

Gambling: Dare We Mention It In Church? Rev. Dallas Henry

The subject is gambling and, sadly to say, it has infiltrated the church. Dare we speak on the subject without turning people away? More and more pastors, these days, are shying away from subjects they consider to be "controversial." "We're just going to preach Christ," they say.

The question we need to ask ourselves is in the once famous phrase: W.W.J.D. What would Jesus do/preach? Somehow I believe that Jesus would address the issue head on. As I understand it, one of the reasons He cleansed the temple was because of graft and issues of greed going on in the Temple. He said that His Father's house was a house of prayer but they had made it a den of thieves.

Most likely you have already heard someone say, "What's wrong with going to the casino, if we're just going for a little fun?" At the casino there will be a variety of ways to "have fun." Is having fun purchasing lottery tickets, playing beano or betting on the ball games?

The Apostle Paul was always in the middle of the action. For that reason he entered into a lot of confrontation. Whenever Paul preached, the response seemed to be either a revival or a riot! Actually, when the Word of God is preached, people ought to feel something. They might feel one of three things-- glad, sad or mad.

Often Paul preached Jesus, and the people became very mad! They did so in Acts 19 because his preaching damaged the very occupation of some people who worshiped the false goddess Diana. These people had made a lot of money as a result of their worship of Diana. If you really want to offend someone, talk about their money.

Paul's preaching hurt their business -- selling statues and shrines to Diana. When people got saved, they renounced these false gods and didn't buy them any longer.

Well, a riot ensued, and about 25,000 people filled the local amphitheater in opposition to Paul. Now that is strong resistance! We see the mob mentality in v. 24-25. They had a profit motive, v. 26 they had a propaganda machine and now Demetrius is going to smear Paul's name, and rally the troops against him.

They said things that we who are Bible-believing evangelicals have heard: Paul is bigoted, narrow-minded, and intolerant. He doesn't accept us and has no respect for our historical beliefs. In v. 27, he's appealing to their patriotism. He's using the "bandwagon" method of advertising, everyone believes in Diana!

The big problem in all of this is how Demetrius is leading people to believe in something for all the wrong reasons...mostly from a profit motive. And he is a master of rationalizing it, giving them "good reason" to feel okay with what they're doing.

Today, at the gambling parlors, people don't worship Diana, they worship a different god, which goes by the name "Lady Luck." And they worship her under the guise of gambling.

Anytime you deal with the gambling crowd and anytime you hear someone try to defend the practice of gambling, you always come up against these same two elements: profit motive and the propaganda machine. The State of Maine had an encounter with Penn National who threatened to stop construction on their new mega-casino if Maine raised the taxes on gambling. It all results in the mob psychology: v. 28-29a

Two thousand years ago, 25,000 people chanting a lie didn't make the lie become the truth, and today millions of people chanting a lie, still doesn't make it true. Today, even some Christians say, "show me a verse in the Bible that prohibits gambling" (for example, thou shalt not gamble).

The Bible is not a book of detailed laws; it is a book of great and grand principles. You won't find a Scripture that says, "thou shalt not use cocaine." Does that make it all right? Of course not!

Biblical principles take care of things like driving 80 mph through a school zone. The Bible is not a simple list of don'ts, because if it were, it would be so large it would take a freight train to haul it around. And, you can always find loopholes in laws. Laws are for the immature; they are for children.

In 1908, the Carlisle Institute and Harvard University were football rivals. The Harvard coach believed in a straightforward, hard-hitting game...he depended upon the basics. But the coach at Carlisle was different; he depended upon razzle dazzle and trick plays, ways to bend the rules to his advantage.

Well, the week before they were to play Harvard, Carlisle played Syracuse. Coach Warner of Carlisle came up with an ingenious scheme which won them the game. He took brown material, the same shade as a football, cut it into shapes like a football, the same size as a football, and had them sewn on the jerseys of his offensive players.

When all eleven players were out on the field, it looked like they all had a football! He had checked the rules, and had found out it was not against the rules. It wasn't breaking the letter of the law, but it certainly broke the spirit of the law. It violated the principles of good sportsmanship.

The next week, Carlisle faced Harvard. The day before the game, the Harvard coach met with Coach Warner and said, "Listen, are you going to use those trick jerseys tomorrow?" "There's nothing in the rule book against it!" Coach Warner replied. "OK," he said, "no problem."

The next day, Carlisle trotted onto the field, complete with their trick jerseys. Then Harvard came out with their crimson red jerseys on. Of course, the home team, Harvard, had to supply the footballs. When they pulled the balls out of the bag, they were crimson red!

Today it seems that people try to see what they can get away with from the Bible's perspective - how close can they walk to the line without crossing it - always trying to see how close they can dance around that grey area without violating the letter of the law. Mature Christians don't live that way!

There's no verse in the Bible that says, 'thou shalt not buy that lottery ticket,' but Biblical principles show that it is clearly, undeniably, sinful!

Risk taking

Gambling is not the same as taking a risk. Not all risk taking is gambling. Nowhere does the Bible condemn adventurous, pro-active living. Nowhere does the Bible, in principle, condemn categorically, all risk taking.

We take a risk every time we start down the road in our cars. Every farmer who ever plants a crop takes a risk. Anyone who has started a business took a risk.

Jesus actually condemned a man for playing it safe, burying his treasure, instead of investing it! Investing in the stock market is not the same as gambling.

There is a big difference between risk taking and gambling, because gambling winnings come from gambling losses. For every winner, there has to be a loser. One person gains because many others lose. Nothing is produced, nothing is created, no goods or services exchange hands.

With stocks, of course, something very different happens. Businesses are built, goods are created, and services are rendered. These, in turn, make more wealth to reward everyone involved. But gambling is different. Gambling is one person trying to get into the pockets of others, without earning the money.

Larry Burkett, said: "Gambling consumes, but it doesn't produce. It creates no new money, and no new goods." An investment is made to benefit yourself, as well as others; a wager, however, is a selfish attempt to benefit only yourself.

Of course, the devil pops in with his always present version of the situation. His lie, mixed with truth, is meant to deceive: "This will benefit education; this will build roads, etc." No, actually it's just another government tax. The poor become even poorer as they try their "luck." If you want to give to education, do it directly!

George Washington said, "Gambling is the child of avarice, the brother of iniquity, and the father of mischief."

Bible principles which confound gambling

-Gambling contradicts God's honesty principle Ex. 20:15 "thou shalt not steal."

-Gambling breaks the spirit of that command, because gambling is robbery by mutual consent. The wealth that changes hands is not a gift. Nothing is given back in exchange. Just because both parties consent, doesn't make it right. It simply shows that they both have covetousness in their heart.

There is little difference between a man with a gun walking away with the another man's money and a man with a pair of dice walking away with another man's money! The only difference is that in the first case there is a thief and in the second, there are two thieves! Both the robber and the gamblers desired to take what rightfully belonged to another man.

"Thou shalt not covet." The man who gambles and wins is a thief, the man who gambles and loses is a fool!

In Matt. 22:37 and following, Jesus said all the Commandments hinge on these two Commandments; "Love God with all your heart and love your neighbor as yourself." Gambling violates these commands.

Loving your neighbors while you're trying to get what belongs to them is not love. Gambling is pleasure and profit at the cost of another's pain and loss.

God's work principle

In the Bible, honest work and wages always go together. The Bible does not support getting something for nothing. II Thess. 3: "if any do not work, neither should he eat." This is God's divine welfare program!

The American dream has changed. It used to be 'just give me an opportunity.' Now, it's, 'oh God, give me the right six numbers!' Then they say to God, "I'll give most of it to the church!" Our state government promotes the idea of gambling, and then doesn't understand why we have this welfare problem that we do!

Virgil Petersen used to be crime commissioner in Chicago. He said, "Gambling produces no wealth, it simply redistributes it from the hands of the many to the hands of the few. Gambling invariably leads to higher police and welfare costs."

Senator Alexander Wiley of Wisconsin: "The idea that legalized gambling will be a revenue raiser is an illusion. Every dollar raised from such sources means five dollars spent in higher police costs, court costs, penitentiary costs, relief costs."

Nevada is the gambling capital of the nation, and the crime rate is twice the national average, and the suicide rate is triple! No wonder U.S. Senator Harry Reid, chairman of the Nevada gaming control commission told U.S. News and World Report, "Any state trying to follow Nevada's lead will find that the social costs far outweigh any economic advantage."

Herbert Jenkins, former president of International Association of Police Chiefs: "For every dollar received from gambling, government spends ten dollars fighting problems directly relating to legalized gambling including prostitution, embezzlement, bad checks, and police corruption. Racketeers and mobsters swarm to gambling communities, and bring with them other sordid businesses."

Legalized gambling, including the lottery, is a regressive tax that preys upon the people that can

least afford it! The biggest day of the month at the Atlantic City gaming tables is the day the welfare checks come out!

Stewardship principle

Some think that 10% of their money actually belongs to God. But really 100% is His.

Good stewardship says, "Don't flush God's money down the toilet. Don't throw it out the window." It would be wrong to do so! Likewise, gambling with God's money is wrong. If you heard the church was doing that, you'd be outraged. That's God's money!

Some say, "To us, it's just entertainment. We go with a certain amount of money, and when it's gone, it's gone." Yes, it's gone all right. God's money is gone, and Christians are still responsible before God for who ends up with His money, and what they do with it!

It's a well known fact that organized crime is in control of the casinos, and they depend heavily upon that revenue to support their lifestyle of immorality. What do they do with the money? They are involved in illegal narcotics, prostitution, murder, intimidation, bribery, etc.

Milton R. Wessel, attorney in charge of a government counsel on organized crime said; "Fully half of [organized crime's] income from gambling is earmarked for protection money paid to police and politicians...approximately 4.5 billion dollars per year goes from gamblers to [organized crime] to public officials as bribes."

It's not difficult to understand that gambling contradicts God's financial principles. Some say, "All I do is play the lottery, and the money goes to help the schools." That's pretty lame, as only a small percentage goes to help schools.

If you want to help schools, give directly to them. Gamblers should just admit that they are motivated by greed and covetousness, trying to get something for nothing. "Wealth gotten by vanity shall be diminished." (Prov.13:11)

The Trust principle

Gambling strikes at the root of our belief in an all-wise God Who provides for the needs of His people. One of our greatest privileges as believers is knowing we serve a God who cares and has promised to meet our needs. Followers of Christ don't depend upon Lady Luck, they depend on the Lord!

Some of the saddest faces you'll ever see are in the casinos. Even some Christians justify it as just good, clean fun. Not according to the faces inside! Even the few that are winners cannot help but play away their winnings, and then some! A grandma in Hawaii, who won \$100 on first try, gave it all back a quarter at a time, plus \$200 more!

The Danger principle

Prov. 6:27 "Can a man take fire in his bosom, and not be burned?"

No alcoholic ever planned on becoming enslaved when he took his first drink. No rapist ever planned on doing his evil deeds when he first looked at pornography. No addicted gambler has ever planned on becoming enslaved to gambling and losing everything he had when he inserted his first nickel!

Statistics show that upwards of 8% of those who say they gambled the first time 'just for fun,' became compulsive gamblers. Of those 8%, 22% will get divorced, 85% will steal from their employer to pay their accumulated debts, 79% will say they "wish they were dead," and 17% will actually attempt suicide.

"Can a man take fire in his bosom, and not be burned?"

Two sure things: (no risk involved!)

1. "...be sure your sin will find you out." God has a way of bringing things out into the open, for the protection of His church!
2. You can be sure that if you call upon the name of the Lord, you will be saved and delivered!