

To flutter or not to flutter?

Fluttering?

I am really thinking about gambling and the role it plays in our society. We have all heard the expression, ‘she enjoys a little flutter.’

Did you know that Australia leads the world in the amount lost per head each year through gambling? Our losses in 2016 were \$1292 per adult person, and the next country is Singapore with about \$700 per person. This amounted to about \$23 billion in 2014-2015. (1)

As you think about this, remember that many people do not gamble.

Also, these losses are disproportionately borne by those who can least afford them.

It's mainly lotteries and poker machines, of course. But instead of trying to curtail gambling, our authorities seems to be allowing its spread more and more through electronic means. Have you noticed how frequently now ads for gambling appear on the sporting programs on TV?



A proportion of people are addicted, problem gamblers. But a problem gambler has an effect on many.

A few years ago, the Australian Medical Association put out a report which said, 'up to 5 million Australians feel the health, social and financial impacts of problem gambling including friends, families and employers of people with a gambling problem.' (2)

It also said, 'problem gamblers have a higher than average number of visits to a GP, and experience an increased incidence of physical illnesses such as hypertension, insomnia, migraine and other stress-related problems.' (2)

People gamble for a variety of reasons: the idea of becoming wealthy, hope for a better future, social interaction, recreation, a way of giving to charity.

The Bible does not directly forbid gambling. Instead, it offers a critique of the reasons which lead people to gamble and it offers something better. In the end it would be hard to conclude that the Bible endorses this behaviour and for that reason many Christians abstain entirely. This would be my own position.

Thus, the Bible warns us about love of money and the powerful negative impact of greed. But in gambling, we are trying to gain money not through work but through chance.

The Bible calls us to love our neighbours as ourselves. But much gambling depends on winning what other people lose. When we gamble, we must consider consequences – especially for the problem gambler.

The Bible calls us to provide for ourselves through the work of our hands, not through chance and luck.

The Bible calls us to live by faith in the Lord and his provision, which comes to us through work, our own or another's.

Above all, the Bible calls on us to be generous, *'for God loves a cheerful giver'* (2 Corinthians 9:7). One of the tragedies is, that gambling is so often used as a way of raising money for good causes. This makes it appear that gambling is morally neutral. Furthermore, it suggests that we will not give unless there is a chance of receiving something in return.

Surely it is far better for us to encourage people to give freely, spontaneously, generously to good causes. I think we would find that more is raised by this method than by raffles and the like. And it would model what we hope is a pattern of generosity so important in today's world.

Governments can help. It would be impossible to ban gambling – human beings always get around such a law. But it has been the positive attitude of government to poker machines which has made us so welcoming to this evil. Furthermore it is a form of revenue to the government, which means that addicted people are paying for things which the rest of us enjoy.

But governments can help by channelling and restricting gambling and we should be ready to take this matter up with our representatives. It is tragic, for example, to hear of a second casino being built in Sydney. We do not need it and it will only serve the interests of those who own it.

In the end, though, this is a matter of the heart. The question of gambling is played out in our hearts as we think about trusting God, being generous, resisting greed, loving our neighbour, finding our deepest fellowship amongst God's people and not allowing ourselves to be enslaved. The gospel of Jesus offers help in the very areas which motivate so many to gamble in the first place. Here is hope, and here is love.

As Jesus once said: *'It is more blessed to give than to receive'!* (Acts 20:35).

Christine Jensen

Social Issues and Action AMUA

1. <http://www.news.com.au/finance/money/costs/scary-graph-shows-how-australians-are-the-biggest-losers/news-story/4a437cd5f735b87988549b37af12917f>
2. <https://ama.com.au/position-statement/health-effects-problem-gambling-2013>