

# ***THE GOSPEL OF CHRIST***

SPREADING THE SOUL-SAVING MESSAGE OF JESUS

## **THE TRUTH ABOUT GAMBLING**

### **Introduction by narrator accompanied by a cappella singing:**

*THE GOSPEL OF CHRIST*. Spreading the soul-saving message of Jesus. And now, Ben Bailey.

The lottery. Casinos. Blackjack tables. Christianity. The Bible. Righteous living. Are these images that go together? Should a Christian be involved in the practice of gambling? Is it something that, as a faithful child of God, a Christian can do and still be righteous? Can a Christian go down to the convenience store and buy a lottery ticket? Is it all right to go down to the local casino on Friday night and play the slot machines? Welcome to our study on the truth about the Christian and gambling. Today we are going to examine what God has to say about gambling in order to determine whether or not we as Christians (those who claim to follow the Bible) can involve ourselves in such practices.

When we talk about gambling, we are talking about a game of chance where money or something of value is either gained or lost—oftentimes at the expense of another person. The basic component of gambling has to do with chance. We are not talking about skill. We are talking about “the luck of the draw,” “a roll of the dice,” or “a chance at the slots.” In this, there is money, goods, or something else of value that is going to be either gained or lost (again, oftentimes at the expense of other people). And, of course, there is the idea of betting—placing value amounts on certain hands of cards or certain machines in order to try to gain other things. This is what we mean by gambling.

Look at some statistics about gambling that show us that it is a very serious problem in our culture today. Gamblers Anonymous has stated that there are at least 12 million Americans who are compulsive gamblers. Think about that—**12 million Americans!** These people are addicted to gambling—just like a drug addict has to have his “fix.” The average compulsive gambler has debts exceeding \$80,000. Not only is it addictive (where a person is brought under its power, 1 Cor. 6:12), but it also puts a person in financial debt. The *Dallas Morning News* reports that the average compulsive gambler has debts exceeding \$80,000. The odds of winning “Megabucks” in Las Vegas are 1 in 49,836,032 according to the *Las Vegas Sun*. Think about that. Your chance of actually winning is 1 out of approximately 50 million?! It is not much better in Texas. The odds of winning the Texas Match 5 Plus Bonus are 1 out of 47,784,352. Your odds get better by two million, but 1 out of 47 million? How many people operate in their everyday lives like that? What if your chances were 1 in 47 million of doing something? Would you do it? We do not think like that. You have a better chance of getting struck by lightning than you have of winning a million dollars in the lottery. You are seven times more likely to be struck by lightning than you are to win a million dollars in a state lottery. Think about that. A person would have a seven times greater chance of getting struck by lightning while on his way to purchase a lottery ticket than he would of actually winning that lottery.

Gambling is a very serious problem in our world today. Look at how gambling is related to crime. Crime rates in casino communities are 84% higher than the national average. What does that suggest? It suggests that people are willing to rob, steal, and cheat in order to continue their gambling. **Crime rates in casino communities are 84% higher than the national average?!** Casinos are not bringing good to the community, that’s for

sure. According to *Christianity Today*, more money is spent each year on gambling than is spent on elementary and secondary education. Think about that. According to the International Gaming and Wagering Business Americans spend more money each year on gambling than they spend on groceries. More money is spent on elementary and secondary education, and more money is spent on gambling than on groceries. People are starving themselves—when it comes to both education and literal food—just so mom and dad can go out and gamble. What a sad, sad fact that is. As you look at these statistics, you can see that gambling, by its very nature, is not something good, holy, and righteous.

But should a Christian gamble? I submit to you that a Christian should never gamble. Gambling should never be something in which Christians get involved. Someone might ask, “Why not?” Here’s why not. First, gamblers are not good stewards of the things that God has given them. How can a person be a good steward of all that God has given him, and then try to go “win something” where he has a 1 in 50 million chance of winning? Is that really being a good steward? James 1:17 tells us that “every perfect gift is from above.” The things we own—the possessions we have or the money in our bank accounts—are not really ours. We are stewards of all that is God’s. We cannot be a good steward and waste the Lord’s money. In Matthew 25 we are told about a one-talent man. He took his talent and hid it in the sand because he was afraid of his master. What if that man had taken that talent and **lost** it?! He drew a bad-enough condemnation because he did nothing more than bury the talent. What if he had gambled it and lost? Jesus said of that man in Matthew 25:30, “Cast the unprofitable servant into the outer darkness.” Let’s turn our attention to some passages in the Bible that deal with being good stewards. Christians are to be good stewards in all that they do and with all that they possess. Notice 1 Peter 4:10 that the Bible says, “As each one has received a gift, minister it to one another, as good stewards of the manifold grace of God.” Peter is talking here about certain gifts that we have been given. Some have the “gift” of being given money or things of a material nature. If we have been given a gift (whatever that gift might be), we need to use that gift to the glory of God and be a good steward of it. We need to use the gift in such a way that it will glorify God and uplift His name. Christians cannot gamble and be a good steward of the Lord’s money because the odds are stacked against them. If a Christian were to take money that was given to him by God (and of which he is a steward), and that Christian gambled away that money, is he being a good steward of what God has given him? Notice Luke 12:48 where Jesus commented on the idea of being a good steward when He said, “To whom much has been committed, of him they will ask the more.” In verse 42 the Lord asked, “Who then is that faithful and wise steward, whom his master will make ruler over his household, to give them their portion of food in due season?” The principle is this: Who is the faithful and wise steward? It is the one who does the will of the master. Being a faithful and wise steward means that we must be willing to be a good steward with our money. If God has given us money, then we need to take care of it and use it for things that are necessary. There is nothing wrong with using money for appropriate types of recreation. The Bible authorizes us to enjoy ourselves, to relax, and to have fun at times. That is not what we are talking about here. The fact is that we need to be careful to use our money to God’s glory. We need to be good stewards of whatever talents, gifts, and abilities God has given us. And we certainly need to be good stewards of the time we have in this life.

Second, a Christian should never gamble because gambling violates the Golden Rule. We are to live by the rule that says, “Whatever you want men to do to you, do also to them” (Mt. 7:12). If a Christian goes to the casino to play blackjack or some other game of chance, is he or she really being a good neighbor? Is the Christian really doing unto others as he would have them do unto him? When a Christian goes to the casino to sit around the blackjack table, he knows that he is going to have to take money from someone else in order to

win. Can the Christian really follow the Golden Rule when acting in such a way? Is that what following the Golden Rule is all about? The Christian who gambles may be beating someone out of a paycheck. Or, he may be winning the money that represents someone's grocery or mortgage payment—or even taking food away from children. Is that really what you would want someone else to do to you? Do you want someone to rob you and take your money or possessions? A Christian cannot really live by the Golden Rule while being involved in gambling. Think about Mark 12:30-31 where Jesus said, "You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, with all your mind, and with all your strength." This is the first commandment. And the second, like it, is this: You shall love your neighbor as yourself." Can a Christian really say, "I love my neighbor," while taking that neighbor's paycheck? Can a Christian really say, "I love my neighbor," while taking the money that a person would have used to buy groceries? Yes, the other person who gambles is to blame as well. But a Christian who gambles shares some of the blame for not adhering to the Golden Rule by taking from others that which is rightfully theirs.

Third, Christians should not gamble because gambling can cause an addiction. Twelve million Americans are addicted to gambling. Those compulsive gamblers have individual accumulated debts exceeding \$80,000. This is a very serious problem. Gambling can cause an addiction—just like a drug. People who get addicted to it continue doing it, regardless of what it costs them. We need to understand that gambling represents a serious addiction problem. Let me give you some information that I think will help you understand just how serious this addiction is for some people. In 2001 the gross revenues from gambling were \$68.7 billion—more money than Americans spent on music, movies, spectator sports, video games, and theme parks combined. Think about that. Americans spent \$68.7 billion dollars in a single year on gambling. The National Council on Problem Gambling reported in March 2003 that over 80 percent of U.S. adults had gambled at least once in the past year. This is indeed a problem. The National Institute of Mental Health concluded that 4.2 million Americans are addicted to gambling, 60 percent of whom have yearly incomes under \$25,000. That in itself shows that these people cannot afford to gamble because they do not make enough money. Yet they go and do it—regardless of who ends up suffering. So, yes, this can be an addiction that can cause a person not to think about things that are important, and to focus instead solely on himself. The Bible teaches that a Christian ought not to allow anything to have power over him. In Galatians 5:23, one of the fruits of the Spirit is "self-control." The problem with gambling is that it causes a person to lose self-control. The person is playing a slot machine or blackjack puts \$5 and thinks, "Well, I didn't win with that \$5, so I'll just put in another \$5." And so on. Eventually self-control is gone. Look at what Paul said in 1 Corinthians 6:12—"All things are lawful for me, but all things are not helpful. All things are lawful for me, but I will not be brought under the power of any." Paul's point is that we should not let anything have power or control over us. Yes, we are to be controlled by Jesus, by Christian living, and by the Bible. But things of the world are not to control us. That is not what the Christian life is all about. We must understand that gambling can be addicting, and that if a person gets involved in gambling, it has the potential to control that person who will be thinking, "Next time, I'm going to 'hit it big!' Just one more quarter and I'll 'hit it big' on this slot machine. Just one more lottery ticket and I'll 'win the big one.'" That kind of thinking is typical of someone who is addicted. And it has cost a lot of people a lot of money—sending them to the poor house as a result.

Fourth, gambling ruins a Christian's example. Being involved with gambling and the things associated with gambling has the potential to ruin a person's example. Christians are commanded, "'Come out from among them and be separate,' says the Lord. 'Do not touch what is unclean, and I will receive you. I will be a Father to you, and you shall be My sons

and daughters,' says the Lord Almighty" (2 Cor. 6:17). When it comes to worldly things like drinking, gambling, and drugs, Christians are commanded to come out of such things. We are not to be associated with such things, involved with such things, or even around such things. If we are, we can know that it will ruin our Christian example. Paul said to Timothy, "Be an example to the believers in word, in conduct, in love, in spirit, in faith, in purity" (1 Tim. 4:12). We are to be an example to both those who are believers and those who are in the world. Notice, too, what Jesus said in Matthew 5:16—"Let your light so shine before men that they may see your good works and glorify your Father in heaven." People should be able to look to us and to our example to see what Christ is really like. We never saw Christ gambling. We never see Christians in the New Testament gambling. If a person frequents a gambling establishment, his light will be put out. His example for Christ will not shine as it should. Someone might ask, "Why not?" Here's why not. Gambling is evil in and of itself. But it also is associated with things like drinking, drugs, sex, reveling, etc. All those types of things are associated with gambling. In 1 Thessalonians 5:22 we are told to "abstain from every appearance of evil." We are not to be involved in such things, but are instead to be careful to do only what God wants us to do. Gambling will cause a person's Christian reputation to be damaged or destroyed.

Fifth, gambling can cause a person to be deceitful and dishonest. It can cause him to lie. Gambling is not something a Christian should do because it is associated with such activities. Someone might ask, "How do you **know** that gambling is associated with such things?" An analysis in *U.S. News & World Report* found crime rates in casino communities to be 84% higher than the national average. That represents dishonesty and deceit. People who are involved in gambling are frequently involved in things that are not right in order to support their gambling habit. Focus on the Family reported an extreme example where a church secretary stole \$186,000 from the church to finance her gambling habit. Here's how you can know that gambling is associated with dishonesty and deceit. A church secretary wrote herself a check for \$186,000 so that she could go to the casino and gamble. That woman probably did not want to do that. She was working for the Lord (so she thought), yet she was actually robbing God so she could continue her gambling habit. In communities where there is gambling, you will find much more stealing, robbery, and similar crimes against people.

Sixth, gambling violates the biblical pattern for making money. Do we as Christians believe that we must have authority for everything we do? Colossians 3:17 teaches us, "Whatever you do in word or deed, do all in the name of the Lord Jesus." In 1 Corinthians 4:6 Christians are told not to go "beyond that which is written." How does the Bible tell us to make money? We can work for it. In 2 Thessalonians 3:10 Paul told the Christians in Thessalonica to stop sitting around and to get out and go to work. A person also can sell something (like land or goods) to make money. In Acts 4:34 and in Acts 5:1 we see the example of some Christians in the New Testament who sold their land in order to bring the proceeds to the apostles to be used for spreading the Gospel. Also, one may trade land or goods for money. In Genesis 34 we see land being trading for money or goods. Thus, we can work for our money. We can sell something of value. Or, we can trade something for something else of equal value. Those are the only ways by which we are authorized to make money. This surely is one of the strongest points in regard to gambling. There is no biblical authority for a Christian to receive money from the practice of gambling. If there is no authority for it, then we must not do it. We must not live that lifestyle, or become involved in things that are known to be evil.

Seventh, Christians should not get involved in gambling because it destroys families. Gambling has done so much harm to the family. I know a family right now whose mom and dad have a gambling problem, and the children never see their parents. If the kids ever get any-

thing to eat, it is from their grandparents. Mom and dad are usually down at the casino, and are always broke. As a result, the children do not receive the love, care, and attention that they should. Why? It is because their parents are addicted to gambling, which is destroying the American family. In Illinois a review of the state's gaming records revealed that in a 14-month period 72 children were found abandoned on gambling premises. Mom and dad went off to gamble and simply abandoned their children. Mom and dad were so addicted to gambling that they could not even look up to see where their children were. How sad that is. In Louisiana and South Carolina, children died after being locked in hot cars for hours while their caretakers gambled. Talk about an addiction—here it is! Mom and dad were so addicted to gambling that they locked their children in a car on a hot day, and the children died. That is a horrible addiction, and a horrible crime against the family. In one example, an Illinois mother was sentenced to prison for suffocating her infant daughter in order to collect insurance money for gambling. Talk about harm to a family! Mom is so addicted to gambling that she actually kills her own child in order to collect the life-insurance money to promote her gambling habit. It is a proven fact that in gambling communities, spousal abuse and divorce rates skyrocket. Gambling is doing a great deal of harm to the family today. We need to understand that gambling is not something in which a child can become involved. If you want to destroy the family, the children, the marriage, and any relationship you might have with the Lord, then gamble. But if you want to live a Christian life, be a good father or mother, get to Heaven, and help your children get to Heaven, then do not have anything to do with the practice of gambling.

What applications can we make today? We must understand that a Christian should never participate in gambling. Christians do not buy lottery tickets. Christians do not go to the casino to gamble away their paychecks. Christians do not go to the blackjack tables. It is sinful for the child of God to do those things, as the evidence I have discussed with you today shows. The child of God must not get involved in such things. Another application is that, as children of God, we need to speak up against gambling. The Lord already has too many "silent partners." We need to be a voice against gambling. If we have someone in our lives who we know to be involved in gambling, we need to sit them down and tell them what the Bible says about it. We must speak out against gambling, and we must not contribute to the gambling industry in any way whatsoever. We must not buy things that are associated with it. We must not go to car shows at casinos. We must not be associated with gambling in any way so that it can simply go out of existence. The chances are that it may not, but we still need to do everything we can to make sure that gambling does not continue in our communities.

Gambling is a very serious problem. But the most serious problem of all is that when a person gambles, he is gambling with his soul. The most important thing that a person possesses in this life is his or her soul. God has given us an immortal soul. And this life is our one chance to get to Heaven. Do you want to gamble that away and risk the odds of losing your soul? Jesus said, "What will it profit a man if he gains the whole world, and loses his own soul? Or what will a man give in exchange for his soul?" (Mk. 8:36-37). Let's say that you win the lottery, and get a million dollars a year for the rest of your life, and then you go to Hell. Would that really have been worth it? You got to spend all of that money in this life, but you ended up spending eternity in Hell. Does that make good sense? In Luke 12 we see an example of a man who got caught up in worldliness. He did well with his crops. He tore down his old barns and built new barns. He decided to just take it easy, relax, and have a good time. But God said, "You fool. This night your soul will be required of you." Jesus said in Luke 12:21, "So is he who lays up treasure for himself, and is not rich toward God." The principle here is that we should not get caught up in worldliness. We must not get caught up with things that will perish with the using. Instead, let's put our hope in things of eternal importance. Let's put our trust in things that are of eternal value.

Are you a child of God today? Have you obeyed the Gospel? The most important thing you can do right now if you are not prepared is to get prepared to spend eternity with the Lord. One can become a New Testament Christian by hearing God's Word. Romans 10:17 says, "Faith comes by hearing, and hearing by the word of God." Then a person must put his trust in Jesus by believing in Him as the Son of God (Jn. 3:16). A person also must be willing to repent and change his ways. If you have been involved in gambling, you need to repent. You must stop doing wrong and start doing right. In Luke 3:8 John the Immerser said, "Bear fruits worthy of repentance." Repentance has fruits, and includes no longer doing things that are wrong. Also a person must confess that Jesus is God's Son. The Bible says in Romans 10:10, "With the heart one believes unto righteousness, and with the mouth confession is made unto salvation." A person then must be baptized for the remission of sins in order to go to Heaven. Jesus said in Mark 16:16, "He who believes and is baptized will be saved; but he who does not believe will be condemned." In Acts 22:16 Paul was told, "Why are you waiting? Arise and be baptized, and wash away your sins, calling on the name of the Lord." If you are a child of God, but you have gotten involved with gambling, then you need to repent publicly because you have sinned publicly. You need to ask for God's forgiveness and for the church's forgiveness. Above all, you must not get involved in gambling again. May God give us the courage, the determination, and the desire to never get involved in these types of evil practices, and to always live our lives by the Gospel of Christ.

**Narrator accompanied by a cappella singing:**

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## STUDY QUESTIONS FOR “THE TRUTH ABOUT GAMBLING”

1. According to Gamblers Anonymous how many Americans are currently listed as compulsive gamblers?
2. According to Gamblers Anonymous, what is the average individual debt of compulsive gamblers?
3. In 1 Corinthians 6:12, what did the apostle Paul urge Christians not to let happen?
4. This lesson lists seven reasons why it is wrong for Christians to gamble. What is the first of those reasons?
5. This lesson lists seven reasons why it is wrong for Christians to gamble. What is the second of those reasons?
6. This lesson lists seven reasons why it is wrong for Christians to gamble. What is the third of those reasons?
7. This lesson lists seven reasons why it is wrong for Christians to gamble. What is the fourth of those reasons?
8. This lesson lists seven reasons why it is wrong for Christians to gamble. What is the fifth of those reasons?
9. This lesson lists seven reasons why it is wrong for Christians to gamble. What is the sixth of those reasons?
10. This lesson lists seven reasons why it is wrong for Christians to gamble. What is the seventh of those reasons?
11. In Matthew 25, why was the one-talent made condemned?
12. In Mark 12:30-31, what did Jesus urge Christians to do as “the second greatest commandment”?
13. This lesson mentions a particular “fruit of the Spirit” (discussed in Galatians 5:23) that applies to gambling. What is it?
14. What apostolic admonition is found in 2 Corinthians 6:17 that would apply to Christians and gambling?
15. In Matthew 5:16, what did Jesus urge Christians to do?
16. What does 1 Thessalonians 5:22 admonish Christians to do?
17. What does 1 Timothy 4:12 urge Christians to do?
18. According to Christ’s teaching in Mark 8:36-37, what is our most important possession?