

CHRISTIAN LIFE REPORT

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THE OTHER SIDE OF THE GAMBLING HYPE

by
Darryl Wood

In a February, 2009 news release, the Poarch Band of Creek Indians touted their contributions to Alabama through their gambling operations (*The Birmingham News*, 2/9/09, B1-2). The group claims their electronic bingo operations supply thousands of jobs and millions of dollars in revenue to government. Others, however, dispute the Poarch numbers. In addition, the Indians have taken to the television airwaves with advertisements hyping other public service aid they provide to the state.

This shameless self-promotion serves one purpose for the Band. They seek leverage to expand their operations to other types of gambling. Proponents of gambling proudly list the advantages to the state. What they want you to ignore, however, are the disadvantages. Allow me to highlight a few with a personal example.

A couple of years ago, a disconsolate woman entered the office of the church where I served as pastor at the time. She stated that she and her family needed assistance. "Assistance with what, ma'am?" I countered. "Everything!" she stated. "We need food, rent money, and help with the electric bill. My babies are cold and hungry."

"That's a tall order," I responded. That church offers generous relief to people in need. So I sought information to help me understand more specifically her situation and what we could do to help. When asked for identification, the woman dug into her purse and pulled out a wallet. As she opened it, a couple of ticket stubs fell to the floor. I reached to retrieve them for her and noticed they were from a Tunica, Mississippi casino.

This gave me pause. Seeking to withhold judgment I said, "Ma'am, I need to ask you a question. Apparently you've recently returned from a gambling trip to Tunica, Am I right?" "Yes, I went last weekend"

she answered without hesitation. "Let me guess," I continued. "Did you lose the money at this casino that you needed to provide for your family?" The woman bowed her head and remained silent. But she did not deny it.

A discussion ensued in which I encouraged her to consider the consequences before she undertook such a foolhardy approach again. Since I cannot stand the thought of children going hungry, we did supply some food for the family. This incident provided me with tangible evidence of the direct impact of gambling that often gets ignored in the stampede toward easy money and shaky jobs.

First, people who can ill afford to throw money down a black hole do so. When people gamble, the losers far outnumber the winners. Hard earned wages or money from government assistance programs gets wasted.

Second, collateral damage to the families of gamblers mounts. Innocent children go hungry because grocery money gets dropped in slot machines. People lose housing when rent money is spent on lottery tickets. Families grow cold when funds for utility payments buy pull-tabs instead.

Third, local churches and other helping agencies bear the burden. These entities are asked to make up what gambling operations take away from people in our communities. Meeting human need is our calling, even when the need is caused by bad decisions. This added stress on already tight resources, however, limits ministries and services to everyone.

Be wary of the publicity hype of the pro-gambling establishment. They don't tell the whole story. You only get that when you encounter the victims — individuals and families who live in your community.

(Wood is pastor of First Baptist Church Vincent, Alabama)



*The articles in this issue were gathered from various sources
The opinions in the Christian Life Report are not necessarily the opinions of the Christian Life Commission*

GAMBLING WITH ETERNITY

by Dusty McLemore

Someone described gambling as the want for something quick and easy...for nothing. But, gambling is not "getting something" for nothing. Gambling is "giving much" for nothing!

I believe gambling is both a sin and a snare that has destroyed many lives. Gambling glorifies self and leads to greed, covetousness and addiction. On the surface gambling appears to be harmless and controllable, however that's the danger of this very addictive habit. Before one knows what's happened, their life is in a tumult of extreme chaos and devastation. Whatever form of gambling Satan uses to deceive us, whether it's casinos, betting on sports, or even something as subtle as the lottery, in the end everyone eventually loses. Remember, *"the love of money is the root of all kinds of evil."*

I grew up in a Christian home and was active in our church and our youth group. However at a young age I became intrigued with gambling. It began as something very innocent and seemingly harmless. I can remember being fascinated watching people play "penny-anny" poker. On the surface it appeared to be just an innocent form of recreation between friends, but to a young boy it sure was captivating and thrilling.

During my high school days I was athletic and very involved in sports I didn't realize it as much then as I would later, but I developed a highly competitive nature. I hated to lose and my competitiveness served as a catalyst fueling my desire to gamble. I soon found the combination of gambling and winning to be the ultimate high. I somehow rationalized my gambling as nothing more than competitive fun and passed it off as just a way to make a few extra bucks for school and dating.

Gambling seemed to come natural to me. It began with the love of winning money, but soon I just simply loved winning. I enjoyed beating my friends and taking their money as we bet on card games, pool, golf, or anything else on which we could make a wager. Winning produced an extreme rush of adrenalin and I loved it.

When I entered college in the fall of 1971, I progressed to another level of gambling when a friend introduced me to betting with professional bookies. The bookies would place odds on all kinds of sporting events such as football, basketball, baseball, boxing, etc.

I'll never forget the very first bet I made with a bookie. My friend and I picked twelve college football games and bet twenty-five dollars on each. Ten out of the twelve teams we picked won their games and we ended up winning two hundred dollars each! We were both elated! This was too easy! We couldn't wait to make another wager. As my gambling habit increased, so did my wagers. I was now betting almost on a daily basis. I soon hit a losing streak and had to quit college to find a job to support my habit. A huge loss on the Super Bowl in January of 1973 forced me to ask my sister's husband to cosign on a loan from the bank to help pay my debt to the bookie.

In July of 1973, sixteen-year old Patsy and I were married. She was aware of my gambling habit, but had no clue how much money I was betting.

By the summer of 1979, my compulsive gambling habit was taking its toll on our marriage. I found myself so addicted that I would gamble on anything. I played pinball machines at clubs, bet on horse racing, boxing, and even placed a bet on our high school football game when pro football went on strike!

I was totally consumed and addicted to gambling, although I would never admit it to anyone. I was even receiving threatening phone calls from my bookies. I kept thinking I could win back the money I owed because I had done it so many times before. I found myself in a desperate situation and I knew I was way out of my league! My life was in a downward spiral and I truly wanted to stop gambling.

Everything came to a head in October of 1979, as our home became a pressure cooker. For the first time in all my gambling days, I was about to panic. I was in debt way over my head. The bookies meant business, and they had informed me that if I didn't pay them soon they would first proceed to break my arms and then my legs. I was twenty-seven years old and I knew they were serious! I owed them several thousand dollars by this time and they wanted their money.

One morning at 3:00 a.m. I couldn't deal with the pressure any longer, So, I got out of my bed, walked over to our closet, fell on my knees and began to weep profusely. Crying out in desperation, all I can remember saying was "God save me! God save me!" I repeated it over and over again. I didn't know how God would do it, but I was certain He could because I had witnessed how he saved my wife. God saved and delivered me from my sins.

Later that morning, I called my mother to tell her that her son had been saved. I knew my mom had been praying for me for a long time. I couldn't wait to tell her the good news of my salvation, but on the other hand that also meant I had to tell her the news of my gambling as well. My father wasn't a Christian at the time but when I explained the depth of my problem he helped me financially to secure a loan from the bank. I paid substantial payments on that loan for three and a half years! It was worth every penny because it had resulted in my finding Jesus Christ as my Savior. Later Dad was saved.

In September of 1991 God called me to preach! I immediately enrolled in Bible College. He then called me to a little church across town called Lindsay Lane Baptist. In April of 1992, I became the pastor of that small congregation of thirty-two people.

Now, fifteen years later, God continues to bless us at Lindsay Lane Baptist Church. The church now has a membership of over 1,750 and still growing.

(McLemore is pastor of Lindsay Lane Baptist Church, Athens, Alabama)

WHAT THE BIBLE HAS TO SAY ABOUT GAMBLING

by Joe Bob Mizzell

INTRODUCTION:

Gambling is rolling in America, with every state except Utah and Hawaii having legalized some form of betting.

The state of Mississippi, which legalized gambling in 1992, is one of the fastest growing gaming states in the U.S. Even after the destructive forces of Hurricane Katrina demolished several casinos on the Gulf Coast, they have been rebuilt and/or relocated and back in operation.

In Alabama, we constantly must fight against forces that hope to expand legalized gambling in our state. In 1999 the people of Alabama said "NO" to a state operated lottery, but in spite of the strong vote of the people our legislators keep trying to expand gambling. The Alabama Supreme Court ruled in 2006 that sweepstake gambling in Alabama is illegal. That ruling closed numerous gambling establishments. Still, every year several bills are presented in the legislature to increase gambling.

There are many good biblical reasons why we should say NO to gambling:

I. The Bible promotes good stewardship against gambling

Is there a commandment against gambling?

Yes, **Thou shalt have no other gods before me.**

Yes, **Thou shalt not steal** (gambling is robbery by mutual consent).

Yes, **Thou shalt not covet.**

No, the Bible does not say, "Thou shalt not gamble."

But are we so intellectually and morally illiterate that we must have everything spelled out on a third grade level? Don't we know anything about spiritual principles? Gambling did not trouble Israel, so the first direct reference to gambling did not come until Isaiah 65:11 where it says, "Who forsake the Lord, who forget my holy mountain, who set a table for Fortune and fill cups of mixed wine for Destiny." Fortune and Destiny were the pagan gods of fate who symbolized good and bad luck.

One other direct reference to gambling came from Matthew 27:35 where the soldiers gambled for the garments of Jesus at the crucifixion.

II. The Bible attacks gambling as covetousness

There is no doubt that gambling is a form of covetousness. It is a desire to have something that does not belong to you. It is a desire to get things the easy way — something for nothing or almost nothing. The Bible says in Exodus 20:17, "You shall not covet your neighbor's house; you shall not covet your neighbor's wife, nor his male servant, nor his female servant, nor his ox, nor his donkey, nor anything that is your neighbor's."

III. The Bible assures us that gambling is caused by greed

Greed is a basic motive in gambling. The people who own casinos, dog and horse tracks and other gambling establishments are motivated by greed. If not for the huge profits there would be no gambling industry. The people who go to gambling sites are there also because of greed. They want to get rich quick, even though the odds against them are astronomical. Jesus said in Luke 12:15, "For a man's life consisteth not in the abundance of things which he possesseth."

IV. The Bible attacks gambling from the law of love

Gambling stands in opposition to the biblical law of love.

In Mark 12:31 Jesus told his followers, "Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself." Love imposes strong demands upon our lives. How can I love my neighbor and at the same time take his wealth, giving him nothing in return? Love refuses to engage in actions that mistreat or exploit others. My desire should be to give, not take from those I love. Gambling values taking or winning not giving.

The good Samaritan story of Jesus reveals there are no limits on love (Luke 10:25-37), for it is the law of the King, the principle by which our lives must be regulated. Love meets needs but gambling exploits, love entreats but gambling mistreats, love strengthens but gambling weakens, love builds up but gambling tears down, love never fails but gambling ever fails.

V. The Bible promotes good stewardship against gambling

Gambling undermines good stewardship. Christians are to put their trust in God for their financial resources, not in blind fate such as gambling. Ultimately, all things belong to God and we are his stewards (Psalm 24:1). We are to handle his resources wisely and gratefully. I do not think God wants his money put to the gambler's wheel.

The New Testament teaches that we first give ourselves to God (2 Corinthians 8:3), then out of that surrender we gratefully use whatever money or property we have for God's glory and human good (Luke 12:42-48).

Gambling is poor stewardship because gamblers are losers. The odds of winning the Florida lottery are 1 in 13,983,820. Your chances of being struck by lightning are greater than winning the lottery even if you play and pay on a regularly basis.

The Bible instructs us that good stewardship occurs when we use money for our basic needs, to support our family, contribute to the Lord's work, give to the poor and to pay taxes. This precludes gambling.

VI. The Bible emphasizes work over gambling

Gambling destroys a proper work ethic. Honest work and honest wages go together. Luke 10:7 tells us "the laborer is worthy of his hire." The parable of the talents gives us the option of investing (including the stock market—which is not gambling) in order to gain wealth, but it does not allow for gambling. Each person is obligated to work. One purpose for work is to gain wealth that can be used for God's glory. However, work in itself is good. What would life be like, if one sat in idleness. I have heard people say, "If I won the lottery, I would quit my job." If winning at gambling allowed you to stop working, that in itself would bring a certain amount of destruction to your life.

VII. The Bible promotes Christian influence in opposition to gambling

Gambling destroys one's Christian influence. If your pastor or other influential Christians gambled, would your admiration and appreciation for them decline? Most likely it would. I Thessalonians 5:22 instructs us to abstain from all appearance of evil. All our actions should glorify God. Gambling will not bring glory to God even if you give the church 10% of your winnings or even 100%. Remember God cannot be bought, he already owns the cattle on a 1000 hills.

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WHAT THE BIBLE HAS TO SAY ABOUT GAMBLING

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VIII. The Bible hates gambling because it corrupts government

The purpose of government is to serve and protect the citizens under its authority (Romans 13:1-7). Taxation is a legitimate method for government to raise revenue for its operating expenses (Matthew 22:31). When government legalizes gambling to supplement taxes, it transforms itself from a benevolent protector to a retailer of gambling. Through advertisement and other means it becomes a hostile predator and an exploiter of the people. When gambling (especially the lottery) becomes legal, the government promotes something that Alabama's forefathers stamped illegal and bad.

It is the responsibility of government to protect and possibly supply a safety net for the poor. When government legalizes gambling (especially lottery) it exploits the very people it is responsible to protect. Most studies show that the vast majority of lottery tickets are purchased by the poor. Money is used to buy tickets that should purchase food, clothing and lodging. Government sponsored lottery encourages the poor to be totally destitute.

IX. The Bible deplores gambling because it encourages crime

Studies show that when gambling comes to town, so does crime. In 1993, in Greenville, Mississippi, when riverboat gambling opened up, crime jumped 19%. When gambling was legalized in New Jersey, crime more than doubled from 1976 to 1989. In 1995 the FBI reported that organized crime families had infiltrated a Mississippi Gulf Coast casino and stolen a half million dollars.

There are numerous stories available about crime, prostitution and other vices that follow the gambling trade.

Conclusion:

Gambling contributes nothing to the common good. It undermines values, mocks work, finances crime, robs children, enslaves its addicts, subverts governments and poisons whatever it touches. Biblical insights lead us to reject its false promises and say "**NO**" to gambling.

(Mizzell is director of the Office of Christian Ethics/Chaplaincy Ministries, of the Alabama Baptist State Convention)

ILLEGAL GAMBLING FACTS

The state's gambling moguls are pushing legislation that will unravel Alabama's laws against gambling.

The first pro-gambling bill to come up in the Legislature, **SB 135/HB363**, is disguised as a so-called "local bill" in an effort to slip it past our anti-gambling stalwarts in the Legislature. In reality, the bill would have statewide impact. It would **legalize slot machines and expand gambling across the state.**

The second pro-gambling bill before the legislature is **SB471/HB676**. It is a Constitutional Amendment to legalize slot machines that is being pushed **by ALL of the state's major gambling interests, aided and abetted by other powerful special interests.**

CALL YOUR LEGISLATOR!!

- ◇ Senate Switchboard 334-242-7800
- ◇ House Switchboard 334-242-7600



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