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# GAMBLING CHRISTIANS?

A religious news item startled me into realizing just how far the religious world has deteriorated. The article told of a large church built in Las Vegas, Nevada, the capital of gambling in the United States. The church was built at one end of the gambling strip at a cost of 3.1 million dollars. The church is meant especially to serve the millions who come to the city to gamble.

This Las Vegas church actually encourages people to place gambling chips in the offering basket when it is passed. A chip is a small round disk purchased and used instead of money in gambling machines. Once in a while one of the leaders of the church leaves his clerical robes behind and dons a T-shirt and blue jeans and goes to a gambling casino to play the chips in hopes of winning some money for the church.

The priest in charge of the church commented that people often ask him to pray that they would win at the casinos. He frankly admitted that prayer does not guarantee that people will win. If prayer really led to a big win, then why is there still a debt on the church building?

This article reminded me of another article about Las Vegas I read some years ago. A prominent Protestant evangelist conducted a crusade at Las Vegas. Many responded to the invitations, including a casino operator. The operator debated whether or not to give up his profession in light of some Christians disapproving of gambling. Finally he decided that for the time being he would continue to operate the gambling establishment and try to be a "witness" for Christ to his customers.

We may conclude that these two illustrations are rather far-fetched. Certainly we or our churches would never condone gambling. But it seems to me that acceptance of gambling is only a logical step at the end of a trail of acceptance of society's cultural practices and values. Professing Christians begin by accepting such things as dancing, movies, use of cigarettes and alcohol, and other things not specifically mentioned in the Bible but which violate Bible principles. The next step is to accept or reason around sins that are named in the Bible such as divorce and remarriage and other forms of immorality. Gambling, too, can be looked upon as a rather harmless pastime.

Since gambling is not specifically named in the Bible, some would excuse it. However, it violates several Bible principles, not the least of which is honest toil for honest wages. *"If any would not work, neither should he eat"* (2 Thessalonians 3:10). Proverbs 13:11 says, *"Wealth gotten by vanity shall be diminished: but he that gathereth by labour shall increase."* Ephesians 4:28 emphasizes that honest, hard work is the way to earn money and to have to give to those in need: *"Let him that stole steal no more: but rather let him labour, working with his hands the thing which is good, that he may have to give to him that needeth."*

Gambling also violates the Scriptures that teach against oppressing the poor. Some rich people do gamble, but it is well-known that most of the money made in gambling establishments, including lotteries, is garnered from the poor. Some have called lotteries a "poor man's tax."

In a gambling-prone society where people try to get something for nothing, Christians must watch diligently lest they get caught up in lotteries, raffles, gambling for "good" causes, and gambling's first cousin, the sweepstakes, as well as programs that emphasize sitting back and letting someone else do the work while we benefit. Let us labor honestly for our needs, the needs of others, and most of all for the kingdom of God.

~Roger Berry