

“What’s the Difference Between Gambling and Investing?”

Can you explain the difference between gambling and investing?
Thanks in advance.

Thank you for your e-mail and question about the differences between gambling and investing. There are a number of Christian authors who have addressed this issue (Norm Geisler, Tony Evans, Gary North, etc.).

Briefly let me say that there are some similarities, and there are people who get addicted to high risk investing just like gambling. So I would acknowledge there are some similarities between the two.

But the key issue is that there are some striking differences. Investors research an investment with the goal of lowering the risks and making a wise investment. Gambling is all about risk and the odds cannot be lowered by further research (except for those who can modify the odds of blackjack by card counting or something like that).

The goal of investing is to build up a company and portfolio. Even if it’s done selfishly, it still can have a positive effect on the company and the economy. Gambling takes money out of the capital economy. It doesn’t contribute to job creation, etc. As I argue in [my transcript on gambling](#), gambling actually hurts a local economy and increases social costs (abuse, neglect, bankruptcy).

Most investing is done with discretionary income and with certain limits (amount of stock that can be bought on margin, debt load allowed by a lender, etc.). Most gambling is not done with discretionary income. Money that should go for food,

rent, clothing is often risked in a “get-rich-quick” scheme.

So while I would acknowledge that investing and gambling have some similarities, the differences make the difference. If you are interested, I would encourage you to read some additional material by some of the authors I mentioned.

Thanks for writing.

Kerby Anderson
Probe Ministries

“What If You Disagree with the Catholic Church About Birth Control?”

I have a friend who is a devout Catholic. She is torn about birth control in her marriage. Her priest has told her it is a mortal sin to use birth control. The few scripture references she was given, I had a rebuttal to, but I am looking for a way to help her through this crisis. This is really beginning to affect her marriage, since she and her husband do not want any more children. I would appreciate any guidance you could give us.

Dear _____,

Well, your friend has a choice to make. The position of the Catholic Church is that birth control is sin. There are many other people who are completely committed to the Bible and to a biblical world view who see freedom to use birth control in

the context of submitting to Christ and actively seeking to know His personal will for them. (We mean here contraception, preventing an egg from being fertilized so no new human being comes into existence.)

Your friend will have to choose either the church's position or her own conscience after spending time in prayer (and, may I suggest, fasting) about this issue. I say this very gently and respectfully: there are lots of people (my husband and I included) who no longer accept the Catholic Church's authority, understanding that we can go directly to Christ for instruction and direction (1 Tim. 2:5). Your friend needs to ask herself if she can live with that. I suggest that's it's not enough to reject the church's authority simply to pursue whatever we want and think will make us happy (been there, done that—it doesn't work!); the only wise course of action is to pursue what will bring glory to God through our obedience to His word and Spirit.

I send this with a prayer for heavenly wisdom (James 3) for your friend, and for you as you help her walk this out.

Sue Bohlin
Probe Ministries

“What are the Criteria for Euthanasia?”

I have a co-worker who is a fellow Christian and we are in a dispute over the issue of euthanasia. We have agreed to let you settle this dispute.

I contend that euthanasia is only considered to be

“euthanasia” when there is a deliberate attempt to end a person’s life using some medical tool that speeds up the timeframe of a natural death, i.e. lethal injection. He contends that removing life support from a patient should also be considered euthanasia. I argue that removing life support allows for a natural death according to God’s timeframe. He argues that if a patient does not receive all that medical science offers to prolong life, then that is in effect killing this patient according to our own timeframe, since it is God who gives us the scientific knowledge to have access to these life support systems. He has an interesting point, but I simply don’t agree with him and can’t find anything in the scriptures that affirm either argument. Can you help us?

Regarding withholding treatment of a dying patient, you are both right depending on the circumstances. When a patient is truly and imminently dying (and we can know this since certain bodily functions can begin to irreversibly shut down such as the ability to eliminate fluids), continuing normal body maintenance such as food and water can actually increase the patient’s discomfort without altering their chances for survival. This is little more than torture for no intended purpose. Letting nature take its course and relieving as much discomfort and pain as possible is a completely humane and biblical course of action. Some may argue that prolonging life in this instance may allow God an opportunity to work a miraculous healing. We simply have to ask ourselves, How much time does God really need? If He is sovereign, then He will act in His timeframe, not ours.

However, if the person has a terminal illness but the acute death process has not yet begun and there are normal measures that offer hope and comfort without adding an unnecessary burden, then these measures ought to be pursued. But I must emphasize that this is a tricky judgement call. An Alzheimer’s patient is dying and will die relatively soon, but when do normal measures become more of a burden than a help? In Joni

Eareckson Tada's 1992 book, *When Is It Right to Die?*, she tells of her father who suffered a series of strokes and could no longer expel waste fluids. They chose to remove the IV (which would simply have bloated his body and not nourished it) and simply soothe his mouth and lips with ice chips as his body died. However, she strongly insists that patients in a Permanently Vegetative State (PVS) are severely disabled but not dying, and they deserve whatever care we can give them.

These decisions will always require a host of opinions—medical, familial, and pastoral—to arrive at the best course for this individual patient. Hard and fast rules will lead to abuses which is one of the reasons why pro-euthanasia laws are always a bad idea. They simply can't cover all the possible contingencies, now or in the future. Regulations will be impossible to write and to enforce.

Respectfully,

Ray Bohlin
Probe Ministries

“Vegetarianism is a More Biblical Diet!”

I, as a vegetarian and a Christian, thought it important to point out that being a vegetarian is the more “natural” form of diet considering the Garden of Eden. In Genesis 1:29 we see that God gives the the fruits and seeds, vegetables etc...”as meat,” causing one to consider then obviously He (God) made a distinction between the meat of animals and the meat for humans to eat. I personally try to eat as close to Gen 1:29 as possible...this is not saying that meat is wrong—Jesus ate

meat—yet Hinduism is simply ripping off God's original plan and adding a twist of spirituality to what God intended to be natural and common sense. I am also not making a blanket statement that meat is unclean...not calling unclean what was made (or possibly created to be?) clean...considering the mass production of cattle in the U.S. and horrible sanitation we have adopted as common practice in the meat industry largely as a whole...we owe it to ourselves to consider these points that:

1. God created man for a plant based diet
2. That changed when sin entered the picture
3. We are God's temple, BODY, soul and spirit
4. Animals being killed and eaten was symbolic also of Jesus' sacrifice and our remembrance of Him in communion (a bit of foreshadowing). Also possibly why when meat consumption is documented it is only in special occasions—e.g.: symbolic feasts, sacrifice of the priests, celebrations of significance—but not frivolously. One would soon run out of cattle if you were eating them all the time. You wouldn't sin too much either if you had to sacrifice cattle all the time.
5. We are never commanded to eat meat.
6. The meat back then and the meat now are almost two completely different things (as far as healthy content and environment are concerned).

Anyhow, I thank you for your time and on a final note...nothing in this world is the Devil's original idea...it is simply a twist of God's original idea...this goes for religions as well as health practices. The religions of the world have truth to them but those truths belong to Christianity and have been twisted and blown way out of proportion. May God bless you richly. Grace and Peace.

I agree with much of what you wrote but I would not go so far as to say that vegetarianism is more natural from a Biblical perspective. Clearly that was God's initial intent, but the

Fall changed many things as you indicated. Sin was not natural to our being before the Fall but is quite natural after. So it is quite possible that most of our bodies are going to struggle on a purely vegetarian diet as a result of changes wrought by the Fall. In fact, the care and knowledge needed to follow a strictly vegetarian diet and remain healthy, may indicate that in our fallen state, a diet that includes meat may be more natural. Just a thought.

Also we are clearly told that we can eat meat in Genesis 9:3, "Every moving thing that is alive shall be food for you; I give all to you, as I gave the green plant." It is the same language and tense as in Genesis 1:29. Neither statement is strictly a command but God's intent is made quite clear.

Respectfully,

Ray Bohlin
Probe Ministries

"Should Christians Give the Pledge of Allegiance?"

Should Christians give the pledge of allegiance?

Your question is an old one. First century Christians struggled with how much allegiance (if any) they were to give to Rome. The founders of this country struggled with it as well.

At one extreme you have the Jehovah's Witnesses (who do not pledge because they believe it is idolatry). At the other extreme you have Christians with a mindset of "my country right or wrong." A proper biblical response is somewhere in

Studying Literature and History from Secular Textbooks?"

After homeschooling my children for 5 years we were led to put them into our church's Christian school. My question for you has to do with our school's adoption of a few textbooks that are not from the Christian worldview and how we are supposed to train our children with these books.

My 5th grade daughter's textbook is politically correct, multicultural and full of pictures, graphs and charts. The content that is there is slim and boring; in other words, "dumbed down." The school adopted it for reasons that it is popular and they want the kids to do well on the SAT's.

The 6th to 8th grade literature textbooks changed from Bob Jones (traditional Christian) to McDougal Littell (secular). The stories in the new textbooks are awful. Most of the authors I have never heard of and from their biographies in the textbook, they do not embrace a Christian worldview. Their stories are negative, immoral, and depressing. Again I believe that our school adopted these books because they are popular, may cause the kids to do better on the standardized tests and they offer a diverse view of the world.

On that last point is where I am having the most problem. The school says that they will combat the negative and immoral stories with Biblical principles to help the children defend their faith. There is no written teacher or student materials, however. Further, when I ask my daughter about the teacher's rebuttal from a Christian worldview she could not explain to me what the teacher had said in class. I can't say I blame her in that she is only 11 years old.

One story in her 6th grade textbook is called "Scout's Honor"

by Avi. This so-called comedy is about three arrogant Boy Scouts that earn a badge by lying, cheating and stealing. This story not only depicts the Boy Scouts in a bad light – have you heard about their pro-traditional family stand which they took recently – but it promotes the path of the ends justifying the means.

Should Christians be studying literature and history from secular textbooks? Are the school's arguments valid in that the immoral readings can be used as a apologetics-type course? What is the best way to train our children to respond to immoral behavior? Do we start apologetics in the 6th grade, 7th grade, or 8th grade in this manner? Is there another way? Are we sheltering the kids too much by not letting them read the works of the world and then tempering them in Biblical truth?

You have touched on one of the most important questions for Christian educators. Part of an answer to your question includes the importance of age appropriateness. I believe that the younger children are, the more vital it is that we give them an uncompromised Christian perspective. As they grow older and can understand more complex or abstract issues it becomes important to introduce them to other worldviews. This is dangerous for children who have yet to understand that there is a spiritual and intellectual battle going on in our society and in the world. However, if we never introduce them to other perspectives while still under Christian instruction they are open to discouragement and confusion when exposed to opposing ideas in college or later in life. The point is that when students are mature enough they should encounter difficult ideas under the direction of capable Christian instructors. This often acts as an inoculation against discouragement later.

The use of secular textbooks also depends on the subject matter at hand. A good math text from any source can be integrated into a Christian classroom by an alert instructor

without much concern. History and literature texts provide a much more difficult challenge. I would want to know that considerable time had been spent on worldview instruction beforehand. Students must be able to comprehend the different faith presuppositions being made by the different worldviews in order to evaluate works of literature sufficiently. I am not against a multicultural component in history and literature as long as it is genuinely attempting to inform students about other cultures belief systems and traditions. Attempts to make all belief systems or worldviews morally equivalent has to be rejected and shown to be invalid to the students, as does religious pluralism. Offering a multicultural curriculum simply to comply with state or testing standards is not a sufficient cause. The material should be as inclusive as truth demands and must be interpreted through a Christian worldview.

I do not doubt that some middle school students are capable of understanding the worldview issues at hand and that they can benefit from reading and discussing works that challenge the Christian perspective. However, the instructor should be very careful to introduce this material only after properly preparing the students and to maintain a healthy balance between works that reinforce the students faith and those that present a challenge to it. Those schools who offer a classical approach (the trivium) to Christian schooling usually note that the middle school years are ideal for introducing the instruction of logic and debating skills (dialectic phase). Materials that help accomplish this instruction often must include opposing viewpoints.

Merely offering students a diverse view of the world does not appear to me to be a legitimate goal of Christian education. Introducing students to various perspectives in order to evaluate them in light of revealed truth and to become a more effective ambassador for Gods Kingdom might be more appropriate.

Make sure that when you voice your concerns to your child's teacher that you are ready to listen carefully to his or her response. If you have to take up the matter with the school's administration, do so in a manner that will benefit the school in the long run.

I hope this is of some help.

For Him,

Don Closson
Probe Ministries

“Please Consider the Christian Vegetarian Position”

Greetings Mr. Williams,

I enjoyed your well-written and thoughtfully-considered article [“Probe Answers Our E-Mail: Eating Animals.”](#)

I urge you, therefore, to consider the Christian vegetarian position, developed in scholarly literature and now, finally, summarized on the Internet (www.ChristianVeg.com).

Like your own perspective, vegetarian Christians do not typically equate human and animal life and shun exploitation in order to be the best stewards we can be of the Creation God has made. Take a look for yourself and tell me what you think!

Some “food” for thought: you stated, “God provided a food chain involving plants and animals for man.” But much modern

research in nutrition is showing animal protein to be hardly necessary for the proper development of humans. In fact, an animal-free (vegan) diet is shown to be optimum (for human performance, growth, etc.). It certainly avoids many risks related to cancer and especially heart disease (which it virtually eliminates)—the two biggest killers of North Americans!!!

Consider the facts for your self—I am genuinely interested in your perspective in light of this knowledge. As a starting point from this perspective, from an “outside” (i.e. nonvegetarian) source, see the American Dietetic Association at <http://www.eatright.org/cps/rde/xchg/ada/hs.xsl/index.html>

Thanks for your time and consideration. I am looking forward to your response!

P.S. Relevant titles are listed on the bibliography on the website. See especially *Is God a Vegetarian?* by Richard Alan Young (student of Luke Timothy Johnson). And works by Stephen H. Webb, such as *On God and Dogs: A Christian Theology of Compassion for Animals* another title forthcoming from Oxford University Press this October.

Thank you for your recent E Mail concerning my article on “Eating Animals.”

I appreciate very much your contacting me, and I will make a note of your resources at ChristianVeg.com. I will be happy to refer your efforts to people who struggle with this issue, and I will explore your information myself as my dialogue with users continues.

I think there are many unanswered questions about this. For example, the human digestive system which parallels the herbivores (long) and not the carnivores (short) is an argument for your position. I have often pondered this.

On the other hand, if we take the Bible at its word, and

recognizing the nutrition, disease, and environmental factors, etc., which you mentioned, I still do not think we can develop an exclusive doctrine of vegetarianism based on the Scriptures. The fact that God gives explicit instructions about which animals could and could not be eaten in the Hebrew community would indicate some meat eating is allowed.

I also turn to the New Testament and discover that Jesus celebrated Passover and ate portions of the slain lamb.

Further, there are passages in the New Testament (Peter's vision in Acts 10, or Romans 14, for example) which indicate that this is a matter of conscience, indicating that some may choose to eat meat, and others who do not. But one is not supposed to judge the other, because God has sanctified both.

I will look forward to reviewing your material.

Warm Regards,

Jimmy Williams, Founder
Probe Ministries

Dear Probe,

I find your correspondence with the Christian vegetarian to be so interesting. . . It's got to be the best dialogue I've seen on this topic in almost all of my 30+ years. I just wanted to add that I don't think the choice to eat or not eat meat is one of just conscience. See, I quit meat (long before becoming a Christian) and had several problems physically/medically. I'm anemic, and not eating meat seemed to complicate the matter. I tried vitamins, eating more beans, nuts, fruits and vegetables (especially spinach) and still couldn't raise my iron level to where it needed to be. . . The only thing that worked (and had I been honest with myself I would have heeded the strong cravings) was a 6-8 ounce piece of beef liver prior to my monthly cycle. I've since taken to eating meat again (although I'm still more a veggie eater) and I've been a lot

healthier for it. I say all of this to say, that I and many others are not wired for life without flesh. The Lord's intricate work will never be fully figured out as it regards the body (although we've seen some of the best medical advances known to man and that's a good thing). . . Nothing could take the place of meat in my life. I'm not sure why this happened or why it's still a necessity, but I would love to be meatless, I just wouldn't be as healthy. I hope this all makes sense. I'm looking forward to the next installment regarding vegetarianism. Thanks and keep up the good work.

Well, your comment IS the next installment! <smile> As a lover of chicken and cheeseburgers, I freely admit to a pro-meat-eating bias. . . but even with my personal preferences aside, I think your experience adds an important element to the discussion. Vegetarianism can cause problems for women of childbearing age that men do not face, and this needs to be considered as we seek to be wise stewards of the bodies God gave us to use for His glory.

Thanks for writing!

Sue Bohlin
Probe Ministries

“My Son Wants To Go to a Britney Spears Concert”

My son is 15 years old. My husband and I have differing opinions on our son's attraction to Britney Spears. Our son has requested tickets to her concert. The photographs I've seen are extremely sexual and seem pornographic. Her physical gyrations at the concerts are repulsive to me but I know my

son loves it. It seems that this fixation on Britney is cultivating a strong appetite for more sexually explicit visual stimulations in the future. Share your thoughts or scripture please.

Dear _____,

I know what *I* think, but I thought it might be helpful to ask my son Kevin, a college sophomore home for a visit, how HE would answer your question.

First of all, he just shook his head and said "Keep that boy away from her!! She has incited so many guys to lust—I don't care WHAT she says about being a virgin. She's a tease."

Then he sat down with his Bible and provided the following perspective:

Proverbs 5:3-5 says, "For the lips of the adulteress drip honey. . . her steps lead straight to the grave." Verse 8 says, "Keep far away from her and do not go near the door of her house." Kevin pointed out that Britney's provocative dress and onstage behavior has invited so many men to lust after her that, according to the way the Lord Jesus equated lust with adultery in the mind, she could reasonably be considered an adulteress. Not literally, of course, but acting deliberately with the intent of making young men lust after her. And not very different from the woman warned against in Proverbs.

2 Timothy 2:22 says, "FLEE youthful lusts. . ." Don't even let there be an opportunity, either in behavior or in one's mind, to pursue unholy thoughts. Going to a Britney Spears concert is the exact opposite of fleeing youthful lusts.

And finally, Kevin brought up Proverbs 6:20 and 24-25: "My son, observe the commandment of your father and *do not forsake the teaching of your mother* . . . To keep you from the evil woman, From the smooth tongue of the adulteress. Do not desire her beauty in your heart, Not let her capture you with her

eyelids.”

My mother’s heart is delighted that he put such emphasis on your (and my!) role in your son’s life. From that same mother’s perspective, I would put this in the same context as the kind of unpopular decisions we make all the time:

- “I realize you don’t want to brush your teeth and you don’t see any reason for it, but you need to do it anyway.”
- “I realize you prefer pizza and chocolate cake to anything green, but it’s important for you to eat vegetables, and there will BE no pizza or chocolate cake until you eat the healthy stuff.”
- “I understand you hate pain and so do I, but you have to go to the doctor and get this booster shot, and I’m afraid you don’t have a choice in this.”

So it follows that we would say, “Yes, son, I know you think Britney Spears is the hottest thing since fire and this constitutes child abuse, but because I love you and want to protect you from your own flesh and hormones, you can’t go. End of discussion.”

Part of the value of God placing parents in a place of authority and protection over children is that we are able to see farther down the road than they are, and we can see the big picture of life better than they can. So we make them do things they don’t want to do, and we prevent them from doing things they really want to do, because acting in their best interests is more important to us than feeling popular and well-liked by our kids. We are no longer in high school; we can choose being wise and responsible over being popular.

But then there’s the other issue, which is that your husband and your son are apparently in agreement *against* your position and beliefs. I’m so sorry you have to deal with that!

But according to what the scripture says about our role as

wives, we need to be in submission at the same time that we support our husbands by providing our God-given woman's perspective. So all you can do is speak to your husband (ALONE) about how you think about this issue (and I would use the word "thoughts" rather than "feelings" since it's a temptation for many men to dismiss women's feelings as unreliable and not valuable. Not fair, I know, but it seems to be the way it is a lot of the time). The more logical and analytical you can be in sharing your perspective, the better the communication will probably be. Once your husband knows your position, leave the final decision up to him (which it should be anyway since he's the dad) and turn over the situation into God's hands. (This reminds me of a word of wisdom I heard the other day: If you can't change something, release it.) If your son ends up going to the concert, pray for him! Pray that he will have eyes to see the truth about what Britney's doing; pray that he will feel guilty; pray that he will have a growing discomfort with this kind of self-absorbed fleshly behavior. And if you haven't read *The Power of a Praying Parent* by Stormie Omartian, get it and pray it!

I hope this helps.

Blessings on you,

Sue Bohlin

Probe Ministries

"Is Smoking a Sin?"

Is it a sin to smoke? I have always thought it was, with the caveat that the Bible does not expressly forbid it. However, if smoking is wrong, why isn't eating high fat foods or candy wrong? I realize that these foods do provide something

positive, but they are still bad for you.

It's interesting that you should link smoking with eating junk foods. Probe field associate Todd Kappelman makes this connection often in discussing the "Christian" position on smoking, as he points out that people who condemn tobacco are often the first ones to pop Twinkies and Ding Dongs in their mouths and not think anything of it. Is one so much worse than the other?

So I asked Todd how, exactly, he would respond to your question, and took notes as he answered.

He said that there are three positions that can be taken concerning questionable behaviors, which are appropriate to the discussion of smoking.

First is *prohibition*: "I don't, and you shouldn't either." Pedophilia and abortion, for instance, would fall in this category.

The second is *abstinence*: "I don't, but I won't say you shouldn't." For many people, drinking and watching TV fall in this category.

The third is *moderation*: "I do, but I also practice moderation in it." For many other people, drinking and watching TV fall in THIS category. A number of Christians take this position in regard to smoking.

Moderation is a Biblical standard in non-moral issues: Phil. 4:5 says, "Let your moderation be known to all men."

It's interesting that the culture of North American Christianity has made smoking an unacceptable, "unChristian" behavior, while in Europe, many Christians don't think twice about smoking, but consider American Christians' materialism and women's makeup unacceptable, "unChristian" behavior. So much of what we think is wrong is culturally bound.

Still, the issue of our bodies being a temple of the Holy Spirit needs to be taken into account. Is it possible to smoke to the glory of God? To bring us back to your original question, is it possible to eat fatty foods with empty calories to the glory of God? [When I had my husband Ray read this response, he added here that if you had nothing else to eat but fatty foods, they are still calories which would keep one alive, whereas nicotine is a drug without redeeming qualities, and there is nothing good that smoking does for you. Even junk food provides calories that may enable someone to live, but smoking only hurts you.]

Todd said that smoking is a non-moral issue. The rightness or wrongness of smoking wasn't even discussed before the health consequences of tobacco were discovered. [Note: not all the Probe staff is convinced of this argument.]

Todd conceded that these arguments are all weak and sketchy, which is why there is danger in taking a hard stance. One person may have freedom from the Lord to smoke, especially pipes and cigars which have moderation built in (so I hear). Others may sense His leading to quit or stay away from tobacco in the first place.

The two best questions that each person should ask, I believe, are 1) Can I do this to the glory of God? -and- 2) Is it OK with the Lord for me to do this? It is entirely possible, given different cultures and groups of people we minister to, that He could give freedom to one person and tell another no.

I hope this helps!

Sue Bohlin
Probe Ministries

“Is Organ Donation OK?”

Is organ donation Biblical considering the resurrection of our bodies from the grave when Jesus comes back? Some people have argued that we cannot donate because our bodies need to be intact for the resurrection.

Think about how long it takes for bodies to decompose. Within a year, they can be nothing but bones. Think about the people who have been dead for a thousand years. Where are their bodies? By now even their bones have been completely broken down and recycled in the environment. And what about people who died at sea, or in fires?

In short, nobody's body will be intact unless they died moments before Jesus comes back. God is more powerful than the decomposition of our bodies, so there is no reason to withhold on organ donation so we can “help God out” when it comes time for the resurrection. In fact, I would argue that organ donation is a reasonable fulfillment of the Lord Jesus' comment that “Greater love has no man than to lay down his life for his friends.” If self-sacrifice is a measure of love, then organ donation is a way to be loving even after death.

Hope this helps!

Sue Bohlin

Probe Ministries