

Hitting the Jackpot (3)

June 1995

Gambling is not easy to precisely define. It is not the mere taking of a risk, for we all take risks daily in business, investments, safety, etc. Neither is gambling simply acquiring something without earning it; inheritances, birthday presents, scratch-off prizes at McDonald's and even salvation fall into this category. Nor is gambling the investment of personal funds with a view to profit, for this is the principle of commerce. It is this very subtlety that entices some Christians to participate in gambling activities.

Consider the following definitions: Gamble: To play a game for money or property; to bet on an uncertain income; to stake something on a contingency: take a chance (*Webster's Ninth Collegiate Dictionary*, p. 504). Lottery: A drawing of lots in which prizes are distributed to the winners among persons buying a chance; an event or affair whose outcome is or seems to be determined by chance (*ibid*, p. 706). When does the application of these definitions constitute sin? From cake walks for the local school to blackjack in Vegas, from the ring toss at the state fair to roulette in Atlantic City, from the Publishers Clearinghouse Sweepstakes to horses and jai alai, Christians are called upon to carefully examine their attitudes and behavior regarding magnified profit.

Organized gambling enterprises, which operate solely upon the basis of selling chances for fortune by the "stakes" of the participants, incite the basest desires in people. "Atlantic City started with one casino, but now has 11. Within three years the city's crime rate tripled, going from 50th in the nation per capita to first. Forty percent of local restaurants closed, the number of homeless increased 2,000%, property values dropped, and almost 200 homes of people who refused to sell their property to casinos were destroyed in arson-related fires" (*AFA Journal*, June 1995). Gambling is not a "victimless crime"; all of society will pay for this vice one way or another.

Gambling glorifies greed, magnifies materialism, invites addiction, and opens a floodgate to other vices. Someone always wins at the expense of many, many losers who often addictively wager themselves into poverty. While any activity can potentially become obsessive – eating, exercise, playing the stock market – the desire to be rich (1 Tim 6:9) lies at the heart of gambling. Let us be "*wise as serpents*" in recognizing sin in all of its deceitful forms.