

Fulton County Gospel News

Good News About Christ And His Church For All Of The World

"...Christ is the head of the church: and He is the Savior of the body." – Ephesians 5:23

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GAMBLING AND THE LOCAL CHURCH

by B. J. Clarke

She walked to the door of the church building in her mini-skirt and knocked on the glass. Shortly, the church secretary answered the door. The woman in the mini-skirt asked, "Is this *Sam's Town*?" (*Sam's Town* is a popular casino and gambling hall located in Las Vegas, Nevada. More recently *Sam's Town* has opened a casino in Tunica, Mississippi, approximately 35 miles south of Memphis, Tennessee.) The woman had been told that *Sam's Town Employment Training Center* was located in our building. When our secretary told her that she was at the wrong place, the woman seemed astonished.

As it turns out, the training center the woman was looking for was just across the street from our back parking lot. In fact, we were soon inundated with employees from *Sam's Town* parking their vehicles on our lot while they were being trained or tested. The elders agreed that our parking lot had not been built for the purpose of enabling casino employees to have a place to park while they learned the craft of bilking people out of their money. We expressed our displeasure to *Sam's Town* and requested that their employees not park on our lot. When the problem persisted even after our request, I personally visited the training center to inform the manager that we would have no choice but to begin towing vehicles if the problem continued. I told him that this was not a personal matter but that we had a serious difference about gambling and its effect on the community. His reply to me spoke volumes! The manager looked at me and said, "I understand. Gambling and the church just don't mix." How true that is! If only I could get some of my brethren to recognize this truth.

Not long ago Tunica County approved a measure to introduce casino gambling and has since surpassed Atlantic City in having the second largest number of casinos per square foot in the United States of America. At the time of this writing

nearly a dozen casinos are operating only 30 minutes away from our church building. Many other casinos are presently being built or planned. Furthermore, even though there are no actual casinos in DeSoto County, we have been overrun with training centers for these casinos. I can think of at least six of these training centers within two or three miles of the church building. Thus, the influence and presence of gambling is very much evident in our county.

But what effect has gambling had on the local church here in Southaven, Mississippi and DeSoto County? I assure you that the problems are far more significant and far-reaching than just the presence of unwanted vehicles on our parking lot. The tragic truth of the matter is that casino gambling has already begun to siphon the spirituality out of the hearts of some of the brethren in this area. Apostasy has already occurred! Souls have already been lost that were once saved! Marriages have already begun to disintegrate that were once strong! But, someone may say, "How can gambling be responsible for these blemishes?" Please read on.

GAMBLING PRECIPITATES CARNALITY AND COVETOUSNESS

It is the will of God that His church be "a glorious church, not having spot, or wrinkle, or any such thing; but that it should be holy and without blemish" (Eph. 5:27). God desires that His children be set apart from the conduct of the world. The church is to be holy! Our focus is to be spiritual and not fleshly. The apostle Paul indicted the Corinthians for their carnal conduct (1 Cor. 3:1-4). The Greek word for "carnal" is the word "sarkikos." *Vine's Expository Dictionary of New Testament Words* says the word signifies that which is "sensual, controlled by animal appetites." The carnally minded are those who focus upon the things of the flesh to the exclusion of minding the things of the Spirit,

or they attempt to mix fleshly things with the spiritual (2 Cor. 6:14:18).

Gambling encourages us to become obsessed in our appetite for money and material wealth. While it is true that money, in and of itself, is not carnal, there are some who have a carnal desire for money. Paul said, "godliness with contentment is great gain. For we brought nothing into the world, and it is certain we can carry nothing out. And having food and raiment let us therewith be content. But they that will be rich fall into temptation and a snare, and into many foolish and hurtful lusts, which drown men in destruction and perdition. For the love of money is the root of all evil: which while some coveted after, they have erred from the faith, and pierced themselves through with many sorrows. But thou, O man of God, flee these things" (1 Tim. 6:7-11a). Gambling does not encourage contentment. Even the winners are not satisfied with their winnings. More often than not, they gamble their winnings away in an attempt to win more.

Paul says that those who will be ("desire to be" NKJV) rich fall into temptation and a snare. A couple of years ago I studied with a young lady and baptized her into Christ. Up until recently she had been very faithful. But then she was laid off from her job. Her personnel director at work gave her name to one of the local casinos and suggested that they should contact her. Suddenly, this Christian sister began missing services on a regular basis. When I contacted her and expressed my concern, I sensed that something deeper was wrong. She informed me that she was considering a job offer from one of the local casinos. For over an hour and a half I attempted to persuade her against accepting the job. I explained to her that we were to "have no fellowship with the unfruitful works of darkness but rather expose them" (Eph. 5:11). I reminded her that we are not to be partakers in other men's sins (1 Tim. 5:22). I talked with her about influence and atmosphere. She listened but kept saying, "But this is more money than I've ever made

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before. After all, I've got to pay the bills." I told her that the elders would rather help her pay her bills instead of her going to work for a casino. It was to no avail. She couldn't see the truth of what I was saying because of the dollar signs in her eyes. Her desire to be rich ensnared her. Because of her love of money, which she coveted after, she erred from the faith (1 Tim. 6:10). She will now no longer answer the door or my phone calls.

Jesus spoke of some who hear the word, go forth, and are choked with cares and riches and pleasures of this life, and bring no fruit to perfection (Luke 8:15). It is sad, but true, that more than one child of God in this congregation and county has become choked with cares and riches via gambling, and as a result, has strayed from the faith. The influence of gambling promotes laying up treasures upon the earth rather than laying them up in heaven (Matt. 6:19-20). In this same context, Jesus warned that we cannot serve God and mammon (Matt. 6:24). The word "mammon" was a common Aramaic word for riches. Satan seeks to convince us that we can serve both God and riches. One of the means by which Satan tries to obsess us with the acquisition of riches is casino gambling. Satan wants us to buy into the philosophy which says, "You only go around once in life; go for the gusto. Get all you can while you can!" Satan wants us to forget Paul's admonition, "If ye then be risen with Christ, seek those things which are above, where Christ sitteth on the right hand of God. Set your affection on things above, not

on things on the earth" (Col. 3:1-2). It is not accidental that setting our affection on things above is coupled with putting covetousness to death in our lives (Col. 3:5). It is not accidental that Peter joins our being strangers and pilgrims upon the earth with abstaining from fleshly lusts upon the earth (1 Pet. 2:11).

It is disconcerting to discover just how many people of God in this area are being enticed by the glitter and glamour of gambling. Every few weeks I will hear of some brother or sister who has visited a local casino and tried their hand at the slot machine or blackjack table. Oh, that I could convince all my brethren that gambling "is not of the Father, but of the world" (1 John 2:16). It is not spiritual, but carnal. To be carnally minded is death; but to be spiritually minded is life and peace (Rom. 8:6). Gambling takes much more than it gives, but even that which it gives "passeth away and the lust thereof; but he that doeth the will of God abideth forever" (1 John 2:17). The casinos and the cash within them will someday melt with fervent heat and be burned up (2 Pet. 3:10). "Seeing then that all these things shall be dissolved, what manner of persons ought ye to be in all holy conversation and godliness?" (2 Pet. 3:11). Unfortunately, the casinos have convinced some of my brethren to sell their souls for the economic security of a job or the pipedream of acquiring massive amounts of that which won't last anyway!

WHAT CAN BE DONE?

The church must recognize that a battle for the mind is underway! Satan wants our minds to focus on the carnal. Christ wants our minds to focus on things above. Gambling is just one of many tools utilized by Satan to accomplish his purposes. Thus, the church must aggressively educate the members concerning the spiritual and financial risks associated with the glitter of gambling. Gambling is like a whited sepulchre; it looks good from the outside but is really full of corruption. Sermons need to be preached and classes need to be taught for the express purpose of identifying the sinfulness and danger of gambling. Extensive preaching should be done to demonstrate the fleeting nature of riches and the eternal nature of the soul.

The elders here at the Southaven church of Christ are extremely interested in guarding the flock from the enticements of casino gambling. They are sending a personal letter to each family

in the congregation, warning of gambling and its dangers. In addition, they are enclosing within each envelope a copy of the tract, "Gambling: National Pastime To Prosperity Or Sure Bet To Poverty And Perdition," by Garland Elkins and Robert R. Taylor, Jr. They have also asked me to preach on the subject. Thus, each family will have been educated and warned, both from the elders by personal letter and tract, and by the preacher from the pulpit.

CONCLUSION

Gambling impacts the local church by calling brethren away from the spiritual to the carnal. It precipitates covetousness and setting our affection on things on the earth instead of in heaven. Since the casinos have only been open here in North Mississippi since 1992, we have only seen the tip of the iceberg concerning the problems gambling will cause both in the church and in the community. I predict that it will not be long before an eldership in this county has to sit down and confront a member whose wife and children are suffering and needy due to a gambling addiction. It may have already happened.

The battle is on! Let us fight the evil influence of gambling by teaching extensively concerning stewardship and the temporal nature of earthly possessions. Let us emphasize and ask, "What shall it profit a man if he shall gain the whole world and lose his own soul?" (Matt. 16:26).

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CONTRIBUTIONS

CHURCHES

Jeff Church of Christ, Thayer, Mo.	\$25.00
Moko Church of Christ, Salem, Ar.	25.00
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Church of Christ, Bakersfield, Mo.	25.00
Welcome Hill Church of Christ	10.00
Mammoth Spring, Ar.	
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WHY WOULD A CHRISTIAN DEFEND GAMBLING?

by Dennis Gulledge

From the streets of ancient Babylon to the glittering Las Vegas strip to the casinos of Tunica, Mississippi, gambling has been a force to be reckoned with by concerned people of all societies. Archaeological discoveries reveal gambling devices dating as far back as 1800 years B.C. In Babylon headless arrows were used in wagering, and ancient Greeks had dice marked with numbers on four sides.

In 1976 the gambling industry set about to change its image. At the Fourth National Conference on Public Gaming, keynote speaker Raymond Blanchard said, "We've got to convince people we're not in the gambling business. We're in the public revenue business." This is what we in the state of Arkansas are hearing now as pressure is being brought to bear on the state to eliminate economic shortfalls with casino gambling. Many people see nothing wrong with it. They see no evil. They hear no evil. Even if gambling were to bring needed revenue to Arkansas it is never right to do evil that "good" may come. Solomon wrote, "Better is a little with righteousness than great revenues without right" (Proverbs 16:8). Paul said, "And not rather, (as we be slanderously reported, and as some affirm that we say,) Let us do evil, that good may come? whose damnation is just" (Romans 3:8).

What Gambling Is And What It Is Not

Gambling means "To play games of chance for money or some other stake; to take a risk in order to gain some advantage; to bet, wager." **Artificial risks** are created in order to take from the many so as to benefit the few who are "lucky" enough to get it.

One of the common arguments used in the attempt to justify gambling is to say that there is an element of risk in everything we do, and that all of life is a gamble. It is often alleged that farming, operating a business or investing money involves risk and is therefore gambling. It is true that these enterprises involve risk, but there is an expenditure of effort in order to produce tangible results for the benefit of others by the fruit of labor involved. This cannot be said of gambling.

There are four ways in which we may obtain money. First, money may be earned through labor. Solomon said,

"Wealth gotten by vanity shall be diminished: but he that gathereth by labour shall increase" (Proverbs 13:11). Second, money may be received as a gift. Paul said, "Now ye Philippians know also, that in the beginning of the gospel, when I departed from Macedonia, no church communicated with me as concerning giving and receiving, but ye only" (Philippians 4:15). Third, money may be found with no way to determine who may have lost it. Fourth, money may be stolen (Ephesians 4:28).

The money one receives from gambling is not earned, it is not a gift and it is not found (all three being legitimate ways of obtaining money). The money received is stolen, by consent if not by force. Guy N. Woods said, "Gambling is a form of theft, because it takes from many and gives without effort to a few. Most often, those from whom money is taken are least able to lose, and usually the loss falls on helpless women and children who must suffer deprivation because of the gambler's obsession" (*Questions & Answers, Vol. 2, p. 17*).

Why Is Gambling Sinful?

Someone will ask, "But, where does the Bible say, 'Thou shalt not gamble'?" It doesn't, and neither is it necessary, because gambling is a gross violation of several fundamental truths of God's Holy Word.

First, gambling is wrong because it violates the Biblical principle of stewardship. A steward is one who manages the property of another. We are managers of that which is given to us by God (James 1:17). As stewards we must be good stewards. Paul wrote, "Moreover it is required in stewards that a man be found faithful" (1 Corinthians 4:1-2; Cf., 1 Peter 4:10). It cannot be said that gambling is good stewardship, because the gambler wastes his substance in riotous living (Luke 15:13).

Second, gambling is wrong because it thrives on the principle that "might makes right," which is a clear contradiction of God's demand, that "thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself" (Leviticus 19:18; Luke 10:27). If one can secure his neighbor's money or goods by skill or chance, then, it's loser's tough luck. It is impossible for a Christian to engage in gambling (to any degree, and in any amount) and obey Christ, when he says, "Therefore all things whatsoever ye would that men should do to you, do ye even so to them: for this is the law and the prophets" (Matthew 7:12). No one would appre-

ciate being on the losing end of the gambling proposition.

Third, gambling is wrong because it stifles the incentive for honest work. God's plan for man is that he earn his living by honest effort (Genesis 3:19). God promises no loaves to loafers. Paul warned, "For even when we were with you, this we commanded you, that if any would not work, neither should he eat" (2 Thessalonians 3:10). Why should one want to earn his living "by the sweat of his brow," when he can more easily take in great sums (or, lose the same) with the simple roll of the dice, the flip of the card, or, the chance of getting that winning number? A man cannot be a gambler and qualify as an elder in the Lord's church, because an elder must not be greedy for money (1 Timothy 3:8).

Fourth, gambling is wrong because of its addictive potential. Gamblers Anonymous estimates that there are 6-10 million compulsive gamblers in the United States today. Gambling is destructive of character to those who engage in it. Some become so obsessed with gambling that they will readily yield to any temptation in order to get money to indulge their habit. Compulsive gamblers attempt suicide at a higher rate than any other group. The world considers compulsive gambling an "illness," with the participant not being responsible for his actions, but, Jesus said that such a one is a slave to sin (John 8:34). Many people feel that they can be involved on an innocent level and that they will not get caught up in the character-destroying aspects of gambling. However, knowing what we do about the addictive potential of gambling, one is certainly at risk to be brought under its power. As Paul said, "All things are lawful unto me, but all things are not expedient: all things are lawful for me, but I will not be brought under the power of any" (1 Corinthians 6:12).

CONCLUSION

States may legalize some forms of gambling, but this does not make it right. Presently, Arkansas is being urged to legalize gambling beyond the horse and dog racing that already exists in our fair state. **It will come to a vote in the ballot box. Are Christians in this state going to look the other way on this issue and ignore or deny the many Scriptural principles that make gambling a moral travesty wherever it is practiced?** No matter what is said,

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there will be those who intend to make gambling legal. Some brethren will undoubtedly be gullible enough to listen to the arguments in favor of it and vote for it thinking that it is for the good of Arkansas. To the contrary, "Righteousness exalteth a nation: but sin is a reproach to any people" (Proverbs 14:34).

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GET OUT AND VOTE "NO" ON ALL GAMBLING AMENDMENTS

The time has come for all Christians and those who favor godly living to "exercise ourselves unto godliness" (1 Timothy 4:7). We cannot afford to be lazy in the matter of gambling which threatens the state of Arkansas. Let us all vote and help to get out the vote of others in order to defeat every gambling amendment on the November 8th ballot in Arkansas!

Elders, preachers, other church leaders - do all of the following and help to prevent the further deterioration of the moral fiber of our state and country.

1. Preach on the subject of gambling and all of the associated evils thereof. Make sure that your members and friends are well informed on these issues.
2. Encourage everyone to register to vote before the registration deadline of October 19th in most Arkansas counties.
3. Set up transportation to the polls for the elderly and others who are without means to get there. We need every vote we can get - both young and old. Our elderly sometimes think that their vote doesn't matter. It does! Those who are older and wiser need to speak out for godliness through their votes. Especially encourage those who do not normally vote to do so and help defeat these gambling amendments.
4. Ask everyone you know to vote "NO" on amendments 3, 4, and 5 on the ballot. **Amendment # 3** is to permit charitable bingo and is sponsored by the Arkansas legislature. Gambling is never good, even for so-called charitable purposes! **Amendment # 4** is deceptively called a "Lottery Amendment," but if passed will also permit gambling casinos and charitable bingo as well as a lottery. This amendment is sponsored by the "Arkansas First" committee of the racetrack interests in West Memphis and Hot Springs. **Amendment # 5** promotes gambling

casinos in Wilson, AR and a state lottery. This is sponsored by the "Committee to Promote Arkansas." Remember, vote "NO" on all amendments, 3, 4, & 5!

Do not be deceived into thinking that any of these gambling interests are really concerned with "promoting Arkansas" or putting "Arkansas first." The promise of bringing millions and millions of dollars into Arkansas is only a small percentage of the revenues that gambling interests will gain. If they get three dollars to our one dollar, who is really first and whose interests are being promoted? Think! Studies in states with these gambling ventures have shown that states end up paying out more money than they take in. These increased costs come from having to police the associated problems of gambling and crime, plus medical and social costs of caring for gamblers and their families who lose their incomes on gambling. Additionally, while some of the promised money goes into state treasuries, the amount coming in often dwindles markedly after a few years, while the problems connected with gambling increase.

Statistics show that we can defeat these powerful gambling interests, in spite of the millions of dollars that they are spending to get into Arkansas bill-folds and pocketbooks. Let's show these "high rollers" that committed Christians can be a more powerful force than all the money in the world. God has given us a tremendous blessing to live in a country where we have a democratic system that allows our voices for righteousness to be heard. We have something to say about what evils we allow to surround us. Let us say "NO" to all gambling in Arkansas and help to protect our state and especially our children from needless exposure to this sinful vice.

GET OUT AND VOTE "NO" ON ALL GAMBLING AMENDMENTS!

We will truly be putting Arkansas first and promoting our state by exercising our "NO" vote on November 8th. Let us pray for wisdom, strength and success. If gambling is passed, it will largely be because the Christians in each community did not exercise their vote for godliness.

Ted J. Clarke, Editor

It is harder to conceal ignorance than to acquire knowledge.

GOD'S PLAN OF SALVATION

1. Hearing the word of God (Romans 10:17; Acts 16:32).
2. Believing what is taught (Mark 16:16; Hebrews 11:6).
3. Repentance (Acts 2:38; Luke 13:3; Acts 17:30).
4. Confession (Romans 10:9, 10; Acts 8:37).
5. Baptism (Acts 2:38; Mark 16:16; I Peter 3:21; Romans 6:3, 4).
6. After the above five steps, faithful Christian Living (I Peter 2:11, 12; Revelation 2:10).

THE CHURCH OF CHRIST

1. The Bible is its only guide (Romans 1:16; I Thess. 2:13).
2. Wears a Biblical Name (Romans 16:16).
3. Established at the right place (Isaiah 2:2,3; Acts 2).
4. Established at the right time (Joel 2:28-32; Acts 2).
5. Established on the right person (Matthew 16:18; Acts 2:36).
6. Saved are in it (Ephesians 5:23; Acts 2:47).
7. Its members are enrolled in heaven (Hebrews 12:23).
8. Membership in it is obtained by obedience to God's commands including baptism (Acts 2:41-47; I Corinthians 12:13).

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