

Scriptures
DIRECTLY
On
GAMBLING

By

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Abbreviations used herein for various Bible versions:

KJV – King James Version

NIV – New International Version

RSV – Revised Standard Version

DBT – Holy Scriptures & New Testament Bible by J. N. Darby

Amp – The Amplified Bible

YLT – Young's Literal Translation

INT – Interlinear translation by Bible Hub

For a long time people have thought that there are no bible passages that refer directly to the sinfulness or evil of gambling. Most preachers have been attacking this vice from the angle of evil covetousness (which it truly is!). However, there are some passages in the book of Proverbs that directly speak about gambling itself, though they use the olden names “striking hands” (betting) and “pledging”.

Before we go to those verses in Proverbs, let us first be sure of one thing: God, at the beginning, decreed or ordained that *“By the sweat of your brow you will eat your food until you return to the ground, since from it you were taken; for dust you are and to dust you will return.”* (Genesis 3:19, NIV).

Any method of trying to gain wealth without HONEST LABOUR runs against this Divine Ordinance and is improper! It may be via dishonest or fraudulent means. It may be via ‘chance’ or ‘luck’ methods like gambling, lottery, betting, etc. It may be via violent or diabolical means. But as long as it is not by honest labour it is sinful. Note that it is not just ‘labour’ but ‘HONEST labour’. Much labour is involved before a bank robbery is successfully pulled through, but it is evil labour. A prostitute (oh, pardon me, ‘commercial sex worker’!) claims to be labouring, but it is sinful labour.

Hence, Genesis 3:19 is already one general verse. It is supported by Ephesians 4:28, which prescribes *“labouring, working with one’s own hands the thing that is **good**”* (KJV) as the acceptable way of making a living.

Let us now go to the specific verses in Proverbs.

Proverbs 17:18 – *“A man void of understanding striketh hands in pledge, and puts up security for another in the presence of his neighbour.”* (NIV, KJV, Amp, RSV, INT, DBT).

Proverbs 22:26 – *“Be not one of those who strike hands and pledge themselves, or one of those who put up security for another’s debts.”* (Amp, NIV, KJV, INT, RSV, DBT).

Proverbs 11:15 – “*He who puts up security for a stranger will surely suffer, but whoever refuses to strike hands in pledge is safe.*” (NIV, KJV, RSV, INT).

Proverbs 20:16 – “*Take the garment of one who puts up security for a stranger; and hold him in pledge when he is security for foreigners.*” (Amp, RSV, NIV, KJV, INT, DBT).

[Proverbs 20:16 is repeated at Proverbs 27:13]

The *striking of hands* stated in the above verses was an ancient way of making a bet. It is still being done today in many places. In my locality, someone who contends with another, especially by asserting that things will go his own way or he will win in a challenge, does so by presenting his right palm horizontally facing up and saying “*bet me*”. If the other accepts the challenge, he would use his own right palm facing down to strike the presented palm. If he doesn’t strike, it means he has refused to bet and declined from going into the challenge. At times, if the challenge is very strong, it can involve both contenders keeping something as pledges in the custody of a neutral third party, all of which things will be handed over to the eventual winner of the challenge.

This betting does not always have to be between two people, it may involve three or more contenders. In that case, after each contender’s stance, position, contention or prediction has been clearly stated and understood, all of them interlock their hands or fingers (when possible) and the neutral witness/custodian will finally place his right palm on top and they disengage. Moreover, the striking of hands is not always about violent or hostile challenges; it can be about peaceful and friendly challenges like predicting the occurrence of some natural phenomena or predicting the outcomes of the village wrestling contest or of any other games. In such cases, each contender does the betting with the profit motive of winning what has been laid down as pledges by all contending participants.

Advances in knowledge and technology have changed the striking of hands to the marking of printed coupons, and now to the simple clicking of a button. Today, one can in just one second ‘strike hands’ online with millions of other participants in far off continents.

The *'striking of hands and pledging'* have now been greatly commercialized and elaborately organized. The neutral witness/custodian who receives all that has been pledged and gives them out to eventual winners are now big-time Corporations, Associations, and even Governments.

It is fair to state that apart from betting, striking hands could also be a gesture of other things like greetings, congratulations, solidarity, fraternity or agreement, depending on the circumstances. But when there are contentions it signifies betting, and when accompanied by laying things down as pledges (or putting them up as securities) it surely means there is something at stake. That thing could even be immaterial things like one's authority, respect, honour or reputation. (E.g. when an angry mother tells her stubborn kid: "If you don't do what I said, bet me whether you'll eat tonight!"). However, when the thing at stake is a material thing one hopes to gain or win, then 'striking hands' is gambling. (E.g. someone throwing the challenge: "Who here is ready to bet me £5 that it will not rain tomorrow?")

The online Concise English Dictionary, in this regard, defines **gambling** as "betting", and defines betting itself as "*risking a sum of money or other valued item against someone else's on the basis of the outcome of an unpredictable event such as a race or a game.*"

When you play the **lottery**, you are placing your ticket money as pledge in your contention against other players that your ticket number will win. That winning is an "unpredictable event" and is thus a 'stranger' to you – the "*stranger*" as stated in the quoted verses of the book of Proverbs. As you play the lottery, you are *betting* all other players that your number will be the winner and you will then cart away all or some of the money that had been pledged by them. You are *striking hands* with the other players and laying down *pledges* for *strangers*, namely 'a number' and 'an unpredictable outcome'. Those verses in Proverbs show that you are sinning. Furthermore, you are trying to gain wealth via 'chance' or 'luck' method, not by engaging in honest labour.

Indeed, in some modern forms of gambling one seems to be 'striking hands' with a **machine** or an 'invisible' challenger namely

the operators/owners of the gambling business. The money one slots into the machine is the pledge one has laid down for his contention or prediction that a favourable pay-off would be dispensed to him by the ‘neutral’ witness/custodian, namely the machine. But, sadly, in most cases this custodian is not all that ‘neutral’ because its makers or owners have ensured that it is programmed to very rarely pay the jackpot you keep wishing for.

In **football pools** betting, you are ‘*striking hands*’ with millions of other so-called “stakers” in your profit-oriented contention that the results of the matches will be as you have predicted. The money you have staked is the ‘*pledge*’ you have laid down or security you have put up for the “*stranger*” called ‘outcome-of-matches’. In addition, you are trying to multiply money by ‘chance’ or ‘luck’ winning and not honest labour. [Note: In fact, in one modern version of this, the teams are merely simulated ones, the matches are not actually played ones, but a computer just randomly brings out results of fictitious games.]

It is amazing how some folks in our local villages stake moneys on the outcomes of matches played by teams in far off Europe or Australia – teams they know almost nothing about! What is the usefulness of piles of records of past drawn matches when one knows nothing about the current states of the teams in the league – the current coaches, the current players and their forms, those on injury, those on suspension, etc.? When such a person stakes, is he not pledging for total “strangers”?

If you are an insider, say a coach or a footballer in that league, when you bet you can rightly say you are trying to make more money from your honest labour because football is your profession. You can also say you are not pledging for a stranger because you know the game and the teams inside out. But even then, the final outcome of matches is still a “stranger” because coaches and footballers have been saying that “in football anything can happen” and that “it is not yet over until it is over”, and we have been witnessing some surprising upsets.

Now consider someone who bets on his own performance in a thing that does not come by luck but is by skill and strength. For

example, a professional boxer or expert chess player betting on the outcome of his own match. He is trying to make more from his honest labour in an endeavour whose result is not by “chance”. He is not pledging “another” or for a stranger but for his own abilities. We may concede that his betting is thus not sinful. But a stricter consideration would bring in the Scripture of Ecclesiastes 9:11-12, *“This also have I seen under the sun, that the race is not always to the swift, nor the battle to the strong, neither yet bread to the wise, nor yet riches to the men of understanding, nor yet favour to men of skill; but **time and chance** happeneth to them all. For man also knoweth not his time: as the fishes that are taken in an evil net, and the birds that are caught in the snare, so men are trapped by evil times that fall unexpectedly upon them.”* (NIV, KJV, RSV). This is saying that the outcome of our friend’s match or contest is still not 100.00% free of the “time and chance” influence. Hence, his betting would still not be 100.00% sinless. What is your opinion in such a case?

This consideration may be taken further and the argument can be made that, after all, no business is 100.00% free of the “time and chance” influence since all businesses involve risk-taking. Agreed! But the big difference is that in any genuine undertaking the risk is taken for and based upon and backed by honest labour, not just sitting down and expecting to reap a “lucky” multiplication of money. One makes an investment on something for which there is feasibility studies, market survey, controllable variables, careful planning, good development strategies, monitored execution, etc. This is much different from gambling.

Trying to make money via ‘chance’ or ‘luck’ methods is improper. These include lottery, dice games, card games, roulette, jackpot machine, betting on the performances of *other* people or of animals or of machines, and all kinds of gambling. They are all contrary to the Divine Ordinance established in Genesis 3:19 and re-affirmed in the New Covenant at Ephesians 4:28 as the acceptable way of making a living.

Proverbs 11:15 and Proverbs 17:18 say it is “unwise”, “ill-advised” and “unsafe” to bet, make pledges or put up security for strangers (which includes the outcomes of unpredictable events); and

that culprits will “suffer” or “smart” for it. However, Proverbs 20:16 and Proverbs 22:27 reveal the serious nature of this sin and God’s strong dislike for it when it is said that such a person should not be spared, excused, pardoned or pitied even if it gets to the point of stripping him of his last garment or taking away his only bed (leaving him naked or lying on the hard floor). The fact that our ‘loving’ and ‘merciful’ God demands such stern treatment for those who pledge things for strangers shows that gambling is not only harmful to the practitioner but is also strongly hated by God.

In **summary**, then, my dear Christian do not feel handicapped or embarrassed by the thought that our Bible has no verses that speak **DIRECTLY** against the widespread sin of gambling or betting. The Bible is hardly silent on anything that pertains unto life and godliness. It is only that it refers to this one by its old name and old manner in which it used to be done in those olden times. There is basically no new sin under the sun. The same old sins are being committed under new names and new methods enabled by our advances in knowledge and technology. Fortunately, in the case of gambling the old method of betting by striking hands still persists today at various places in the world, thereby lending us this insight into what those verses in the book of Proverbs are saying.*

Dear friend, repent from the sin of gambling. Stop ‘striking hands’ and ‘pledging’ amounts for the stranger named “outcome of unpredictable events”. It will always be a “stranger” to us mere mortals. Don’t be deceived and trapped by occasional winnings. The **LONG RUN** effects of gambling have always been evil and will continue to be evil. It enslaves people; it pushes them into becoming liars, thieves, lazy, reckless, promise breakers, spendthrifts, untrustworthy and hypertensive. It leads people into believing in omens, astrology, palmistry, mysticism, and to even consult soothsayers. It has brought suffering to households, broken many families, and ruined many lives and businesses. It has pushed people into murder and suicide. Please, turn to the Lord and live righteously for Him, and you will witness in your life the great faithfulness of the Lord our Provider and Good Shepherd. (See Psalm 23).

GOD BLESS YOU!

***Addendum: (Just for Theological Minds):**

What evidence exists that striking hands was a customary gesture of betting in the ancient Eastern biblical lands? More importantly, is there any Scripture that, at least, alludes to this?

Fortunately, our faithful God has once again not left Himself without an INTERNAL witness. In the ancient Eastern book of Job, we see how Job's friends were all contending that his calamity was due to his sins. Job always strongly contested this and was ever affirming his innocence. Their accusations and judgement were so much that at some point Job got really exasperated, and was ready to back his contention with a bet. He threw a challenge to them, and asked: "Who amongst you can bet me that I am not innocent?" His challenge was similar to the one Jesus gave the Pharisees: "Which of you convinceth me of sin?" (John 8:46). Job was so serious that he asked them to lay down their pledges and he would lay down his own and would even let them keep the pledged items with them (i.e. be the custodian). He put forth his palm facing up and said "let us bet. If the Righteous Judge tests/tries me and I don't come forth as gold but I'm found guilty, then you my contenders can take my pledged item and go with it." We find this in **Job17:3**, though he did not use the modern expression "bet me" but the olden one "strike hands with me".

"Please lay down a pledge for me with yourself. Who would strike hands with me?" – (The Scriptures, Institute for Scripture Research).

"Lay down now. Put me in a surety with thee. Who is he that will strike hands with me?" – (KJV).

"Place, I pray thee, my pledge with thee. Who is he that striketh hands with me?" – (YLT).

"Lay down now [a pledge], be thou surety for me with thyself, who is he that striketh hands with me?" – (DBT).

"Lay down now put me in surety with Who he hands [that] will strike. – (Bible hub Interlinear Bible, INT)

Some Commentaries say that Job even extended the challenge to the Divine Being Himself. That is understandable from the fact that Job had also been complaining to God for letting him suffer without cause. But in that case, who then would be the **neutral** Righteous Arbitrator that would conduct the test/trial and vindicate him as he had expected? The word “*thee*” (or “*thyself*”) and the word “*else*” do not exist in the original as can be seen in the Interlinear Bible of biblehub.com. These two supplied words are not absolutely necessary for the verse to make complete sense. Even if “*thee*” (without capitalizing it and referring it to God) is acceptable when it refers to Job’s friends, “*else*” is very questionable.

There are many fine commentaries on Job 17:3, like Barnes’ Notes and others. However, they do not vividly bring out the “bet me, I challenge you” meaning that is conveyed by the words “lay down now your pledge, and strike hands with me”. But *Clarke’s Commentary* does capture it by saying:

“Lay down now – Deposit a pledge, stake your conduct against mine, and your life and soul on the issue, let the cause come before God, let him try it, and see whether any of you shall be justified by him, while I am condemned.”

It is quite obvious that the striking of hands in Job 17:3 was not meant to be a gesture of greeting, congratulations, solidarity, fraternity or agreement. What agreement or deal had Job reached with his friends that needed to be sealed by striking hands? None! It was clearly an invitation to bet him.

Of course, none of Job’s friends struck his presented palm. They understood he was seriously suffering, and they had not gone there to be involved in betting with him. But had they accepted the challenge, Job would have won the bet as is evident from the vindication God finally gave him as recorded in Job 42:7-9.

In **conclusion**, I can say that Job 17:3 provides important sufficient internal biblical evidence that striking hands was an old customary gesture of betting in ancient Eastern biblical lands. This gives credence to the fact that the phrase “*striking hands*” in those

verses of Proverbs do also refer to *betting*, which when accompanied by *pledging* things for the stranger or “another” named ‘outcome of an unpredictable event’ is plainly **gambling**.

Though the earlier part of this piece sufficiently provided needed material with which to hit directly at gambling, yet it was not complete without this *theological Addendum* that gives it basis and credence.

May everlasting glory be to our all-wise God whose Pure Word is always found to be wonderfully consistent and complete. Amen.

Dear friend, if this book has been a blessing to you, then own a copy for reference; and, please, do the good work of helping your friends and others get copies of this liberating truth. May God bless you.

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