing unnecessary items, etc.). Nonetheless, the fact that money is wasted in other ways, does not justify gambling. Excess money should be saved for future needs or used for the Lord’s work. It should not be squandered. Furthermore, gambling can be addictive. Homes, marriages and livelihoods can be destroyed. Many addicts end up stealing, embezzling, or worse, to pay their debts or support their habit.

The Bible emphatically warns us to stay away from the love of money (1 Timothy 6:10; Hebrews 13:5). Scripture also encourages us to stay away from attempts to “get rich quick” (Proverbs 23:5; Ecclesiastes 5:10). The Apostle Paul tells us just how important it is to work for our food. “For you yourselves know how you ought to follow our example. We were not idle when we were with you nor did we eat anyone’s food without paying for it. On the contrary, we worked night and day, laboring and toiling so that we would not be a burden to any of you. We did this, not because we do not have the right to such help, but in order to make ourselves a model for you to follow. For even when we were with you, we gave you this rule: ‘If a man will not work, he shall not eat.’” (2 Thessalonians 3:7-10) He also admonishes us to work when he says in Colossians 3:23-24, “Whatever you do, work at it with all your heart, as working for the Lord, not for men since you know that you will receive an inheritance from the Lord as a reward. It is the Lord Christ you are serving.”

Therefore, we can say that gambling in any form is not a productive way for a Christian to spend his or her time or money. “No one can serve two masters. Either he will hate the one and love the other, or he will be devoted to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve both God and Money.” (Matthew 6:24) “Do not conform any longer to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God’s will is –his good, pleasing and perfect will.” (Romans 12:2)

We hope we have shed some light on your question.

Sincerely,
Christian Questions Radio