

Gambling: What is at stake?

Isaiah 65:11

By Dr. Franklin L. Kirksey

Introduction

Philip L. Wilson shares the following, "Gambling in some form or other has been around since ancient times. Some pharaohs of Egypt were known to be compulsive gamblers and often had their dice buried with them. Gambling was prevalent in ancient China as well, prompting the philosopher Confucius, who lived 500 years before Christ to denounce it.

Gambling was popular among the Greek and Roman civilizations. Both had goddesses of gambling. Of course Roman soldiers gambled for Christ's robe at the foot of the cross.

Through the intervening centuries, various countries ran or permitted gambling operations in some form. France and Britain conducted lotteries. But in 1826, Britain banned lotteries. Lotteries in the United States were used for a number of purposes, including an attempt to build Washington, D.C., the construction of a monument to George Washington in Maryland, and money toward the support of such schools as the University of Pennsylvania, Columbia, Harvard and the University of North Carolina.

Most, if not all, states, operated lotteries or permitted their operation. As time passed, however, corruption became rampant and the outcry against gambling grew. By the time of the Civil War, only three states did not have laws against lotteries." Wilson concludes, "For the most part, Christians have traditionally viewed gambling with alarm--and with good reason, for its basic philosophy is anti-God."¹

Dr. Kenneth S. Kantzer (1917–2002), former president of Trinity International University, Deerfield, Illinois, and editor of Christianity Today magazine, shares in an article titled, "Gambling: Everyone's A Loser", "[Dr.] Cotton Mather (1663–1728) preached against gambling as the denial of the providential control of God. Puritans and Quakers generally followed him." Dr. Kantzer further explains, "Archbishop of Canterbury William Temple (1881–1944) echoed the words of [Dr.] Cotton Mather and evangelicals before him. The fundamental Christian objection to gambling is that it represents a denial of the God of providence. It replaces him with the universe of pure chance and a dependence on blind luck."

In Isaiah 65:11 we read God's indictment against His chosen people, "But you are those who forsake the LORD, / Who forget My holy mountain, / Who prepare a table for Gad [the pagan god of "fortune" and "luck"], / And who furnish a drink offering for Meni [the pagan god of "destiny" and "chance"]."

Dr. Kantzer adds, “[Evangelicals] denounced [gambling] as socially harmful and inconsistent with the biblical view of God and the Christian’s responsibility to exercise good stewardship with his resources. Methodists and Baptists supported the Puritans and Quakers in an evangelical activism that lay at the growing edge of American Christianity all through the nineteenth century. State after state rejected government lotteries and declared gambling illegal. The last fling of government participation came in Louisiana in 1894. It ended in corruption and in a financial fiasco. Public gambling was finally stopped cold when U.S. Postmaster General John Wannamaker, an evangelical, barred ‘all letters, postcards, circulars, lists of drawings, tickets, and other materials referring to lotteries from the mail.’”²

A caller to the “SoundOff” column in the Mobile Press–Register, shares the following, “I’m having my girlfriends over for our monthly Bunco game soon but don’t tell [Alabama Governor] Bob Riley and John Tyson [commander of Alabama Gov. Bob Riley’s task force on illegal gambling]. We play with dice and play for money. We even drink a little wine, but don’t tell them that, either. They’ll hunt us down and raid us. Come on, girls! Bunco is on at my house and bring your money. And, by the way, most of these gals are all over 65, so let the fun begin! Just let the people vote, and quit embarrassing Alabama.”³

Dr. Wayne Flynt, professor emeritus in the Department of History at Auburn University, reminds us, “Riverboat gambling was prevalent in Alabama in the antebellum era.” I understand Dr. Flynt shared his views about gambling with his Sunday school class at Auburn First Baptist Church. He believes that casinos “prey on the poor, contribute to political corruption and discourage the values of hard work and thrift.” Dr. Flynt feels that his opposition to gambling “put him at odds with most of the church’s congregation.”⁴ I wonder if those who would be at odds with Dr. Flynt, understand the section of The Baptist Faith & Message titled, “The Christian and the Social Order”. Among other things, it says, “Christians should oppose . . . every form of greed, selfishness and vice.”

We read in Ephesians 1:3–14, “Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places in Christ, just as He chose us in Him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and without blame before Him in love, having predestined us to adoption as sons by Jesus Christ to Himself, according to the good pleasure of His will, to the praise of the glory of His grace, by which He made us accepted in the Beloved. In Him we have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of sins, according to the riches of His grace which He made to abound toward us in all wisdom and prudence, having made known to us the mystery of His will, according to His good pleasure which He purposed in Himself, that in the

dispensation of the fullness of the times He might gather together in one all things in Christ, both which are in heaven and which are on earth—in Him. In Him also we have obtained an inheritance, being predestined according to the purpose of Him who works all things according to the counsel of His will, that we who first trusted in Christ should be to the praise of His glory. In Him you also trusted, after you heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation; in whom also, having believed, you were sealed with the Holy Spirit of promise, who is the guarantee of our inheritance until the redemption of the purchased possession, to the praise of His glory.”

Paul the apostle wants believers to understand who they are in Christ. We must constantly remind ourselves as believers who we are in Christ.

I. Gambling discards our values from Christ.

Gambling discards our values from Christ. Jesus’ Sermon on the Mount recorded in Matthew 5–7 presents values from Jesus Christ our Lord. Jesus teaches in Matthew 6:19–21, “Do not lay up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust destroy and where thieves break in and steal; but lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust destroys and where thieves do not break in and steal. For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.” Jesus also teaches, “No one can serve two masters; for either he will hate the one and love the other, or else he will be loyal to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and mammon. Therefore I say to you, do not worry about your life, what you will eat or what you will drink; nor about your body, what you will put on. Is not life more than food and the body more than clothing? Look at the birds of the air, for they neither sow nor reap nor gather into barns; yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not of more value than they? Which of you by worrying can add one cubit to his stature? ‘So why do you worry about clothing? Consider the lilies of the field, how they grow: they neither toil nor spin; and yet I say to you that even Solomon in all his glory was not arrayed like one of these. Now if God so clothes the grass of the field, which today is, and tomorrow is thrown into the oven, will He not much more clothe you, O you of little faith? ‘Therefore do not worry, saying, ‘What shall we eat?’ or ‘What shall we drink?’ or ‘What shall we wear?’ For after all these things the Gentiles seek. For your heavenly Father knows that you need all these things. But seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all these things shall be added to you. Therefore do not worry about tomorrow, for tomorrow will worry about its own things. Sufficient for the day is its own trouble” (Matthew 6:24–34).

In a message titled "The Myth of the Money Tree", Dr. Charles Colson shares, "A Texas Baptist official put it well: 'A lottery is the sale of an illusion to poor people who view it as the only possibility for breaking out of the cycle of poverty they live in.'"

Paul warns believers "[not] to trust in uncertain riches but in the living God" (1 Timothy 6:17b). We read in Proverbs 3:5-7, "Trust in the LORD with all your heart, / And lean not on your own understanding; / In all your ways acknowledge Him, / And He shall direct your paths. Do not be wise in your own eyes; / Fear the LORD and depart from evil."

British theologian and author, Rev. Godfrey Clive Robinson (1913-1971), reminds us of the biblical declaration, "Whatever is not of faith is sin" (Romans 14:23). Rev. Robinson states, "Gambling is a sin against God. It is a misuse of what He has graciously provided to meet the needs of His children, through their labor and the just exchange of goods and service. Let those who claim that gambling is their way of helping good causes simply help those causes, thus eliminating the motive of greed. Gambling is opposed to the example and teaching of the Lord Jesus Christ. It is as we trust and reverence Him that we learn to receive all His gifts with gratitude and employ them with a wise concern for the welfare of all."⁵

Dr. Richard Land, president of the Ethics & Religious Liberty Commission of the Southern Baptist Convention, states, "Scripture gives Christians principles for living in a proper relationship with God and with each other. Gambling and its promotion violate these principles. It is my prayer that Christians will run from gambling in every form, for there is scarcely no greater act of disobedience and faithlessness than to cast your lot at the feet of a false idol, in this case, the gambling industry."⁶

II. Gambling dims our vision of Christ.

Dr. J. Wilbur Chapman (1859-1918) American evangelist, revivalist and pastor, said, "It is a very difficult thing to make a rule for another to live by. The rule which governs my life is this: anything that dims my vision of Christ, or takes away my taste for Bible study, or cramps me in my prayer life, or makes Christian work difficult, is wrong for me.; and I must, as a Christian, turn away from it."

The lyrics to the hymn titled "Be Thou My Vision" are "attributed to Dallan Forgaill, 8th Century (Rob tu mo bhoile, a Comdi cride); translated from ancient Irish to English by Mary E. Byrne, in 'Eriú,' Journal of the School of Irish Learning, 1905, and versed by Eleanor H. Hull, 1912, alt."⁷

Allow me to share the lyrics of the first and last stanza:
"Be Thou my Vision, O Lord of my heart; / Naught be all else to me, save that Thou art.

Thou my best Thought, by day or by night, /Waking or sleeping, Thy presence my light.
High King of Heaven, my victory won, / May I reach Heaven's joys, O bright Heaven's Sun! Heart of my own heart, whatever befall, / Still be my Vision, O Ruler of all."⁸

We read in 1 Peter 1:3–9, “Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who according to His abundant mercy has begotten us again to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, to an inheritance incorruptible and undefiled and that does not fade away, reserved in heaven for you, who are kept by the power of God through faith for salvation ready to be revealed in the last time. In this you greatly rejoice, though now for a little while, if need be, you have been grieved by various trials, that the genuineness of your faith, being much more precious than gold that perishes, though it is tested by fire, may be found to praise, honor, and glory at the revelation of Jesus Christ, whom having not seen you love. Though now you do not see Him, yet believing, you rejoice with joy inexpressible and full of glory, receiving the end of your faith—the salvation of your souls.”

III. Gambling diverts our venture with Christ.

Ovid Demaris (1919–1998), born Ovide E. Desmarais, former United Press correspondent and newspaper reporter, shares, "It was broad daylight when I stepped into his cab. I had just arrived in Atlantic City to begin research on my book *The Boardwalk Jungle*. We were in the heart of the business district, but he gave me that wary appraisal taxi-drivers usually reserve for the most dangerous areas of our cities. Seemingly satisfied that I wasn't going to mug him, he shifted gears, and I said, trying to be friendly, 'Well, what has casino gambling done for you?' He swung around and glared at me. 'I'll tell you what it's done for me,' he snapped angrily. 'It turned my daughter into a hooker and my son into a hustler.'"⁹

We read in 1 Corinthians 6:12a, “All things are lawful for me, but all things are not helpful.” Sometimes people use these words to justify immoral living under the banner of Christian liberty. Peter writes, “Therefore, beloved, looking forward to these things, be diligent to be found by Him in peace, without spot and blameless; and consider that the longsuffering of our Lord is salvation—as also our beloved brother Paul, according to the wisdom given to him, has written to you, as also in all his epistles, speaking in them of these things, in which are some things hard to understand, which untaught and unstable people twist to their own destruction, as they do also the rest of the Scriptures. You therefore, beloved, since you know this beforehand, beware lest you also fall from your own steadfastness, being led away with the error of the

wicked; but grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. To Him be the glory both now and forever. Amen” (2 Peter 3:14–18).

Dr. Kenneth S. Kantzer, explains, "Gambling is an artificially contrived risk, taken for selfish gain at another's expense, with no constructive product or social good as its goal."¹⁰ If you enjoy the rush of risk remember if you are a real Christian you will risk your life and livelihood in the will of God. Paul warns Timothy, “Yes, and all who desire to live godly in Christ Jesus will suffer persecution” (2 Timothy 3:12). In Romans 16:3–4a, Paul writes about “Priscilla and Aquila, [his] fellow workers in Christ Jesus, who risked their own necks for [his] life.”

Quintus Septimius Florens Tertullianus, anglicized as Tertullian (160–220) taught, "If you say that you are a Christian when you are a dice-player, you say you are what you are not, because you are a partner with this world."¹¹ We read in 1 John 2:15–17, “Do not love the world or the things in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him. For all that is in the world—the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life—is not of the Father but is of the world. And the world is passing away, and the lust of it; but he who does the will of God abides forever.”

Arthur Holmes shares that *The Gambler* by Fyodor Dostoyevsky (1821–1881) [pronounced Fyo'der DahstahYEHfsky] “is a penetrating revelation of the addictive and destructive power of gambling through the experience of a young tutor who found himself sucked into the habit, and robbed of every other goal in life.”¹²

Conclusion

Gambling is wrong because it follows the premise that luck rules the world. Isaiah indicts the Israelis of his day, “But you are those who forsake the LORD, / Who forget My holy mountain, / Who prepare a table for Gad [the pagan god of “fortune” and “luck”], / And who furnish a drink offering for Meni [the pagan god of “destiny” and “chance”]” (Isaiah 65:11). Many people today worship the god of luck, but we worship the Lord of Glory. David writes in Psalm 95:3, “For the LORD is the great God, / And the great King above all gods.” Paul writes in Ephesians 4:4–6, “There is one body and one Spirit, just as you were called in one hope of your calling; one Lord, one faith, one baptism; one God and Father of all, who is above all, and through all, and in you all.”

Gambling is wrong because it is contrary to Christ’s teaching for us to love our neighbor as ourselves. “Jesus said to [a lawyer], ‘You shall love the LORD your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind.’ This is the first and great commandment. And the second is

like it: 'You shall love your neighbor as yourself.' On these two commandments hang all the Law and the Prophets" (Matthew 22:37-40).

Gambling is wrong because it expresses a wrong attitude toward labor. In Exodus 20:9 we read, "Six days you shall labor and do all your work." Paul writes in Ephesians 4:28, "Let him who stole steal no longer, but rather let him labor, working with his hands what is good, that he may have something to give him who has need." He also writes in 2 Thessalonians 3:10-12, "For even when we were with you, we commanded you this: If anyone will not work, neither shall he eat. For we hear that there are some who walk among you in a disorderly manner, not working at all, but are busybodies. Now those who are such we command and exhort through our Lord Jesus Christ that they work in quietness and eat their own bread."

Solomon writes in Proverbs 13:11, "Wealth gained by dishonesty will be diminished, / But he who gathers by labor will increase."

Dr. Larry Braidfoot, former general counsel and director of Christian Citizenship and Religious Liberty Concerns of the Southern Baptist Convention Christian Life Commission, and author of *Gambling: The Deadly Game*, explains, "Behind the arguments for legalization of gambling like the economic self-interests of the pro-gambling group. The main motive is materialistic gain, with little regard for moral and social consequences. The so-called economic benefits that supposedly follow a policy of legalized gambling come to only a few commercial interests.

Stripped of these kinds of trappings and claims, gambling is reduced to a stark matter of greed. The gambling interests who control the industry are motivated by greed. They appeal to the greed that hooks people into believing they can get something for nothing."¹³

We read in Proverbs 15:27, "He who is greedy for gain troubles his own house, / But he who hates bribes will live."

Paul confesses in Philippians 4:11-12, "Not that I speak in regard to need, for I have learned in whatever state I am, to be content: I know how to be abased, and I know how to abound. Everywhere and in all things I have learned both to be full and to be hungry, both to abound and to suffer need." Paul explains in 1 Timothy 6:6-10, "Now godliness with contentment is great gain. For we brought nothing into this world, and it is certain we can carry nothing out. And having food and clothing, with these we shall be content. But those who desire to be rich fall into temptation and a snare, and into many foolish and harmful lusts which drown men in destruction and perdition. For the love of money is a root of all kinds of evil, for which some have strayed from the faith in their greediness, and pierced themselves through with many sorrows." Paul also writes, "Command those who are rich in this present age not to be

haughty, nor to trust in uncertain riches but in the living God, who gives us richly all things to enjoy. Let them do good, that they be rich in good works, ready to give, willing to share, storing up for themselves a good foundation for the time to come, that they may lay hold on eternal life” (1 Timothy 6:17–19).

Dr. Braidfoot states, "Gambling represents a 'unique' kind of economic transaction. Unlike the stock market or other economic activities, it produces no product of service that serves human needs." He concludes, "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!"¹⁴

On the issue of ownership William J. Petersen, retired senior editor with Fleming H. Revell, Grand Rapids, Michigan, and the author of more than 20 books, shares the following, “The Bible teaches that all you have is given to you by God. Whatever you possess—whether it is money, property, loved ones, abilities—is held by you in trust. It is God's investment in you. In a sense, you are God's banker; it is your responsibility to invest. He may withdraw his investments at any time. The gambler acts as if everything belongs to him.”¹⁵

In Psalm 24:1 we read, “The earth is the LORD’s, and all its fullness, / The world and those who dwell therein.” The psalmist, Asaph, also writes, “For every beast of the forest is Mine, / And the cattle on a thousand hills. I know all the birds of the mountains, / And the wild beasts of the field are Mine. ‘If I were hungry, I would not tell you; / For the world is Mine, and all its fullness” (Psalm 50:10–12). Paul writes in 1 Corinthians 10:26, “the earth is the LORD’s, and all its fullness” (1 Corinthians 10:26).

On the issue of stewardship William J. Petersen shares, “Although we are to be faithful stewards of all God has entrusted to us, material possessions must not be the focus of our lives.”¹⁶

Dr. William Walsham How (1823–1897) penned these words in 1858:

"We give Thee but Thine own,
What-e'er that gift may be;
All that we have is Thine alone,
A trust, O Lord, from Thee.
The captive to release,
The God the lost to bring,
To teach the way of life and peace--
It is a Chistlike thing.
And we believe Thy word,

Though dim our faith may be;
Whate'er for Thine we do, O Lord,
We do it unto Thee."

Dr. Harry Hollis, James M. Medlin Chair of Business Ethics, Professor of Management at Belmont University, Nashville, Tennessee, writes, "Lotteries are based on a philosophy contrary to Christian teachings, especially Christian stewardship. A young man who just lost his last \$40 gambling shrugged it off by saying, 'What's money for if not to have fun with?' His statement reflects the underlying philosophy of lotteries and of all gambling. (Of course, lotteries often advertise that they are in the business to 'help education,' but as one lottery expert put it, that is done 'to assuage the moralists.')

Contrary to this money-is-to-have-fun-with philosophy, the Christian teaching is that money is to be used to serve others. In the process, a Christian may have fun helping others, but his central motivation is service, not pleasure-seeking."¹⁷

What Dr. Hollis says about a state operated lottery also applies to gambling in general.

Dr. David L. McKenna, former president of Seattle Pacific University, has served as chairman of the Ad Hoc Committee on Gambling for the State of Washington by appointment of the Governor of that State. After studying the issues firsthand he concludes that 'gambling . . . is a parasite on public morals, ' says McKenna, . . . Professional gambling should be vigorously opposed by practical as well as moral arguments. Crime, corruption, and cheating accompany professional gambling. Irrefutable evidence also shows the connection between professional gambling and prostitution, drugs, and violence. Once the stakes are high enough, no system of control can cope with the efficiency and subtlety of organized crime, or with its daring."¹⁸

As believers we must remember who we are in Christ. Many Christians are living far below their privilege as children of the God. Paul's prayer recorded in Ephesians 1:15-23 provides encouragement as we seek to be wise in this evil day. Here he writes, "Therefore I also, after I heard of your faith in the Lord Jesus and your love for all the saints, do not cease to give thanks for you, making mention of you in my prayers: that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, may give to you the spirit of wisdom and revelation in the knowledge of Him, the eyes of your understanding being enlightened; that you may know what is the hope of His calling, what are the riches of the glory of His inheritance in the saints, and what is the exceeding greatness of His power toward us who believe, according to the working of His mighty power which He worked in Christ when He raised Him from the dead and seated Him at His right hand in the heavenly places, far above all principality and power and might and dominion, and every name that is named, not only in this

age but also in that which is to come. And He put all things under His feet, and gave Him to be head over all things to the church, which is His body, the fullness of Him who fills all in all.”

Gambling discards our values from Christ. Gambling dims our vision of Christ. Gambling diverts our venture with Christ. As a believer in the Lord Jesus Christ when you think about gambling remember what is at stake.

¹Philip L. Wilson, "What's Wrong with Gambling?"

²Kenneth S. Kantzer, "Gambling: Everyone's A Loser"(Carol Stream, IL: Christianity Today, November 25, 1983), pp. 12-13

³Mobile Press-Register, Section 2-A, "Beach Blanket Bunco" (Mobile, AL: Saturday, April 3, 2010)

⁴Mobile Press-Register, Section 1-C, George Talbot, Political Editor, "Flynt eyes gambling" (Mobile, AL: Wednesday, March 31, 2010)

⁵Godfrey Robinson cited by William J. Petersen, "Isn't All of Life a Gamble?" (Chicago: Moody Monthly, November, 1975), p. 139

⁶Christian Life Report: A Newsletter of the Alabama Baptist Christian Life Commission, Vol. 20 No. 1, Facts & Issues, compiled by Joe Bob Mizzell, Director, Office of Christian Ethics/Chaplaincy Ministries, Alabama Baptist State Convention (January/February/March 2010), p. 4

⁷Available from: <http://www.cyberhymnal.org/htm/b/t/btmvison.htm> Accessed: 04/08/10

⁸"Be Thou My Vision" attributed to Dallan Forgaill, 8th Century (Rob tu mo bhoile, a Comdi cride); translated from ancient Irish to English by Mary E. Byrne, in 'Eriú,' Journal of the School of Irish Learning, 1905, and versed by Eleanor H. Hull, 1912, Available from: <http://www.cyberhymnal.org/htm/b/t/btmvison.htm> Accessed: 04/08/10

⁹Ovid Demaris, "Why Casino Gambling Is A Bad Bet"

¹⁰Kenneth S. Kantzer, "Gambling: Everyone's A Loser"(Carol Stream, IL : Christianity Today, November 25, 1983), pp. 12-13

¹¹Encyclopedia of Religion and Ethics, ed. James Hastings, Volume VII (New York: Charles Scribners & Sons, 1915), p. 164

¹²Arthur Holmes, "Why Oppose Gambling?"

¹³Larry Braidfoot, "Gambling--Why Christians Must Say No" (Lynchburg, VA: Fundamentalist Journal, 1987)

¹⁴Ibid.

¹⁵William J. Petersen, "The False and Capricious Lady Luck"

¹⁶Ibid.

¹⁷Harry Hollis, "Lotteries: Government by Chance" (Wheaton, IL: Tyndale House Publishers, The Christian Reader, October–November, 1973), p. 26

¹⁸David L. McKenna, "Gambling: Parasite on Public Morals" (Carol Stream, IL: Christianity Today, June 8, 1973), p. 6

By Dr. Franklin L. Kirksey, pastor First Baptist Church of Spanish Fort 30775 Jay Drive Spanish Fort, Alabama 36527

Author of Sound Biblical Preaching: Giving the Bible a Voice Available on Amazon.com and WORDsearchbible.com

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