

Sermon & Bible Study Helps

BETTER IS A LITTLE WITH RIGHTEOUSNESS

Emphasis Passage: Proverbs 16:8

Parallel Translations

King James Version: Better *is* a little with righteousness than great revenues without right.

New King James Version: Better *is* a little with righteousness, Than vast revenues without justice.

New International Version: Better a little with righteousness than much gain with injustice.

New American Standard Bible: Better is a little with righteousness Than great income with injustice.

Revised Standard Version: Better is a little with righteousness than great revenues with injustice.

New Living Translation: It is better to be poor and godly than rich and dishonest.

New Jerusalem Bible: Better have little and with it uprightness than great revenues with injustice.

Hebrew Text

טוֹב-מֵעַט בְּצִדְקָה מֵרַב תְּבוּאוֹת בְּלֹא מִשְׁפָּט:

KEY WORDS (WITH STRONG'S REFERENCE NUMBERS)

בְּצִדְקָה (bitsdaqah) – noun, feminine, singular, with prefixed preposition כּ (“with”)
(6666) צִדְקָה (ts^edaqah) – righteousness, justice

מִשְׁפָּט (mishpat) – noun, masculine, singular
(4941) מִשְׁפָּט (mishpat) – justice, ordinance

HELPFUL SCRIPTURE

Bible Passages That Give Guidance To Gambling

Exodus 20:3, gambling violates the principle of Lordship

Matthew 6:24, gambling violates the principle of spiritual priorities

Exodus 20:17, gambling violates the principle of love

I Corinthians 10:23-24, gambling violates the principle of stewardship

2 Thessalonians 3:10-12, gambling violates the principle of work

I Thessalonians 5:22, gambling violates the principle of witness

Romans 13:1-4, gambling violates the principle of the civil magistrate

CONTEXT

C. Bullock, *An Introduction to the Old Testament Poetic Books*, p. 152, says that the book of Proverbs “purports to be a primer of right conduct and essential attitudes toward life, aimed at producing lives in conformity to the divine will. The immediate object was to train and educate for the preservation of the family unit, and social stability of the society as a whole.”

The value of Proverb 16:8 in achieving this goal is obvious. This proverb is written in a typical Hebrew poetic style called antithetical parallelism. This particular type of poetic style balances two opposing concepts in its two main lines. One line presents the positive side of the issue and the other line presents the negative side. A quick look at Proverb 16:8 reveals that the first half of the proverb presents the positive side and the second half presents the negative side.

SERMON AND BIBLE STUDY NOTES

Introduction

Many economists and social scientists have made non-religious arguments concerning the destructive nature of gambling for individuals and society. However, God is not silent when it comes to economic and social issues in society. He regularly called His people to behave in righteous ways in their economic and social dealings with others. For example, He scolded them for unjust economic practices and for taking advantage of the poor (Amos 8:1-6). He also called on His people to provide for the needs of the poor and the weaker members of society (Lev. 19:9-10). Proverb 16:8 reflects God’s concerns about how His people treat others as they attempt to accumulate wealth. Since gambling is primarily about the accumulation of wealth, the proverb provides counsel to those who want to know God’s attitude toward it.

1. There *is* Such a Thing As Right and Wrong.

Our society is becoming very confused about matters of right and wrong. Many so-called experts are claiming that right and wrong are culturally determined and therefore not universal in scope. This proverb, and all of God’s Word belie that claim. God’s Word speaks clearly that some things are inherently wrong and some are inherently right. They are not a matter of cultural preferences but rather principles of life that reflect the character of God.

When it comes to the acquisition of wealth, this proverb relies on the universal principle of right and wrong to make its point. The proverb asserts that gaining wealth is not the chief good in life. There are things that are more important than becoming wealthy. D. Thomas, *Book of Proverbs*, p. 304, identifies two things that are more important to the godly man than the acquisition of wealth. First, he notes that the godly man “has other and far higher aims, namely, the culture of his soul, the extension of truth, the raising of humanity.” Second, “the principles of a godly man’s life preclude him from obeying the conditions by which wealth is generally obtained.”

Gambling must be considered from this perspective of right and wrong. A person who desires to do what is right must ask himself if gambling is an appropriate way to accumulate wealth or a harmless form of entertainment. The evidence is overwhelming. There are numerous principles that make it clear that gambling violates the principles of Scripture and is therefore an inappropriate behavior, especially for Christians. Gambling violates at least seven principles: gambling violates the principle of Lordship, Exodus 20:3; gambling violates the principle of spiritual priorities, Matthew 6:24; gambling violates the principle of love, Exodus 20:17; gambling violates the principle of stewardship, I Corinthians 10:23-24; gambling violates the principle of work, 2 Thessalonians 3:10-12; gambling violates the principle of witness, I Thessalonians 5:22; gambling violates the principle of the civil magistrate, Romans 13:1-4.

2. God Requires Righteousness in the Acquisition of Wealth.

Proverb 16:8 does not declare that the acquisition of wealth is evil. It declares that if one accumulates wealth, he had better do so by righteous means. Righteousness is extremely important to God. The Bible uses this term to refer to a number of things. Foremost, the word refers to a person's spiritual state. A person is either righteous or not in relation to God. Such righteousness is not attained but granted by God. So, Abraham was declared righteous because of his exercise of faith in God (Gen. 15:1-6). Through faith in Jesus, people today are forgiven the guilt of their sins and obtain a right standing with God (Phil. 3:8-9).

The Bible also uses the term "righteousness" to refer to conduct toward others. When used in this way, the term emphasizes appropriate treatment of others. H. Stigers, *Theological Wordbook of the Old Testament*, 2:1879, recognizes the pervasive use of the word *tsedeq* in this way in the Old Testament. He comments that according to biblical standards, "the man who is righteous tries to preserve the peace and prosperity of the community by fulfilling the commands of God in regard to others."

God is honored more by the person who lives a righteous life and never accumulates great wealth than by the person who amasses great wealth at the expense of others. After all, God is able to confer wealth on whomever He chooses, but those who choose to live a righteous life toward others do so by their own choice.

3. God Is Opposed to Any Behavior That Takes Advantage of Others.

The term *mishpat* occurs over 400 times in the Old Testament. R. Culver, *Theological Wordbook of the Old Testament*, 2:2443-2444, notes that the word is used in "thirteen related, but distinct, aspects" which all have "justice" as their central idea. Obviously, justice is an important word in God's vocabulary. Culver observes that *mishpat* "i.e., rightness rooted in God's character, ought to be an attribute of man in general and of judicial process among them (Ps. 106:37. Wise men speak it (Ps. 37:30) and think it (Prov. 12:5) and God requires it of them (Micah 6:8)." God commanded Israel to make justice a priority (Amos 5:24).

God abhors the polar opposite of justice. Often in the Old Testament God is heard denouncing those who practice injustice. Isaiah declared that rampant injustice in the land would bring the judgment of God (Isa. 1:16-31).

The principle of justice applies to gambling because one often finds that those who are the weakest in society are the most victimized by gambling. The poor, in desperation to find relief from their poverty, spend a higher proportion of their income on lottery tickets than do other socio-economic groups. Gambling addicts lose paychecks, savings, houses, and all their worldly possessions chasing a win that never comes in casinos that ply them with free or cheap alcohol 24 hours a day.

Those who choose to gamble should understand that they are facilitating injustice. First, they are the ones looking to profit from the losses of others who too often cannot afford to lose. After all, the only way anyone can win anything gambling is if someone else loses. This is true for any form of gambling. The winner's pot is made up of other gamblers' losses. Since the poorest and weakest among us are often those who lose the most gambling, those who receive their money through gambling are guilty of injustice toward them. Second, by participating in gambling, the gambler helps to keep the gambling enterprise viable. Their participation adds to the revenues that the casinos need to continue to operate, which in turn enables them to continue to profit from the massive losses of the poor and the gambling addict.

Conclusion

While the Bible does not say, "Thou shalt not gamble," it is quite evident that God abhors gambling. It violates numerous biblical principles. Those who seek to accumulate wealth through gambling are not acting in a righteous way toward others since they are engaging in an activity that hurts a certain segment of people in society. God denounces those who accumulate wealth through unrighteous means. In fact, those who benefit from gambling are engaged in an act of injustice toward those from whom they profit, even if that profit is obtained indirectly.

WHAT CAN ONE PERSON DO?

- As much as possible, refuse to shop at stores that provide gambling opportunities.
- Find other people in your church or community who share your concerns.
- Write to your state representative and state senators about your opposition to gambling.
- Provide gambling information to the people in your church.
- Observe anti-gambling Sunday in your church.
- Ask your pastor to preach a message about gambling.
- Write letters to the editor and share your observations about the problems caused by gambling.
- Contact community and other religious groups and ask them to work with you to defeat or repeal gambling legislation.
- Pray for God's power to help you get rid of gambling in your area.

SUGGESTED BIBLE STUDY QUESTIONS

This is a suggested Bible study for any size group. The sermon notes on this sheet, the accompanying fact sheet, and the enclosed materials serve as resources as you prepare to teach and then lead this Bible study. Answers are provided with the questions when appropriate, but do not be too quick to give the answers. Allow the participants time to talk about the questions among themselves and offer their own answers.

Create Learning Readiness: Mention an example that you have heard about someone whose life was devastated by gambling.

Say: We all know people who gamble, and most people can gamble without any significant adverse consequences. However, a certain segment of our population cannot control their gambling. For them, gambling is destroying their lives. Of course, many people say that those who cannot control their gambling compulsions should stay away from gambling. They don't feel any personal obligation or responsibility toward these people. However, Proverb 16:8 has something to say about this that we need to hear.

Call on someone to read Proverb 16:8. (Make sure that person is comfortable reading in public before you call on him or her.)

Say: This proverb is known as an antithetical proverb. This particular type of poetic style balances two opposing concepts in its two main lines. One line presents the positive side of the issue and the other line presents the negative side. A quick look at Proverb 16:8 reveals that the first half of the proverb presents the positive side and the second half presents the negative side. In this way, the proverb contrasts two attitudes toward wealth, creating a value relationship between the two.

Ask: *What are the two attitudes that are contrasted in this proverb?* Let the members identify the contrast. They should note that the proverb contrasts those who are not wealthy but are righteous with those who accumulate wealth through unjust means.

Say: A great starting point for understanding that gambling is a wrong behavior is the basic concept that underlies this contrast.

Ask: *How can this person pronounce one thing wrong and another thing right?* Because there really is such a thing as right and wrong. While it is true that there are situations where one person might think something is right and another person would think it is wrong and it is obvious that these people are merely reflecting their own cultural biases, there are other times when right and wrong are not culturally determined, but are inherent in God's design for His creation.

Ask: *Is it possible to know when right and wrong is a matter of cultural preference and when it is universal in its scope, applicable to all people at all times?* Let the members discuss this for a while. They should recognize that it is not always possible to know, but a good starting point is whether or not the Bible addresses the matter. If the Bible says something is wrong, that judgment reflects

God's attitude about that matter. Since God's holiness is complete and perfect (It does not change.), then the same things that He declared to be wrong some time in the past must still be wrong today.

Say: The question for us is, "Does God have anything to say about gambling?" Let the members talk about this for a while. If necessary, share the biblical principles listed in the Helpful Scripture section of this Guide.

Ask: *Given these principles, would you say that God considers gambling to be right or wrong?* Let the members share their answers.

Say: There is more in this proverb that applies to gambling.

Ask: *Does the proverb say that it is wrong to be a person of moderate means?* No. In fact, the Bible commends a person of moderate means who has righteousness.

Ask: *How would you define righteousness?* Let the members talk about this for a while. If necessary refer to the second point of the Bible Study Notes section of this Guide for a discussion.

Ask: *When we think about the issue of gambling, does the question of righteousness ever come into the picture?* Let the members talk about this for a while. If necessary refer to the second point of the Bible Study Notes section of this Guide for a discussion of this.

Say: Essentially, the polar opposite of the kind of righteousness described in this proverb is injustice. God has a lot to say about injustice. Share some of the discussion about injustice found in the third point of the Bible Study Notes section of this Guide.

Ask: *Do you think those who gamble engage in injustice toward others?* Let the members talk about this for a while. If necessary, share some of the discussion about this found in the third point of the Bible Study Notes section of this Guide.

Say: While the Bible does not say, "Thou shalt not gamble," it is quite evident that God abhors gambling. It violates numerous biblical principles. Those who seek to accumulate wealth through gambling are not acting in a righteous way toward others since they are engaging in an activity that hurts a certain segment of people in society. God denounces those who accumulate wealth through unrighteous means. In fact, those who benefit from gambling are engaged in an act of injustice toward those from whom they profit, even if that profit is obtained indirectly.

Ask: *Has this study given you a different perspective on gambling?* Let the members share their insight.

Ask: *What can we do this week that would help bring an end to gambling in our community or the nation?* Let the members suggest some things they can do.

Say: Very good. Let's do some of that this week and share the results with each other at our next meeting.