

God and Gambling for the Pool Player by Steve Lillis

Many pool players of good conscience ask if it is alright to gamble on pool and if they are a person of faith, they would want to please God as well. There are many diverse opinions and equally as many reasons to gamble or not. In our culture today it is not given too much of a second thought as it is legal. There are lottery tickets, casino gambling, and even a bet on playing a game of pool with someone is for the most part legal because pool playing is considered a game of skill and not luck. If you are a God-fearing person and look to the Bible for advice you will be surprised in some cases as to what the Bible teaches.

The Bible does have what appears chance or luck in it. For example, in the Old Testament of the Bible in Leviticus 16:8 and Numbers 26:55 people would cast lots to determine an outcome. In the New Testament in Acts 1:15-26, the Apostles cast lots to see who would replace Judas as an apostle. However, the Bible also says in Proverbs 16:33 (NIV) "The lot is cast into the lap, but its every decision is from the LORD" and in the NLT that same verse says "We may throw the dice, but the LORD determines how they fall." **Lot-casting** in the **Bible** was not **gambling** and does not satisfy the four criteria necessary for a gamble to take place (action taken, risk of loss, short-term, zero-sum game).

First of all, let's look at what we are talking about when we think of gambling on a game of pool. Someone walks into the pool room and asks you if you gamble and challenges you to a game. What do you do? On one hand you feel like a bet on a game as long as it is reasonable and both parties can afford to lose the bet then why not! Let's look further.

Suppose your opponent has a problem with gambling as many pool players. You might want to make a decision that is in the best interest of both of you. Think of it this way using alcohol as an example which just like gambling is addictive. You are with a friend that has a drinking problem and he is on the proverbial wagon trying to get dried out. You go out to dinner and the waiter asks if you would like a drink with your meal. You usually have a glass of wine with dinner and with no problem so now what do you do in consideration of your friend? The Bible teaches us in I Corinthians 8:9 "Be careful, however, that the exercise of your rights does not become a stumbling block to the weak." So here we see that the better thing to do might be to consider the other person first and abstain from that drink. In the pool hall a similar thing could happen with a fellow pool player and gambling.

Now you might say I know this person and there will not be a problem with a little sociable side bet. Consider who might be watching and what they might think or do! I once played a race to 5 in 9-Ball with a fellow professional pool player in a local pool room for just bragging rights as it was only practice. We did not even wager on who would pay the table time. Some onlookers were curious as to who would win this duel and asked me how much we were playing for.

My response was that we were playing for love, the love of the game. These onlookers or railbirds as they are called in pool world were not satisfied with my answer. However, most of them knew me as a pool playing Chaplain and knew that I did not gamble but also knew that I would still play to win. There was a lot of talk on the side while we were battling it out on the green felt. When the match was over and I won 5-2, one of the railbirds came up to me and said thanks. I said for what and he said I just won \$200 betting on you as I will bet on anything!

I am still not satisfied with these answers as I need more information you might say. Okay then let's look directly at the Bible and gambling. Proverbs 13:11 says "Wealth gained hastily will dwindle, but whoever gathers little by little will increase it." There is no substitute for the good old fashion idea of work for it! You might hear someone say in the pool room something like what a sucker bet as I trapped that person or he got his nose open and I robbed him on the pool table. In most pool circles this is a badge of honor! In the Bible it says in Ephesians 4:28 "Let the thief no longer steal, but rather let him labor, doing honest work with his own hands, so that he may have something to share with anyone in need."

One also might say, now you are getting personal Steve! Yes, I am and glad that was brought up. As a professional pool player and an official Chaplain of the Billiard Congress of America having been appointed in 2007, I consider others first and the example I set to be of utmost importance as a Gospel Trick Shot RACK Team member. RACK stands for Recreational Ambassadors for Christ's Kingdom. As I represent Jesus and his Kingdom, I want to be above reproach and set a good and Godly example. I do not gamble, drink, flirt, swear, or the like. I am not bragging as I am now free from those very same things that I once did! Jesus has delivered me not only from the **penalty** of my sins by what he did on the cross, but He also delivered me from the **power** of sin so that I do not harm myself or others anymore. Someday because I trust in Jesus, I will be free from the very **presence** of sin and there will be no pain or sorrow as I will be with Jesus for all of eternity.

How about you? Will you accept what Jesus did for you on that cruel cross 2,000 years ago in paying the penalty for your sins? Then after you do believe that he will give you the power of the Holy Spirit as promised to resist sin after you put your trust in Him! Finally, to top it all off, after believing you will have the great hope of someday spending all of eternity in His glorious presence! Trust Him today!