

What's Wrong with Gambling? When Love is Lost

By Weston Ware and Ferrell Foster

The central moral imperative of the Bible is love—love of God and love of neighbor.

He [Jesus] said to him, “‘You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind.’ This is the greatest and first commandment. And a second is like it: ‘You shall love your neighbor as yourself.’ On these two commandments hang all the law and the prophets” (Matthew 22:37-40, also Mark 12:28-34 and Luke 10:27).

This “great commandment” may not seem to apply to gambling, but it does. To bet against others is, at its base, a desire to get from another what he or she possesses--usually money. A person who loves his or her neighbors does not wish to take their money.

Love imposes strong demands upon us every day. Any tendency to limit love should be checked by Jesus’ admonition for us to love our neighbors as we love ourselves. The word “neighbor” includes the entire human family, with special concern for vulnerable individuals. Love leads us to seek the welfare or interest of others. It never allows us the luxury of self-interest to the exclusion of the other person’s interests and needs.

Do nothing from selfish ambition or conceit, but in humility regard others as better than yourselves. Let each of you look not to your own interests, but to the interests of others (Philippians 2:3-4, also Romans 12:10; 13:10).

Love is the royal law (James 2:8), the law of Christ (Galatians 6:2), and the principle by which our lives are to be regulated (Romans 14:13-21).

You do well if you really fulfill the royal law according to the scripture, “You shall love your neighbor as yourself” (James 2:8).

Bear one another’s burdens, and in this way you will fulfill the law of Christ (Galatians 6:2).

I know and am persuaded in the Lord Jesus that nothing is unclean in itself; but it is unclean for anyone who thinks it unclean. If your brother or sister is being injured by what you eat, you are no longer walking in love. Do not let what you eat cause the ruin of one for whom Christ died (Romans 14:14-15).

Love refuses to engage in actions that mistreat or exploit others. Love surely is violated when personal pleasure and profit are gained at another's pain and loss, as they are in gambling. And to pass laws that legalize and promote gambling also harms others. This is especially true of the most vulnerable people in a society, because out of desperation they often engage in gambling, especially lotteries, are far higher levels than the more wealthy.

Love requires that we recognize and attempt to meet the needs of others. Gambling, with its exploitation of others, ignores the nobler qualities of humans, among which are reason, justice, compassion, and a sense of responsibility. Gambling weakens the foundations of a responsible community life. Love's work, on the other hand, is always to build up, never to tear down.

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