

Transcript 79- Gambling

Shea Houdmann

Welcome to the Got Questions podcast with Shea Houdmann, president of Got Questions Ministries.

Welcome to the Got Questions podcast. So today we're going to be continuing our series of going through the top 20 questions of all time on GotQuestions.org. And today's question, it's an interesting one. We're going to be talking about is gambling a sin? So today I have Jeff, the administrator of Bibleref.com and Kevin, the managing editor of Got Questions Ministries.

So this question to me is really interesting in that it's become a hot topic again recently. It's always been a popular question. It's been especially so recently with the explosion of sports gambling. Sports betting with several states. I really don't know what the status of sports gambling is in other countries that imagine it's there, but United States several states have legalized it completely, and so you're seeing lots of commercials for download this app, or go with this particular sports book and you can bet.

Shea Houdmann

And I've done a little research into it, and the Super Bowl is actually the biggest gambling event of the year. With some of these apps these programs you could gamble on literally like every play. Like whether do you think the next play, the Los Angeles Rams run is going to be a running player? They'll be passing play or this particular drive of the Bengals? Are they going to score touchdown? A field goal punt or a turnover?

Shea Houdmann

And you can bet on absolutely everything. Well, anyone who's ever tried to minister to someone who's struggling with gambling knows what a recipe for a disaster this. It's taking something that's fun and enjoyable, and honestly I think I would enjoy doing something like that. Just trying to guess what's the next play. A little bit of fun of risking money, but to me it's I know myself well enough to know that's not something I should be involved in, but it's something I could very easily get at least somewhat addicted to. And I don't know I'd be able to have the appropriate amount of control over how much I'm willing to risk so, but it's fascinating concept. It's not something I'm actually that interested in doing, just 'cause I know the risk, so that's what we're going to be talking about today.

Shea Houdmann

Like what is gambling? What does the Bible say about it? Should a Christian be involved in gambling at all, and if so, to what extent?

Shea Houdmann

So Jeff, why did you start us off? What's what are some of the thoughts the Lords given you about gambling recently?

Jeff Laird

One of the things I think we have to focus on is understanding what we mean when we talk about gambling in the 1st place, and there's concepts that come in. There's no single definition that anybody is going to perfectly agree on, but there's general principles when we're talking about gambling, true gambling. We're talking about something that involves a risk without some likelihood of success. There's a reason that they say the house always wins. Gambling, by definition, is set up to make somebody else somebody else some kind of profit or money. It's meant that you're going to have low odds of success.

Jeff Laird

The lottery is the ultimate example of that. Where your chances of getting anything back from it are much lower than the chances that you're just handing money over, we're talking about something that's focused on money, something that doesn't add any creative or aesthetic or artistic or knowledge to something or anything.

Jeff Laird

It's just something that's sort of chance based or mostly chance based and even games that involve a level of skill. Blackjack in a casino. There's things you can do that are good or bad decisions, but there's still an element of chance. That's really what's driving what you're doing. So I think when we talk about something that's true gambling. Those are the ideas. That come into it. So things like sports betting, pretty much everything that happens in a casino. The benefits usually are all about finances. They're all about money, so the idea of it looking as a get rich quick sort of a scheme is part of the problem.

Jeff Laird

And I for me I think that another thing that's really important to focus on is the idea that in gambling there really isn't any, there's no creation, there's no property, there's no advancement. It's just risk and you lose, or you gain and nothing is really developed in the mean time. And that's important to remember because sometimes people get concerned over the idea that it's just the uncertainty or the risk that makes something gambling. And that's not true.

Jeff Laird

And we sometimes use phrases in English that confuse that. Where we say like I'm taking a gamble on this, that or the other, and a lot of times it's not really gambling. Things like investing in the stock market, for example, that's not gambling. But when you buy stocks, what you're doing is you're purchasing a stake in a company. That the company is going to try to succeed. They're going to try to provide a profit.

Jeff Laird

It's true that not all stock purchases succeed. Sometimes they don't do well, sometimes they fail, but they're not deliberately intended to most likely lose your money. You're also investing in that in something that's going to create some sort of either artistry or property or good or service or artistic endeavor.

Jeff Laird

You're in the process of creating something. So things like investments. That's not gambling insurance is also not a form of gambling.

Jeff Laird

When you have an insurance policy that says I'm going to pay a certain amount every month just in case something really, really bad happens, that's almost the opposite of the real spirit of gambling, because in gambling you're investing quite a bit to get ultimately little to no return, especially on the average.

Jeff Laird

Whereas when you have something like insurance, typically what you're doing is you're investing a relatively small amount in order to shield yourself from an even bigger risk. And that doesn't mean that every Christian has to be in favor of insurance and things like that.

Jeff Laird

But there are differences between those things, so it's not just a question of us asking ourselves. Am I taking a risk? Oh well, if it's a risk or there's something uncertain, that's gambling and I can't do that.

Jeff Laird

So the definitions of exactly what it is are important. After we have an idea of whether or not we're talking about gambling, the type of gambling that we're discussing here, then we have other ideas.

Jeff Laird

Then we have other thoughts that we have to look at. Kevin I think you were planning on bringing some information about that. The way that we should be questioning or asking how we're approaching this. Once we've decided whether or not this is gambling in the first place.

Kevin Stone

Yes, and that's helpful, Jeff, to be able to distinguish between gambling and investments. Because there is that difference. And if we're being tempted to do actual gambling, then there are some questions we probably need to be asking ourselves.

Kevin Stone

I have five of them here that I think are wise questions for us to ask if we are tempted to gamble and the first one is just simply where's our where's our faith? Do we live by faith in the provision of God or do we live by faith in luck or faith in chance?

Kevin Stone

I mean really, where is our provision coming from? Where is our hope? Is our hope in God is our hope in in chance, you know, just hoping that something you know lucky is going to happen and I can get these resources. So that's a very important question, I think. What is our faith in exactly?

Kevin Stone

Also another question that we should be asking ourselves concerning this issue of gambling is do we seek to love our neighbor? Or are we seeking to profit from his loss? Because that's really what gambling comes down to. In order for me to win. Somebody else has to lose.

Kevin Stone

Jeff you are pointing out with an investment in a company everybody is seeking to win. And if that company succeeds then the investments pay off and everyone is benefited but not so with gambling. In order for me to succeed, somebody else has to lose and I don't think that shows love for our neighbors. To be rooting for him to fail so that I can collect his money and make it my own, I think that is one of the basic principles that that keeps me away from gambling is love of neighbor. Also another question, are we trying to stay away from all forms of greed and covetousness? Because that's really, I think, what gambling comes down to at its core. It's a form of coveting. I want something that I do not have.

Kevin Stone

I was speaking a few years ago to a man who was. Was addicted to gambling and he was on the verge of losing his family over it actually 'cause he'd spent all their savings. Spent all their vacation money that they had set aside and it was really causing problems at home. I mentioned in the course of our conversation that we needed to work on greed, you know the overcoming greed. And coveting. His statement to me was, you know I never really thought about it. But that's what it is. I'm coveting. I'm just being greedy and I think that's a question we need to ask. Am I trying to avoid all forms of coveting and all forms of greed. Also are we content with what we have? The biblical principle is that godliness with contentment is great gain and God calls us to be content with such things as we have. Hebrews 13 and verse 5. Keep your lives free from the love of money and be content with what you have. And again this ties in with who are we trusting. Are we trusting God to provide for our needs? Are we content with what he has allowed us to have? Or are we desperately grasping for more and following this, this very risky plan of seeking to get more? How much better just to be content with what God allows us to have. Then question #5. Do we realize that everything we possess has been given to us by God and that we are simply stewards of the resources that he has given us?

Kevin Stone

Our church right now is in a building project. We've been raising money for several years now for a new building to add to our existing building. Sometimes we joke about how we should just go out and buy 100 lottery tickets and win the lottery and then we could just pay off this whole building project right away. Of course we say that tongue in cheek. Say that as a joke because we would never consider doing that as a church because it would not be a wise use of the resources God has provided to our ministry.

Kevin Stone

Now we have made some investments. We purchased some certificates of deposit that have a higher rate of interest than just a regular savings account. And so we've tried to wisely steward the money that God's people have given toward this project, but there's no way that we would ever go out and play the lottery.

Kevin Stone

And I think the same holds true in our personal lives. I wouldn't go out and put that money at risk like that knowing that I'm responsible to use every resource I have for the glory of God, and I don't want to put it in a foolish risk like that. For all of these questions that we can ask ourselves, I think we come

down to an answer that gambling is something that believers just need to be staying away from and avoiding.

Shea Houdmann

Excellent thoughts Kevin and Jeff. This is some scriptures that came to my mind. When I was preparing for this. Scriptures on stay away for the love of money. So first Corinthians 6:10, for example, for the love of money is the root of all kinds of evil. It is through this craving that some have wandered away from the faith and pierced themselves with many pains.

Shea Houdmann

Anyone who knows someone who's been addicted to gambling can really relate to piercing themselves with many pains. Where Hebrews 13:5 says keep your life free from the love of money and be content with what you have. For he, as in God, has said I will never leave you and forsake you. Then one other one. This with attempts to get rich quick, but some gamble for fun, but the vast filter or people who are gambling or doing so because they're hoping for a financial windfall. Well, Proverbs 13:11 says wealth gained hastily will dwindle, and whoever gathers it little by little will increase it. Obviously in proverbs there's a lot more about staying away from the love of money, staying away from risking your money, staying away from attempts to get rich quick and elsewhere in Scripture as well. But I think these are good summary of what Scripture says in that there's nothing wrong with seeking to improve our the status of our income to look into ways to increase our income to looking for ways to improve our financial situation, but gambling as the way Jeff defined it, taking unnecessary risk or something that's highly unlikely to pay off. That's not the method the Bible says to go about trying to improve your financial situation and so rarely does it work. When I look at the lottery for example here so many people lose so much money on the lottery. People and the vast amount of people who are investing in investing who are gambling with the lottery are the people who can least afford to do it.

Shea Houdmann

You know, as far as I can remember, I don't think I've purchased a Lotto ticket in the past decade. The last time I did, it's kind of a funny story. I'll, keep it brief. But my dog ate something. I don't know what it was, but it made him horribly sick. He made a huge mess in various part of the house. So I had to run to the grocery store to pick up a wet vac to clean up the mess he had left behind. I'm standing there waiting in the line for the wet vac and I see Powerball up there. 500 million or whatever crazy obscene amount of money it was. I was like you know, maybe God allowed this thing with my dog to happen to get me to the grocery store. So I would buy this Lotto ticket, so then I would win. And ohh I'd give all the money away and all these plans are going through my mind at 2:00 in the morning and bought one ticket. Didn't match a single number. I think that was the last time I did it.

Shea Houdmann

And it was as wonderful as that would be. You also hear stories of how winning money that way ruins people. How it destroys their lives. How they somehow blow through crazy amounts of money, are in a far worse finance situation afterwards than they were before, so none of the things that we dream about with lottery winnings ever come to true. I'm not saying never, but 99% of the time you either are not going to win, or if you do win it is not going to result in the improvement to your life that you were hoping for. And that's something that God has really instilled in me just through learning through the

mistakes of others, so thankfully, gambling is not a temptation for me, but I know it is for many others and I I get it. I understand it, but based on what Scripture says, gambling is not something that Christians should be. I wouldn't say absolutely no, never. Absolutely not sort of thing, but if so, it's got to be extremely rare. You've got to be extremely careful and you've got to make sure you're doing it with the right heart, the right attitude and with the right restrictions.

Jeff Laird

There's a lot of danger in the addiction side of it. I think that's something that's worth pointing out and making clear is that there are unique aspects to gambling that do draw people in in a sense, so it is something that people need to be careful about it. It's not like some other things that we would point at. We would say, well, Scripture doesn't necessarily say that it's a sin. Maybe it's a waste of time. Maybe it's a waste of money, but gambling does have that element to it that gets a lot of people drawn in, and a lot of people addicted that folks need to be careful of they need to be aware of.

Jeff Laird

I think we also have to remember that there is a there is a difference between something that is not necessarily good if it's done very often. Versus something that in and of itself maybe isn't great, but when it's occasional, then it's not as much of an issue. Having a gigantic slice of cake with ice cream is not especially great for a person's health. But doing that every once in a while in and of itself isn't going to completely destroy your health. Its not totally going to destroy your body. And the same thing would be something like if you're buying a lottery ticket every year or something, that's obviously not something that's going to ruin you financially, so there is a difference between saying this is something that is so dangerous. So awful.

Jeff Laird

It's certainly not addictive to the same extent as things like heroin are, but there are things that we have to be careful of that doesn't mean that the entire concept by itself is so dangerous that just because it's not great. There are things that we do that aren't great that are OK when they're done every once in a while because of the benefits they have. In my view, I don't think that there's much going on in gambling that provides even those side benefits like eating cake. So for me, that's something that just isn't very appealing.

Kevin Stone

Jesus warned us about the deceitfulness of riches. Because riches in scripture are often presented as something that can get in between us and God. It can damage our spiritual relationship with our Lord. When Jesus was telling his parable of the four soils. He said. There was one type of ground where the seed came and it fell on the ground. It started to grow, but then Mark four and verse 19. The cares of this world and the deceitfulness of riches. That phrase is one we can't overlook the deceitfulness of riches and the desires for other things enter in and choke the word and it becomes unprofitable.

Kevin Stone

So riches can be deceiving. I mean they promise to solve so many problems. You know if I just had enough money then all my problems would be solved. All my worries would go away. Well, we all know

that that's a lie. That's part of the deceitfulness of riches, and it's something that plays into the temptation to gamble for so many people. Need to watch out for that.

Shea Houdmann

Absolutely anyone who's considering gambling. I would encourage you to do a study in the Book of Proverbs on all the different verses that talk about money and that'll give you a completely different perspective. Again, Proverbs is not a list of commands. More list of principles of wisdom than if you follow these and generally speaking your life will be better, but I'd be really hard to make a case that gambling is something we should have involved in when you studied the financial principles in Proverbs. Jeff, I really like what you said about different things that we maybe waste time or money on.

Shea Houdmann

I remember someone submitted a question to us and not that long ago where they were trying to argue in favor of gambling and their main line of reasoning was, well, we waste money on all sorts of things. I mean like going to a movie is a waste of money, eating fast food is a waste of money when you can eat something cheaper or healthier at home. All these different things we waste time and money on. And I'm like are you seriously comparing saying we shouldn't waste our time on anything at all? So if you think these other things are complete waste of time, well, we shouldn't be doing any of them.

Shea Houdmann

It's like saying, well, just because you waste your time on these things means I can waste my money on gambling. I really didn't see his logic there, but we shouldn't be wasting money or time on anything. Obviously there's a room in the Christian life for entertainment. There's room for having fun. There's room for using our money for things that are fun so but no, comparing gambling to other things that are a waste of time or money that to me that's a nonstarter because my goal is to never waste time or money on anything. So if you think that's the case with gambling or going to movies or whatever, you shouldn't be involved in any of it. You should not do anything that you think as this completely devoid of value.

Jeff Laird

Yeah, if you really think that there's nothing of value in there at all. I mean, if you go see a film or a movie, there's some aesthetic value. There's entertainment value in that they could be bonding experience with the family. Same with food, same with sports. When people run on a track, they're running around in circles. From a certain perspective, they're not accomplishing anything. But there's physical benefits. There's other things like that are involved gambling. It's just really hard to come up with any ancillary benefits like that.

Jeff Laird

I like that you brought up the book of Proverbs. There's a lot of statements in Proverbs that are good. I think there's an especially good one at the start of chapter six in Proverbs, and it shows not only the dangers that are involved in taking what we would think of is stupid risks, but it also kind of emphasizes this difference between something that's an investment versus something that's just a gamble. Solomon is talking about putting up security for a stranger, and the quick explanation of what that means is, is if you are tying your financial status by saying, oh, if this person that I don't know that I've never met can't

pay this debt. I'll pay it for that person, I'll mortgage my house, or something else in my life. He says that's a really bad idea. Go and beg to get out of that because that is not wise.

Jeff Laird

That's an example of why we should say there's a difference between risks that are reasonable that it's not a guarantee, but it looks like something that could make sense versus doing something with your money or with your goods that just there's no reason for you to think it's going to have success and it's going to put you at tremendous risk.

Jeff Laird

I also think it's good to bring up the idea that the gambling thing needs to be looked into carefully before somebody gets into it. I have family who live in Las Vegas, which here in the states is a Mecca for gambling. It's sort of the gambling capital, if not the world, certainly of North America and I have been there to visit at times, and I've heard stories from them of people who will sit for hours and hours and hours in casinos and just pour their money into things like slot machines and table games and things like that. It's not a happy sort of existence, and it's not the sort of thing that people got into from the get go thinking, yes, I would like to spend 35 or 40 hours a week dumping every penny I have into this machine. There's a reason they call slot machines one armed bandits, because it's all part of that system, so it's good for us to look at those things and understand the difference between saying am I taking a step of faith and hoping that what I'm doing is really going to bring me success. Or am I just falling for the deceitfulness of riches because somebody conning me into saying if I give this person money, then maybe I'll get rich really quick. There's a big difference between those.

Shea Houdmann

The last time that Melissa and I, Melissa my wife, were in a casino other than like walking through it to get to the amazing buffet was on our honeymoon and there was a casino right next to our hotel and so we decided the two of us together \$20, that's all we're going to risk. Which at that point in our lives actually was a decent amount of money. But at one point we were up to almost like \$40. We'd almost doubled our money, and I was kind of like this whole gambling thing, this is easy. Why do some people struggle with this well? But then in the evening we were down to I think, around \$3. So I'm like God humbled me very quickly, and that lesson has stayed with me is like no, I'm not so smart that I can figure this out. Or I'm not so disciplined that I can know where to stop. No this is not something that I want to spend time with.

Shea Houdmann

And if you watch the commercials on TV. The recent ones. About all the sports books that are out there and there's many of them. They're more popping up day after day. There's now like disclaimers. They have to put on there. It's like always bet responsibly. Always. Only bet would you decide it had ahead of time to bet.

Shea Houdmann

Even commercials that are specifically in the sense countering all that ones, encouraging you to gamble, saying, be very careful when you gamble, and the reason I have to do this because how powerful temptation it is and how many people's lives and families have been destroyed by the addiction to

gambling or taking exorbitant risks in gambling in hopes of getting rich quick. This is not something that Christians should be a part of.

Shea Houdmann

Again, please don't hear any like legalistic thing though there's absolutely no way Christian should ever gamble in any sense. That's not what we're saying. We're saying the consistent message of scripture is we are to be wise with their money there to be careful with our money. We are to invest it and to make it grow in a careful sense and gambling is none of those things. So please hear that to be our primary advice to you today is this gambling is something you're considering. Study what the scripture have to say and we think God will lead you in a different direction.

Shea Houdmann

So Jeff and Kevin, thank you for joining me again today. It's been a continuation of our series through the top 20 questions of all time on Got Questions on gambling. Is gambling a sin? Should Christians be involved in gambling?

Shea Houdmann

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