

GAMBLING AND THE TENTH COMMANDMENT

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Gambling in the United States, despite all the Federal and local restrictions against it, is the leading industry in the country, both in the number of participants and the amount of money involved.¹

From state run lotteries, racetracks and off-track betting parlors; to private casinos and Internet games; and culminating in the office football pool, gambling has become a pervasive and acceptable form of social activity. Under the guise of supplementing a state's budget, supporting education, or providing much-needed economic development (i.e. jobs), communities have approved and encouraged a wide spectrum of gambling activities. Much has been discussed of the pros and cons of gambling and whether or not society is helped or hurt by the practice. Questions concerning whether this is a proper way to increase the tax base or a trap to which people are addicted and society cheapened have been endlessly debated in the newspapers and legislatures. Countless debates are possible from a political perspective, but a Christian must also view gambling from a Biblical perspective. By determining our point of view consistently with Biblical principles, we can offer an important perspective to this timeless controversy.

The word "gamble" itself is not in the Bible. The practice of "casting lots" is mentioned, but this appears to have a different purpose than our modern definition of the practice. Recorded instances in the Bible indicate the practice was used to make choice, (Lev 16:8; Num 26:55; Jud 20:10; 1 Sam 10:20; Acts 1:26) determined position, (1 Chr 24:3, 5, 19; Luke 1:9) or bring judgment (Josh 7:13-18; Joel 3:3; Obad 11). As indicated by Proverbs 16:33, God determined the outcome and no personal gain was involved. Matthew 27:35 also records the instance of the

¹ John Scarne, *Scarne's New Complete Guide to Gambling* (N.Y., Simon and Schuster, Inc., 1986), 1.

Roman soldiers casting lots for the garments of Jesus. Quick access to money does not appear to be the goal.

For the purpose of this paper gambling will be defined as “to bet money on the outcome of a game, contest, or other event.”² The idea represented is the notion of gaining wealth through a chance event. While all forms of risk taking can in some sense be seen as a “gamble”, it is risk involving money and chance that is our focus. Many financial decisions have uncertain outcomes. Examples of these would be whether or not to start a new business or remain working as an employee, moving to a new city, getting married or investing in the stock market. These, however, are not behaviors in the truest sense of the word gamble. For these activities the Bible encourages us to count the cost and make well-reasoned choice. The traditional notions of gambling are not susceptible of this analysis. For that reason, this paper will deal solely with the desire for quick money based on a game of chance.

Historically, Biblical instruction concerning the gambling issue often begins with the Tenth Commandment on coveting. This commandment, found in Exodus 20:17 states,

Thou shalt not covet thy neighbor’s house; thou shalt not covet thy neighbor’s wife, nor his manservant, nor his maidservant, nor his ox, nor his ass, nor any thing that is thy neighbor’s.

Does gambling in fact fall under the Tenth Commandment and is it a form of coveting? Do we as New Testament Christians have freedom to decide for ourselves in this matter since it is not specifically mentioned in the Bible? To make these determinations five areas will be explored to come to an understanding of the problem.

- #1. The meaning of the word “covet”.
- #2. The relationship between desire and behavior.
- #3. The Biblical view of work.
- #4. Can right desire justify gambling?
- #5. The role of the Church.

² *American Heritage Dictionary* (1973), s.v. “gamble”

From this analysis a conclusion will be drawn to determine whether or not gambling is a violation of the Scriptures.

The Meaning of the Word “Covet”

In the Old Testament the word covet comes from the Hebrew word “*chamad*” meaning “to delight in.”³ The most common translation, the word “desire”, is used eleven times in the Old Testament (Gen 3:6; Ex 34:24; Deut 5:21, 7:25; Job 20:20; Ps 19:10, 68:16; Prov 12:12, 21:20; Isa 1:29, 53:2). This word is also translated in the KJV as “beauty”, “lust”, “covet” and “delectable thing”. (Ps 39:11, Prov 6:25, Isa 44:9). The book of Daniel uses “*chamad*” to mean “pleasant”, “beloved”, or “precious” (Daniel 10:3, 10:11, 10:19, 11:38, 11:43). *Chamad* is translated “covet” in the Exodus and Deuteronomy accounts which give us the Tenth Commandment, and also in Joshua 7:21 and Micah 2:2 to describe wrong desire. Since the root word itself means simply “strong desire”, it is used in both a good and bad sense in the Bible. Clearly it is not desire alone that is wrong, rather the location of that desire determines whether a violation of the commandment occurs.

In the New Testament, “covet” comes from the Greek word “*Epithumeo*” which means “to set your heart upon” or the word “*Zeloo*” which means “to have a warmth of feeling for or against.”⁴ Jesus used the word in Matthew 5:28 to condemn “lust” as a basis for adultery and Paul used it in Romans 7:7 again as the word “lust”. The word is used in 1 Timothy 3:1 however, in a positive sense when Paul says it is good for man to “desire” the office of a Bishop. Hebrews 6:11 states we should “desire” to “show the same diligence to the full assurance of hope unto the end.”

³ Biblesoft’s New Exhaustive Strong’s Numbers and Concordance with expanded Greek-Hebrew Dictionary, s.v. “covet”

⁴ Ibid.

Adam Clark explains the word covet to mean (it) signifies an earnest and strong desire after a matter on which all the affections are concentrated and fixed whether the thing be good or bad. This is what we commonly term as covetousness which word is taken both in a good and bad sense. So when the scripture says that covetousness is idolatry yet it also says covet earnestly the best things. So we find that this disposition is sinful or holy according to the object on which it is fixed. In this command the covetousness that is placed on forbidden objects is that which is prohibited and condemned. To covet in this sense is intensely to long after in order to enjoy as property the person or thing coveted.⁵

Using this definition, it must be determined if the “desire” for the potential money to be gained constitutes desiring a forbidden object.

The Relationship Between Desire and Behavior

The oft-stated goal of the gambler is simply to acquire more money than when he started. For that reason one must look at the desire for wealth and the accumulation of money in an appropriate context in order to determine if a person desires a forbidden object. Is the desire for money wrong? Being wealthy in and of itself is not a violation of Scripture. Abraham was in fact blessed by God and became a very wealthy man. By rejecting the tribute offered from the King of Sodom, Abraham could attribute his wealth solely to the blessing of God.⁶ The same can be said of Isaac and Jacob. Isaac was the recipient of the covenant blessings bestowed on his

⁵ Adam Clark, *Discourses on Various Subjects Relative to the Being and Attribute of God and His Works* (New York: McElrath & Bongo, 1830), II, 36 f; quoted in Rousas Rushdoony, *Institutes of Biblical Law*, (The Presbyterian and Reformed Publishing Co., 1973), 633-4

⁶ Gen. 14: 19-24

father and also enjoyed earthly wealth.⁷ Jacob too attributed all of his wealth directly to God's blessing and divine guidance. Following a God-given dream, Jacob initiated the plan of taking only the spotted and speckled flocks from his father-in-law, Laban. Though Laban consistently changed the terms of their agreement to seemingly gain an advantage over Jacob, God favored Jacob and made him rich.⁸

Since the Bible cannot be said to condemn wealth itself, it must be in the acquisition or the spending of wealth that God's blessing or condemnation is given. Both Abraham and Jacob did not make becoming wealthy the focus of their lives. Their desire was never for the riches of this world, but rather to be approved by God. God blessed their principled decision to serve Him. Jesus, later, condemned the rich young ruler because he could not sacrifice his wealth to completely follow the Lord. The riches of this world were shown as the basis for the young man's status and security, and consequently he could not forsake them. It was not the fact that the young man was wealthy that made him ineligible for the Kingdom, but his reliance on worldly goods instead of God as his source of blessing.⁹ As Walter Kaiser points out in his discussion of wealth and holiness, Israel was constantly warned by God to be careful and not to forget their creator after acquiring material blessing.¹⁰ The fear is that people can easily substitute materialism for holiness. The Apostle Paul similarly observes in Romans 1 that as a society begins to turn from God they will worship the "creation" more than the "creator".

Because the desire of Abraham and Jacob was rightly placed, it led to behavior of which God approved. This linkage of desire and behavior was surprisingly ignored in some explanations involving the tenth commandment. Commonly, the tenth commandment was felt to

⁷ Gen. 25:11

⁸ Gen. 31

⁹ Matt. 19:16-30

¹⁰ Walter Kaiser, *Toward Old Testament Ethics* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1983), 209-212

deal strictly with the emotion or the desire of wanting something and not with any overt behavior (unlike the other nine). Rushdoony comments on this error in exegesis by stating:

The misconception of this law began with pietism, which limited God's law to moral precepts. Religion was internalized and therefore action ceased to be as important as the heart, on top of that, the idea that gain of any sort was somewhat unspiritual was also propagated so that covetousness took on an exclusive evil meaning.¹¹

Habakkuk 2:9 also makes it clear that evil covetousness is the problem and that getting what you want by the wrong method constitutes the breaking of this commandment. "Thus what is clearly condemned by the tenth commandment is every attempt to gain by fraud, coercion, or deceit that which belongs to our neighbor."¹²

The importance of achieving a balance involving both desire and behavior must therefore be linked. If not, we are led to the wrong notion that holds to the idea desire or ambition is suspect in and of itself. An adherent to this wrongheaded approach would simply go through life without any real strong and positive emotions. In point of fact, the Bible teaches emotions are necessary to life and a good thing, but can be brought under control so they do not lead us to wrong behavior. A Biblical illustration of this concept can be found in the life of David and his adultery with Bathsheba. When David committed adultery he clearly broke the Seventh Commandment, "Thou shall not commit adultery."¹³ Later, in an attempt to cover up his crime, he sent Uriah, Bathsheba's husband, to the front line with the purpose of having him killed. Legally it was within David's authority to do this. In war, sending a man to fight at the front is not a crime. The wrong was not that David ordered Uriah to the front, but that his order came with the expectation of Uriah's death and was for the purpose of taking Uriah's wife. It was David's desire for Bathsheba that led to his shameful behavior, and it was this behavior that

¹¹ Rousas Rushdoony, *Institutes of Biblical Law* (The Presbyterian and Reformed Publishing Co., 1973), 634

¹² Ibid.

violated the tenth Commandment as well as the Sixth Commandment forbidding murder. It was on this basis that Nathan the prophet rebuked David. God viewed David's behavior as murder, regardless of any legal technicality.¹⁴

Another example can be found in an account of King Ahab's life. He desired a vineyard that belonged to a villager named Naboth. This resulted in Queen Jezebel securing it for the king through treachery, deceit and a trial that resulted in a death. Even though Ahab himself had done nothing to secure the land, Elijah rebuked him for murder. Again, God viewed Ahab's actions as murder even though he technically had done nothing.¹⁵ By fixing his desire on a forbidden object, Naboth's land, it led to sinful behavior. His desire had set the wheels of wrong behavior in motion.

Miriam, the sister of Moses, also ran into trouble for failing to curb her desire. She coveted the position Moses had as a prophet and insisted she could hear from God as well as he. This desire led her to gossip and spread dissention in the camp. God's judgment came in the form of leprosy.¹⁶ Only the plea by Moses caused God to restore her to the camp.

The Biblical Role of Work

In dealing with the subject of gambling then, it becomes necessary to look at the desire behind the action to determine the rightness or wrongness of the behavior. The true motivation of the gambler must be looked at to determine if gambling violates God's law. If the acquisition of wealth is not wrong in and of itself, then the Biblical method for obtaining money must be analyzed. In this context it is necessary to understand the Biblical role of work. Work is first mentioned in Genesis 1:26-28 as a command by God to Adam at the very beginning of creation.

¹³ Exodus 20:14

¹⁴ 2 Samuel 11 & 12

¹⁵ I Kings 21

¹⁶ Num. 12

Adam was responsible for keeping the garden, for naming the animals, and learning all he could about the world God had created for him. Work was good; it defined him and was a blessing by God to him. With Adam's sin, however, his work changed. Genesis 3:14-19 gives us the consequences of his fall in relation to work. The earth was cursed and brought forth thorns and thistles which would force Adam to struggle in all his pursuits. Adam was still required to work after the fall, but difficulties would now make that work much less enjoyable. This change in working conditions has led to a continual struggle between man and God. That controversy involves recognizing and accepting the consequences of sin.

The Mosaic laws regarding work can be seen in the relationship between work and the Fourth Commandment, "Remember the Sabbath Day to keep it holy."¹⁷ The Fourth commandment contains the phrase "six days shalt thou labor." This part is usually forgotten in favor of the seventh day of rest. Significantly, rest was only available after six days of labor.

The redeemed man's work is not an attempt to create a paradise on earth, but to fulfill God's requirements within the kingdom. The redeemed man is a citizen of the kingdom of God and he abides by the laws thereof that is his work, his duty, and his path to dominion. The fact of the Sabbath presupposes the fact of work.¹⁸

Thus, when man views work as a bad thing or desires to obtain wealth without working, he goes against the authority God has established from the very beginning of time. Even Gambler's Anonymous recognizes this fact when it gives immaturity as one of those reasons people gamble.

A desire to have all the good things in life without any great effort on their part seems to be the common character pattern of problem gamblers. Many Gamblers Anonymous members accept the fact that they were unwilling to grow up. Subconsciously they felt they could avoid mature responsibility by wagering on the spin of a wheel or the turn of a card, and so the struggle to escape responsibility finally became a subconscious obsession.¹⁹

¹⁷ Exodus 20:8-11

¹⁸ Rushdoony, 147

¹⁹ Gambler's Anonymous @gamblersanonymous.org

The mature person accepts work as part of the adult world. The desire to get out of work or create some kind of paradise where work does not exist is to go against God's clearly mandated authority. The Bible teaches that work is an important part of all that we do. Proverbs 13:11, 12:24, 13:4, 22:29 all state that those that work shall prosper while the lazy person will not. Thus "work thus has as its goal the restored kingdom of God. Work therefore is a religious and moral necessity."²⁰

Because unregenerate man seeks to throw off the authority of God, man will also throw off his divine imperative to work. An unregenerate man sees work as an infringement on liberty, his time, a task involving sheer drudgery, and something to be avoided. It is in this context that the gambler often finds himself. He wishes quick money and an easy life but does not want to gain it by hard and diligent work. He sees no divine imperative to work nor does he believe work in any way contributes to the betterment of society. As a result, it is something to be avoided whenever possible. In fact, the ultimate goal is to win enough money so work never rears its ugly head again. The "easy" lifestyle of endless parties, frivolity, and immorality seems to be the main attraction for some.

The Apostle Paul in Ephesians 4:8 states that work is important under God's authority by writing, "Let him that stole steal no more but rather let him labor working with his hands the thing which is good that he may have to give to him that needeth." Here stealing, a violation of the Eighth Commandment is seen as a shortcut to God's mandate to work. Also, Paul gives the purpose of work as not simply a necessity to support oneself, but also as a means to be able to give to others. The desire to accumulate wealth only for oneself thus violates the New Testament's view of charity and giving.

²⁰ Rushdoony 309

How keenly it (tenth commandment) strikes at the roots of our materialistic Western culture. One offensive element of our materialism is insensitivity to the needs of others, which it so often breeds, insensitivity to the poor in our own cities and to the deprived around the world. But even more offensive is our unreasonable dissatisfaction with our abundance of wealth and opportunity ... Unfortunately, covetousness is what the media seems determined to instill in us so that our extravagant and wasteful economy will continue to grow ...”²¹

1 Corinthians 6:10 furthers this point when it says that to love God is our highest duty and covetous man who is a servant of unrighteousness is forever excluded from the kingdom of God. Ephesians 5:5 declares, “Neither thieves nor covetous will inherit the kingdom of God.” Matthew 6:20 declares, “Our concern should be more to lay up riches in heaven than riches in this world.” Romans 1:21 gives ungratefulness as one of the reasons a society turns from God. Focusing on earthly wealth brings dissatisfaction with God’s blessing. Study after study agrees that America has been materially blessed beyond virtually all other nations: yet, individuals continue to report they are not satisfied. The gambler has a desire for more that stems from an inner dissatisfaction with his lot in life.²²

The problem of gambling therefore is the problem of wrong desire. One definition of covetousness is that it

is a strong, sometimes irresistible desire of possessing or increasing one’s possessions. It is evident that under its influence the heart, instead of inspiring to noble, high, and divine goods, will be brought to; the almost exclusive contemplation of earthly, material things; and thus, instead of becoming gradually more closely united with God will become more and more estranged from him. Since where the treasure is there the heart is also, the heart of the covetous cannot be with God, but with Mammon; he is not a servant of God but of idols.²³

When one’s goal is simply wealth, with no relation to the kingdom of God, one is serving Mammon rather than God. This being a clear violation of Scripture, gambling in this sense would be wrong. Because wrong desire leads to wrong behavior, gambling becomes the

²¹ Boice, *Foundations of the Christian Faith* (Downers Grove, IL: Intervarsity Press, 1986), 244.

²² Gambler’s Anonymous

behavior which violates the Tenth Commandment. Trying to achieve wealth without legitimate work is the motivation of the gambler as well as desiring earthly riches instead of God's blessing.

Can “Right Desire” Justify Gambling?

The conclusion that certain types of gambling could be honorable if the desire behind the activity was noble and not simply for personal gain is often advanced. If a charity sponsors a “casino night” to help raise funds for its cause, would this, then not be a proper activity given the “desire” to help? To answer this, one must look at the purpose behind the commandment and gain an understanding of the behavior to be curbed. Thieliicke makes a strong argument when he states

We must interpret the negative character of the Decalogue.... There is within this negativity a protest against man as he actually is. ‘You shall not kill- because you *are* a murderer’; ‘You shall not commit adultery- because you *are* an adulterer’. The negative character is thus to be understood in terms of the specific background of the Decalogue..²⁴

Following his logic, it must be understood that the heart of man is a covetous heart. An unregenerate man has set his desire on the wealth of this world and no desire to help a worthy cause can offset the basic motivation. This is, in Thieliicke's view, a heart condition identified as covetousness that must be addressed. As for the believer, Scripture constantly tells us to “guard” the heart. Ephesians 5:5 equates greed with idolatry. By placing the acquisition of wealth as a primary goal of life, money becomes a god just as surely as any Old Testament idol. When the children of Israel built the golden calf in the wilderness part of their worship claimed it was this

²³ N.T. Krehl, *McClintock and Strong Encyclopedia* (Electronic Database by BibleSoft. 2000), s.v. “covetousness”

²⁴ Helmut Thieliicke, *Theological Ethics, Vol. 1*, Edited by William H. Lazareth, (Philadelphia: Fortress Press. 1966), 441-2

idol that helped deliver them from the Egyptians.²⁵ By placing their gratefulness in a crafted image they offended the God who was the very source of all they had. Where the desire of one's heart is for earthly riches it is easy to attribute happiness to money rather than God.

Continuing along this line, we also find the Apostle Paul's admonition to be free of any practice that might be enslaving.²⁶ In modern day language, this would mean to avoid any practices that lead to addiction. Since gambling is referred to as an addictive behavior, it certainly would seem the better part of wisdom to avoid all forms of it. Gambler's Anonymous can testify to the fact that many people thought they were in complete control only to eventually face tragic consequences. Justifying gambling then, under the guise of "good desire", is to deny the basic character of man. The "heart is deceitful above all things" and to pretend otherwise is foolish.

Another justification of the gambler could be that they do not desire to get wealthy; in fact they know the odds are stacked against them and sudden wealth is unlikely to happen. They simply want to have fun and this is just a form of entertainment. Because they have self-control, limits for spending are established and not compromised. The argument states that spending \$100 in a casino is no different than spending \$100 to go to dinner and a movie.

Today, casino gambling is no longer seen as an evil pastime; rather, it is now viewed as a hobby that includes fine dining, great entertainment, and a respectable environment in which to have some fun. Even Los Vegas has transformed itself over the last 20 years, changing from a glitter and risk town for grown-ups into a family vacation destination. Throughout the rest of America, voters have approved casino gambling on their land to be something that offers substantial financial rewards for their people.²⁷

A case could be made for individual liberty in this rather limited situation. If one is responsible for himself alone, has a job, is not influencing any "weaker" Christians, and truly

²⁵ Ex. 32

²⁶ I Cor. 6:12

does manifest self-control, then it can be admitted there is no specific Bible prohibition against gambling. As Paul says, “All things are lawful unto me.”²⁸ A caution, however, exists in Paul’s conclusion that all things are lawful. He further states all things are not expedient. Just because I “can” do something does not mean I “should” do it. The logic here is that every Christian needs to evaluate their behavior in terms of how it is viewed by others. Paul, in fact, continues in the next verse to say making *another* person wealthy instead of ourselves is the real goal. None of us live to ourselves; we are a part of a greater whole, the Body of Christ and the Local Church.

The Role of the Church

It is one of the roles of the church to help believers live sanctified and holy lifestyles. Paul admonishes us to be aware of the “weaker” brother and to shy away from activities which may cause him to stumble. Using his admonitions, it would be sensible for a church to refrain from activities which may frustrate any person’s attempt to “guard their heart.” Conversely, the church should engage in activities that focus a person’s desire on the good things of the Gospel. In this light, even though an activity, such as “casino night”, may be for a worthy cause, it is encouraging people to practice behaviors that do not lead to holiness.

It is the church responsibility to teach the next generation Biblical doctrines and principles that will bring them into covenant relationship with Christ. The culture is often presenting a lifestyle completely adverse to the Bible and the Church must counterbalance this with an unambiguous message. In terms of gambling,

Teens are paying for our ill-fated social experiment with legal gambling. As more teens are being drawn into the culture of chance, gambling is influencing American society in deep and unexpected ways.... The pervasive worship of Lady Luck – on riverboat casinos, televised live lottery drawings, and at tempting theme-park casinos – alters our

²⁷ John Marchel, *K.I.S.S. Guide to Gambling* (New York: DK Publishing, 2001), 27.

²⁸ I Cor. 10:23-24

perspective on life. The idea that ‘hard work pays off’ is now believed by only one of three people surveyed. In the 1960’s, nearly 60 percent believed in the work ethic. We can count on this attitudinal sea change to affect our youth (and our nation’s future)... Unless we address the spiritual issues underlying gambling, America’s next generation may perish, having no vision, but only a daydream.²⁹

Every responsible Christian must seriously consider how his or her behavior affects the next generation rather than focus on self-amusement as justified by personal liberty. When your children or their friends know you have gone to a casino or watch you buy lottery tickets, then this behavior is given approval. As it is not yet known whether or not they will be able to keep their desires in check, it is the highest form of Christian duty to refrain from all activities which may serve to set others on an undesirable path.

Historically, the church has always regarded gambling as wrong.

The current struggle between gambling entrepreneurs and religious leaders reprises a similar struggle in the nineteenth century, which had its own fights over gambling and lotteries... the Boston Recorder did more than just run sermons against gambling in the nineteenth century. ‘It (covered) particular people who had gambled and lost everything. They gave a face to the issue.’ Politicians of early America also tried to dissuade gamblers. Now, probably the opposite is the case, ...because we have our government leaders promoting state lotteries, and you have journalists very often winking at it ... The church cannot keep yielding moral ground and expect to be any force for good in society.³⁰

The pressure from society to accept all manner of behaviors previously considered immoral has taken a toll on the church. Too many church leaders, in an effort to reach more people, have not wanted to be viewed as socially regressive. Under the guise of “personal liberty”, standards have eroded and the sense of the covenant community has been secondary to individual wants and needs.

It is now settled that gambling is a freely chosen form of entertainment, and that in a free society it is everyone’s prerogative to place wagers? Wrong. Gambling exploits a human weakness. Gambling parallels its constant companion, prostitution, in suggesting that one can buy happiness. When gambling is not only condoned but officially

²⁹ Timothy Morgan, “The Invisible Addiction,” *Christianity Today*. v 40 (8 April 1996): 12.

³⁰ John Zipperer, “Against All Odds”, *Christianity Today*. v 38 (14 Nov. 1994): 58-60.

supported by city and state officials through lotteries and licensed parlors, then government has become a pimp for sin. What my frustrated muse has been urging me to say is that gambling is a sin for the theologically sound reason that anything that exploits human weakness denigrates God's creation and separates us from our creator.³¹

The long held belief that gambling is a "sin" now appears to be based on many venerable precedents. The Apostle Paul understood the necessity of fixing our desires on that which will lead to holiness and turning our desires from the things of this world. The Tenth Commandment made it clear that if your desire lingers on forbidden objects, it is only a matter of time until your desire will cause you to sin. The church should be in the business of clearly labeling sin as sin so that the need for repentance is clearly understood.

Jesus commissioned his disciples to go into the world with the message hope that would "heal the brokenhearted and set the captive free." The results of gambling are beginning to be felt by the church as brokenhearted families are entering our doors in need of healing. Programs designed to help those addicted to gambling have joined those for the alcoholic, the abused, the divorced, and others. As the covenant community of the church seeks to embrace these troubled people, it does not seem sensible that others in the church would sanction these activities under the motive of "personal liberty". To do so focuses on the stronger vessels in these congregations to the detriment of the weaker. It is this general reluctance to take a firm, clear and reasoned stand on issues that have created much of the weakness seen in the role of the local church today.

Conclusion

The historical positions of the past express a valid viewpoint of God and man. The church must educate and convince its people of those doctrines and the reasoning behind them that lead to holiness and a strengthening of the believer's walk with Christ. First must come an understanding of mankind's sinful nature. That nature is to desire what does not belong to us

³¹ James Wall, "Water in the Basement, Judgment in the Flood", *Christian Century* 109. 16 (6 May 1992): 475-6.

and to believe the riches of this world are worth more than the glories yet to come. When the gambler covets the riches of this world, it is not his desire to wait for the blessings of God or to follow the path the Holy Spirit has set for his feet.

Secondly, there is also a divine imperative to work. As our culture veers further away from emphasizing the work ethic and highlights those who avoid real work as role models, the church must make every effort to present examples of good working individuals who have been blessed by God. Those who have found contentment in the Gospel must step to the forefront in order to counterbalance the oft-repeated societal mantra emphasizing materialism. This will be no easy task. The new paradigm of our American society can be expected to encourage spending as the only source of happiness. Who else but the church can challenge or respond? The church stands as the final voice of opposition.

Finally, much more teaching needs to take place on the relationship we all have to the body of Christ. Again, the societal message is one of individualism. This has led to self-centeredness, which is destructive to all aspects of the culture.

This “me” attitude has found its way into the church and often results in people who see no need to view their behavior in relation to other people. The weaker brother, the next generation, and the unsaved all view our behavior as an example of Christianity. Each Christian, therefore, must take the responsibility for their own behavior and view it in terms of its effect on others.

Because the gambler places his desire on the riches of this world instead of pleasing God, it should be concluded that this direction focuses our desire on a forbidden object. Gambling then becomes a behavior that is a violation of the Tenth Commandment. Any behavior that violates a commandment is sin and the church must act to condemn sin in every arena. Political

arguments can be left to the culture, but the Biblical evidence provides ample support for fixing our desires on things above instead of the world below. With the myriad of entertainment choices available in our society, it would seem the benefits of refraining from gambling far outweigh any justification to participate.

Jesus stated that he had been sent to this world to heal the brokenhearted and set the captive free.³² As the end result of gambling is often to make captives of people through addiction and cause families to suffer and become brokenhearted, the church should follow Jesus in leading people away from this behavior and not towards it. We will follow the advice of the Apostle Paul and “set our affection on things above, not on things on the earth.”³³

³² Luke 4:18

³³ Col. 3:2

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