

# Profit on Loss? a Treatise on Gambling

by W.T. Atkin

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*Gambling is a vice, not a virtue, and it leads to crime, economic instability, and the degradation of sports.*

**Scripture:** Proverbs 13:11, Matthew 6:24, Matthew 16:24, Ephesians 5:5, 1 Timothy 6:10

**Topics:** "Moral Decay", "Idolatry"

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## Description

W.T. Atkin preaches against the dangers of gambling, highlighting the selfishness, covetousness, and harm it brings to individuals, families, and society. He emphasizes that gambling is rooted in a bad state of mind, exemplifies a bad principle, and leads to crime, economic instability, and the degradation of sports. Atkin challenges the notion that gambling is harmless by illustrating its negative impact on individuals' character, relationships, and societal well-being, ultimately calling for a choice between serving God or Mammon.

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## Transcript

IT happened at a racecourse. It was a cold, wet day. He was dressed only in a light suit. He was blue with the cold and shivering. A friend said to him, "Look here! Why don't you buy yourself an overcoat? I saw a roll of notes in your hand." Aghast, he replied, "I can't spend that! That's betting money."

How utterly foolish! Yet that is typical of the foolishness of gamblers. Their conversation is full of comments like, "All horse players die broke", or "No bookmaker ever went to the poorhouse except in a Cadillac to visit his mother." But still they go on hoping for a fortune from their "investments".

They are the victims of the fever which besets a majority of Australia's citizens. A generation has grown up to which gambling practices, protected and promoted by governments, are as familiar as the classroom. Inducements to gamble abound on every hand. Many profess to see no wrong or harm in it. Are they right? Is gambling a vice or a virtue?

"There is nothing wrong with a little flutter"??

The usual argument in favour of gambling and participation in it runs like this, "What's wrong with buying a 3d. or 1/- ticket for a tea set or a motor car? Or with putting a 1/- on a horse? Or with having a ticket in Tatts? Or with putting a couple of shillings in the sweep at the office or factory at Cup time? After all, 1/- is not much. The loss of it will not ruin an individual or a family. And if the venture is successful, we shall be more comfortable, more contented, able to help other folk more, and even able to give liberally to the

church or foreign missions. Surely it is not a sin to wish to be comfortable. And if we may do so much good with winnings obtained at such small risk, why should any pious Peter' appoint himself a judge of what we do? Surely we can do as we like with our own money! We worked to earn it--it is ours how we choose to spend it is no one's business but our own."

Yes! Put that way, it all sounds pretty harmless and reasonable. And sad to say lots of church people see no harm in it. It offers a thrill--an escape from the drab monotony of slow earning. A man on an ordinary wage may earn enough to keep body and soul together, but what chance has he of ever being really satisfied and secure, of holidaying abroad, or of educating his children to fill a bigger job than his? He must get more than he is earning, so why not 1/- in a sweep, or on a horse, or in a raffle or why not a ticket in Tatt's? Such is the common attitude.

Let us look at the matter. First we should realise that insofar as a moral point is involved, the amount of money staked does not affect the issue. Some would say that it would be wrong for a working man, with family responsibilities, to bet with and lose each week his whole pay--but merely to bet and gamble with a shilling or two of it is all right. But the principle remains the same, whether the amount be £10 or 1/-. If gambling on the £10 scale is wrong then gambling on the 1/- scale is no less wrong.

"Life, is full of chances--it's a gamble."

So often it is said, "Why say it's wrong to take a chance with a 3d. or a few shillings? We are taking chances every day--the whole of life is a gamble."

But gambling is not merely "taking a chance". We all do "take chances" every day. We do so when we board a train or tram or bus--there is the risk of there being an accident. We do so when we eat--there may be something injurious hidden in the food. We do so when we cross a busy street or climb a stairway--we run the risk of being knocked down or falling. The business man does so when he enters a new market--he must take the chance of successfully competing against others. A minister does so when he visits amongst infectious diseases--he runs the risk of becoming infected.

Yes! But there's a difference!!

True! We take these chances daily. But there is a world of difference between those chances and gambling, One of the main things about gambling is that a risk is taken in the hope of making a personal gain without any contribution being made to the common good--the good of all--but, rather, at the expense or loss of others. Now, Would anyone be so morally and mentally warped as to suggest that that is the kind of risk a minister takes in visiting the sick--that he does in the hope of making a personal gain, makes no contribution to the good of others, but rather causes loss to others?

What about insurance?

So the inevitable risks of life are altogether different from gambling risks. The inevitable risks of life are covered by insurance and only a very poor thinker would compare insurance and gambling. Insurance covers risks, gambling creates them. Insurance lessens human anxieties, gambling increases them. Insurance is designed to counteract the inevitable risks of life and give a sense of certainty and security even if they happen, but gambling throws everything it touches into a state of uncertainty. So much, then, for the argument that we take chances every day, therefore it is all right to take a chance in gambling. There is no comparison, but only contrast, between life's inevitable risks and gambling risks. The former

are taken in the course of performing our duty and in trying to do good to the community; the latter are taken only for the good of self.

Let's get our wages by chance

Furthermore, we are citizens of a community and communal life requires us to do something for our living--to help in the production or distribution of goods; or in the mental, moral, spiritual or aesthetic uplifting of the community; or in the preservation of life and property. For the help or service we render in any of these spheres we receive a return in the form of money; and a standard is fixed so that for a fair week's work we receive a fair week's return. But what if all payments were made dependent upon chance? What if all the names of the employees in your place of work were put in a hat and then one was drawn out--that one to receive all the wages earned by all the others, and the others to receive nothing? You see, surely, that very soon chaos would reign in the economic life of the community. If you were amongst the unlucky ones who received nothing, you would have no money wherewith to purchase food and clothes; butchers, bakers and drapers would be unable to sell their stocks and would soon be bankrupt and out of business. Or, if they had goods and your family needed them desperately and you had no money to purchase them with, you would fight for them or steal them. What a pickle, what chaos there would be if chance were to govern the economic life of a community. Because gambling fosters that uneconomic and unjust spirit and attitude, as citizens we should denounce it and give it no place.

A few more "Bloated Capitalists"

Again, think of this aspect of gambling. The poor cry out against the mal-distribution of wealth, saying that it is not right that so many should have so little and so few should have so much. And yet, multitudes of the poor, each hoping to receive a fortune in return, give something weekly out of the little they have that a few may be made rich at the expense of the many. Thus they make worse the very situation which they deplore. Because gambling aggravates the mal-distribution of wealth we, as citizens, should denounce it and give it no place.

Why work?

Gambling also destroys the efficiency of workers. If a man thinks he may any week receive a fortune without working for it, he is not likely to retain much interest in his job if he has one, or bother himself about finding a job if he hasn't one.

Life's wreckage

How many reputations, careers and homes have been wrecked by gambling, the daily papers reveal. Remember! Every gambler raises the prize money and so encourages others to gamble--hence, every gambler, however amusing and safe he may think his game to be, must accept moral responsibility for the pitiful wreckages strewn along life's pathway.

Gambling akin to theft

If a man steals from me he takes something which does not belong to him and to which he has no just claim; something which I did not wish him to have; something for which he makes no adequate return. That is the principle behind theft, and that is the principle behind gambling. The winning gambler takes from another something which does not belong to him and to which he has no just claim; something which the other did not wish him to have; something for which he makes no adequate return. The fact that the

loser is a consenting party and puts his money where he may lose it, does not justify the immoral act of the winning party in taking the money. You might as well say that if the shopkeeper is willing to risk having his goods stolen when he displays them outside his shop or on his counters, that justifies the thief and shoplifter in taking them. Undoubtedly, in principle gambling is akin to theft and because it fosters that dishonest and immoral spirit we, as citizens, should oppose and condemn it.

#### Gambling an uneconomic and unjust practice

It has been pointed out that there are only three reasons which justify me in taking £1 from another. First, I may have done a £1 worth of work for the other man--that is the law of labour. Secondly, I may have given £1 worth of some commodity to the other man--that is the law of exchange operating. Thirdly, the other person may love me and seeing my need, desire to do me a kindness, so he gives me the £1 freely--that is the law of love operating.

Can the gambler justify his taking another's money by any of these generally accepted and recognised laws of the economic world? He cannot! He has not done any service or labour for the loser. He has not given the loser any equivalent of what he has won. He has not obtained his prize because the losers loved him and wished him to have it.

#### Gambling fosters a practice which is definitely wrong

It may be said, "How can you show that betting and gambling are wrong?" We may say that questions of right and wrong of all types are best approached by recognising that one's duty falls under four heads--duty to God, to one's own character, to one's neighbour, and to society as a whole. Can you defend gambling on these lines? Can you say that in gambling you are doing your duty to God, to yourself, to your neighbour and to society as a whole? That you are doing what is good, right, just, and helpful to God, self, neighbour and society? If you answer, "yes", we can only reply that your sense of good and evil is hopelessly perverted.

#### Three tests

But such abstract reasoning may have little power to convince some minds. So we present three tests, suggested by Dr. Temple, by which we may know whether a thing is wrong in itself.

First, a thing, is wrong if it issues from a bad state of mind.

Gambling certainly reacts to this test. It does issue from a very bad state of mind. It is due to the desire to get something for nothing. In other words, it is rooted in covetousness, and therefore breaks the tenth commandment, which declares, "thou shalt not covet". A "covetous man is an idolater" (Eph. 5:5). The whole law of God is summed up in the word "love". "Thou shalt love the Lord Thy God . . . and thy neighbour as thyself." But gambling breaks both points of this law. It is a sin against God, because it is Mammon worship; and it is a sin against our neighbour, because it is an attempt to make personal gain at the expense of our neighbour's unwilling loss.

Second, a thing is wrong if it exemplifies a bad principle.

By this test also gambling is condemned. Labour or human effort is the only natural basis of the right to property. Any society where property is acquired by any other method, such as force, fraud, or chance, is economically and morally enfeebled. As far as gambling is concerned, the good things of this world are

distributed according to chance and not according to want. This bad principle is elevated into the chief position in life. No one could say that the benefits of gambling necessarily go to the most virtuous or most useful members of the community.

Third, a thing is wrong if it has bad consequences. Here again there can be no doubt that gambling stands condemned.

(a) IT LEADS TO CRIME. A recorder at the Central Court in London said, "Betting does more than anything else to bring young men and lads to this Court as criminals". A probation officer in Melbourne said, 'Of 50 lads under my care 35 have stolen money to make up losses, from 1/- to £1, incurred in gambling.' According to a careful investigation by an American banker, 85 out of every 100 bank embezzlements were due to gambling.

Since 1388 no less than 181 Acts have been passed in England dealing with lotteries alone. One committee appointed by Parliament to make recommendations on the subject said, "Through gambling, idleness, dissipation and poverty are increased, the most sacred trusts are betrayed, domestic confidence is destroyed, madness created, crimes are committed and even suicide is produced". A French paper once reported that, "Last week there were only seven suicides at Monte Carlo!"

(b) IT IS BAD ECONOMICALLY. Think what a difference it would make to business if the £500,000,000 spent in Australia on gambling were spent through normal channels of trading. The Goulburn Chamber of Commerce, N.S.W., urged the Government to reduce facilities for gambling on the grounds that debts were unpaid and the standard of living lowered for those who gambled. The unsettling effect of gambling on the gambler is recognised as a source of lowered efficiency in workers. The excitement of their gambling interests unfits men for steady work. The head of one large engineering firm in Lancashire said, "If gambling were eliminated, it would be equivalent to 10 per cent. dividend on capital."

(c) IT IS THE FOE OF CLEAN SPORT. It also corrupts and degrades every sport with which it becomes associated. "Punch" once put it thus;

"The true spoilsport is betting,

Although it suits the baser sort,

What's sport to them is death to sport."

The Christian Point of View

The gambler is essentially selfish. He wants a great deal, the more the better, for nothing, and he is not concerned about the position or welfare of those who must lose if he is to win--he covets their money no matter in what state they are left.

In view of this we affirm that no one can be a confirmed gambler and a Christian. E may be one or the other, but he cannot be both. The terms "Christian" and "Gambler" are mutually exclusive. Did not our Lord say, "If any man would be my disciple, let him deny himself"? Our Lord made self-denial, lack of selfishness, a first condition of discipleship. The gambler is out for self, regardless of the cost to others. Hence he cannot be a disciple, a Christian and a gambler.

Our Lord said also, "Do unto others as ye would that they should do to you. The Son of Man came not to be ministered unto, but to minister. Inasmuch as ye have done it unto one of the least of these, ye have done it unto me". The selfish and covetous actions and spirit of the gambler are absolutely incompatible with this teaching of the master. Gambling is a violation of our duty to our neighbour and of the clear vows of Christian discipleship. The professing Christian who gambles, on any scale whatsoever, denies the social implications of the faith he professes and does not take Christ seriously. His profession is belied by his actions. He injures Christ's cause and leads astray Christ's lambs. Of him it may well be said, "Your actions speak so loudly that I cannot hear what you say".

God or Mammon?

The fact is the whole question resolves itself finally into one great and simple choice as Christ Himself put it, "God or Mammon?" Remember, you must decide! You cannot drift between the two. "No man can serve two masters; ye cannot serve God and Mammon!" God give you, who read this, grace to make the right choice! To do so will probably mean that you will have to suffer in some degree. You will cut yourself off from some possible ways of getting rich; and you will almost certainly be laughed at and, perhaps, abused for so doing. So much the better! "Blessed are ye when men shall revile you, and persecute you, and shall say al manner of evil against you falsely, for my sake. Rejoice, and be exceeding glad; for great is your reward in Heaven: for so persecuted they the prophets which were before you". It is Christ Who speaks--the Christ Who died on the Cross for you. It is Christ Who bids You. Once again, prove your loyalty to Him, by denying yourself, and talking up your Cross and following Him

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