

Why Gambling Is So Dangerous

1 Corinthians 10:13

James C. Denison, Ph.D.
CEO, Denison Forum
Dallas, Texas

The Supreme Court recently [struck down](#)ⁱ a federal law that prohibits sports gambling. The landmark decision gives states the right to legalize betting on sports. New Jersey plans to be the first state to offer legal wagering on the results of a game. Delaware, Mississippi, New York, Pennsylvania, and West Virginia are expected to follow suit.

My purpose today is not to debate the legalities of sports gambling. Rather, it is to focus on gambling in the context of biblical truth and God's best for us.

Understand the promise and power of gambling

According to the American Gaming Association, gambling in the US is a [\\$240 billion industry](#)ⁱⁱ employing 1.7 million people in forty states. Why is gambling so popular?

The former Director of Gaming Enforcement for the state of New Jersey [told a conference](#)ⁱⁱⁱ that the success of Atlantic City was tied to how well it sold its "only products." He explained: "That product is not entertainment or recreation or leisure. It's really adrenaline: a biological substance capable of producing excitement—highs generated usually by anticipation or expectation of a future event, especially when the outcome of that event is in doubt."

According to a chief regulator of the industry, gambling is not only a drug, but a mind-altering drug. One author calls it a "controlled substance."

Psychologists [offer](#)^{iv} several reasons for the popularity of gambling in our culture:

- It provides a sense of partial reinforcement we crave. "I'll get lucky next time" is a powerful lure.
- Some fall for the "gambler's fallacy" of believing that a string of losses makes a win more likely.
- The illusion of control causes many gamblers to believe that they have some power over the outcome, whether picking numbers in a lottery or blowing on dice before throwing them.
- Loss aversion is a major motivator: we feel more pain over losing \$100 than joy over winning \$100. When a gambler loses money, he or she is motivated to keep gambling to recover what has been lost.

Solomon observed, "Those who work their land will have abundant food, but those who chase fantasies will have their fill of poverty" (Proverbs 28:19 NIV). He added,

"Whoever loves money never has enough; whoever loves wealth is never satisfied with their income. This too is meaningless" (Ecclesiastes 5:10 NIV).

Paul warned that "the love of money is a root of all kinds of evils" (1 Timothy 6:10).

Beware the plague of addictive gambling

As many as 750,000 young people [have a gambling addiction](#)^v. People between the ages of twenty and thirty have the highest rates of [problem gambling](#)^{vi} (defined as "an urge to gamble continuously despite harmful negative consequences or a desire to stop").

People who abuse alcohol are twenty-three times more likely to develop a gambling addiction. An estimated 50 percent of those with gambling problems commit crimes to support their addiction.

According to the Illinois Institute for Addiction Recovery, there is [evidence](#)^{vii} that pathological gambling is an addiction similar to chemical addiction. Winning at gambling has been compared neurologically to a cocaine addict receiving an infusion of the drug.

Those who are pathological gamblers are highly likely to exhibit other psychiatric problems, including substance abuse, mood and anxiety disorders, or personality disorders.

Problem gambling has also been linked to increased suicide attempts. A report in the United States by the National Council on Problem Gambling showed that approximately one in five pathological gamblers attempts suicide. The council also reported that suicide rates among pathological gamblers were higher than for any other addictive disorder.

Step-based treatment programs now exist for problem gamblers. Anti-addiction drugs are being tested on gambling addicts as well.

Does the possibility of gambling addiction mean that all gambling is wrong?

Many substances and activities can become addictive. The fact that some people are [addicted to their cell phones](#)^{viii} does not mean that cell phones should be illegal.

But it does mean that you should absolutely know your limits and be aware of any inclination toward gambling addiction. This [online test](#)^{ix} is one way to determine whether you have a problem or not.

Scripture teaches, "Do not get drunk on wine, which leads to debauchery. Instead, be filled with the Spirit" (Ephesians 5:18 NIV). This text does not mean that no one should ever drink alcohol. But it does mean that no one should ever get drunk. Then alcohol becomes the primary determiner of our actions rather than the Holy Spirit.

The same principle applies to any substance or activity, gambling included. If gambling rather than the Spirit is controlling your life, stop and get help now.

Trust God's power over temptation

Now to our text. Scripture promises, "No temptation has overtaken you that is not common to man. God is faithful, and he will not let you be tempted beyond your ability, but with the temptation he will also provide the way of escape, that you may be able to endure it" (1 Corinthians 10:13).

From this remarkable text we find four crucial imperatives.

One: Expect to be tempted. You will never face a unique temptation. Human nature doesn't change, so Satan's strategies don't change. What worked against our ancestors works against us. We should expect to be tempted, because this fact is common to the entire human race.

Two: Respond to temptation in the power of God. While we should expect to face temptation, we should also expect to defeat temptation: "He will also provide the way of escape, that you may be able to endure it." Notice the definite article: "*the* way of escape." There is always a way out, no matter what temptation we are facing.

In classical Greek, this phrase referred to a way out of the sea. One commentator pictured God's promise this way: a ship is approaching a rocky shore and facing inevitable shipwreck. Suddenly it slips through a gap in the coast and sails into security and peace.

"Endure it" means "bear up under it." The temptation will not go away, but we will be able to withstand it. This was true even for Jesus: after he defeated the enemy's temptations in the wilderness, the devil "departed from him until an opportune time" (Luke 4:13).

Three: Ask for the help you need. Our text promises that "God is faithful" in every moment and need we face. "Faithful" translates the Greek word for "trustworthy, dependable, reliable." We can always count on our Father to be all he promises to be:

- "The LORD your God is God, the faithful God who keeps covenant and steadfast love with those who love him and keep his commandments, to a thousand generations" (Deuteronomy 7:9).
- "He who calls you is faithful; he will surely do it" (1 Thessalonians 5:24).
- "Let us hold fast to the confession of our hope without wavering, for he who promised is faithful" (Hebrews 10:23).
- "Jesus Christ, the faithful witness" (Revelation 1:5).

Because he is faithful to us, he will always give us what we need to obey his word and will. In this case, "he will not let you be tempted beyond your ability." If there is a

temptation you cannot defeat in his strength, you will not face it. This means that every temptation you face is one you *can* defeat in his strength.

However, you must ask for what you need. Jesus counseled his followers to "watch and pray that you may not enter into temptation" (Matthew 26:41). He promised us, "Ask, and it will be given to you; seek, and you will find, knock, and it will be opened to you" (Matthew 7:7). But we must ask, seek, and knock. God honors the freedom he gives us and will not force his help upon us.

F. B. Meyer noted that "the greatest tragedy of life is not unanswered prayer, but unoffered prayer." What temptations do you need to seek God's help in defeating today?

Four: Go to God the moment temptation strikes. When we expect to face and defeat temptation by seeking the help of God and his people, we position ourselves to receive all that we need for spiritual victory. But we're not done. We must then take "the way of escape" our Father offers us. We must choose to "endure" the temptations we face.

In other words, we must choose to obey God as he works in and through our lives:

- Scripture teaches us to "flee from sexual immorality" (1 Corinthians 6:18). But we must choose to flee.
- We are told to "resist the devil, and he will flee from you" (James 4:7). But we must choose to resist.
- We are warned that "the love of money is a root of all kinds of evils" (1 Timothy 6:10). But we must choose not to love money.

Billy Sunday: "Temptation is the devil looking through the keyhole. Yielding is opening the door and inviting him in." Rick Warren noted that "every temptation is an opportunity to do good." But we must want to do good.

If you don't have the strength to choose to obey God, you can ask for that strength. If you don't have the faith to believe that his will is best, you can ask for such faith. Whatever you need, you can ask God to provide. But then you must choose to use his help.

As we work, God works.

Conclusion

Gambling, whether legalized betting on sports or any other form of wagering, can become a powerful drug. It can easily become addictive and lead to other destructive behaviors. And it can deceive us into believing the lie that we are in charge of our circumstances and our lives.

Only the gambler knows if he or she is wagering for fun or from an insidious motive. Thomas Watson was right: "Sin has the devil for its father, shame for its companion, and death for its wages."

Every time.

ⁱ http://www.espn.com/chalk/story/_/id/23501236/supreme-court-strikes-federal-law-prohibiting-sports-gambling

ⁱⁱ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Gambling_in_the_United_States

ⁱⁱⁱ <https://www.pbs.org/wgbh/pages/frontline/shows/gamble/procon/substance.html>

^{iv} <http://www.whatispsychology.biz/psychological-reasons-gambling-addictive>

^v <https://www.addictions.com/gambling/5-alarming-gambling-addiction-statistics/>

^{vi} https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Problem_gambling

^{vii} https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Problem_gambling

^{viii} <http://www.health.com/anxiety/cell-phone-addiction>

^{ix} <http://www.jeu-aiderreference.qc.ca/www2/Article/213/en/gambling-addiction-test>