

Spiritual Considerations...

Selected articles designed to assist in our Bible study and Christian walk.



Dave Phillips, editor

number 16

A Logical Concern

Dave Phillips, Germantown

This is the second of two “Spiritual Considerations” dedicated to a consideration of gambling. The issue reveals a deeper and far more important concern for the Christian, because the subject of the Christian and his money is serious. Paul wrote, “For the love of money is a root of all sorts of evil...” (1 Tim. 6:10, NASV). This represents a quandary for Christians who recognize the need for money for daily sustenance, but also recognize the inherent danger in becoming greedy. This presents a tension between the spiritual and the secular. Understanding there will always be a tension between the way of God and the way of the world, we are reminded that we are not told to come out of the world, but to keep the world out of us. What a challenge. In order to accomplish this task, our minds must be trained for discernment. We want to learn to respond - not to react or over-react. When facing current issues, such as gambling, we are going to have to search diligently to find the truth.

A lady from Millington (name withheld because she may have changed her mind) exemplified the relationship between gambling and money when she wrote the following editorial (my editing, DP) for the Commercial Appeal (Jan. 1994).

“We need more money for our schools to have computers and air-conditioners as well as paying our educators more money. Of course, in order to do this, we must pay higher taxes...”

“Meanwhile, our residents drive across the bridge to West Memphis and spend money at the dog track (and) to Tunica to spend money on riverboat gambling. I’ll just bet those small-town residents are laughing all the way to the bank. We look and act like idiots! Are these towns not included in the Bible belt?”

“The ‘big city’ folks, leaders as well as residents, agree to topless dancing bars where alcohol or beer is served, but we cannot play bingo in church! Please someone, enlighten me; help me understand the logic of this.”

“I can’t think of a better place in this area to have casinos or riverboat gambling than Mud Island. It’s perfect! I guarantee you that if Mud Island did become such a place, there would be all kinds of restaurants and shops operating successfully there in a year or less of opening. And, those of you who wouldn’t agree to such a terrible thing: Well, you don’t have to go, it’s your choice...”

“We’d also have plenty of money for our schools and just about everything else they say that our raised taxes would need to cover. We wouldn’t need to raise taxes!”

I’m glad this lady asked to be enlightened. Read the following articles and see if they shed light on this secular issue that is also a spiritual concern.

(Excerpts from) Gambling: A Deadly Game

Larry Braidfoot, (Nashville: Broadman Press, 1985)

“The first government-sponsored lottery in the English tradition was established in 1566. Government-operated lotteries realized decreasing amounts of revenue, largely because of the proliferation of illegal gambling which undermined the government-sponsored game...By the early nineteenth century, strong opposition was developing to legalized lotteries. Three reasons were cited: (1) lotteries were a financial drain on the economy, (2) many lotteries were fraudulent, and (3) lotteries contributed significantly to crime and poverty” (p. 36).

“Daniel B. Suits, an economics professor at Michigan State University, has pointed out that low-income lottery players wager a disproportionately high percentage of their income on the lottery, with the numbers game having the primary appeal.”

“Perhaps the most conclusive evidence of how lotteries appeal to poor people is the fact that their outlets are concentrated in poorer neighborhoods. One highly informative study was done in

New Castle County, Delaware in 1979. The study found no lottery outlets in upper-income neighborhoods where 17,360 persons lived. There was one lottery outlet for every 17,774 persons in upper-middle income neighborhoods. There was one lottery outlet for every 5,032 persons in the lower-middle to middle-income neighborhoods. There was one lottery outlet for every 1,981 persons in the poorest neighborhoods” (p. 39).

“Gambling represents a ‘unique’ kind of economic transaction. Unlike the stock market or other economic activities, it produces no product or service which serves human needs. Every part of the industry – the construction of facilities, the production of equipment, the employment of workers – is aimed toward an activity that produces no product or service of value.”

“Even if viewed as an ‘entertainment’ industry, gambling fails to meet the test. It is unlike any other form of entertainment which has been devised. Its costs are not specified. It has an addiction quality. It creates social consequences which are not associated with entertainment and which are banned when they are produced by other kinds of business transactions” (p. 187).

“A clinical definition of compulsive gambling might not be as helpful or as clear as one of the small pieces of literature published by Gamblers Anonymous: ‘A compulsive gambler is a person whose gambling causes a continuing and growing problem in any department of his life. He becomes dominated by an irresistible obsessive urge to gamble. Often he appears bent upon his own destruction’” (p. 158).

“The odds of winning a Massachusetts lottery jackpot of \$13 million were much “better” – only one in 1.9 million. Yet an MIT math professor, using gambling terminology, reported that the chances of winning that jackpot were like being dealt four straight royal flushes, all in spades, and then leaving the poker table to meet four complete strangers who had the same birthday” (p. 33).

Casting Lots

Tank Tankersley, Park Avenue News, Vo. XXIII, No. 6

It was no surprise to learn that very few pennies of every dollar generated by state-run lotteries end up serving any beneficial purpose. It is axiomatic that whatever government does it does badly. Nor was I shocked to discover that those proposing such lotteries make every effort to assure that those voting on the issue don’t discern this reality until it’s too late. After all, if one is in the business of making a hash of things, it is not likely that he will want that publicized. This is not to condemn government “per se.” That I cannot do, for government is God’s agency, created by Him to serve His purposes on earth. But it should be apparent to all by now that many of the agents have proven derelict in their duties, and that some have even gone directly into the employ of God’s competitor. It is lamentable but indisputable that more often than not governmental undertakings simply don’t pan out. Why should we imagine that a government lottery would prove an exception to this rule?

And what if it did? What if ninety cents of every dollar ended up furthering some legitimate governmental purpose? So? I have never been moved, except to disdain, by the argument that something bad is somehow magically transmuted into something good if its proceeds are put to a desirable use. Under that reasoning the activities of a Mafia hit man are to be applauded if he takes his earnings and uses them to pay for a child’s much needed operation. Will anyone buy that one? Why should government be in the business of catering to the worst that is in us? Why should it exploit our desire to benefit from the luck of the draw, rather than by the sweat of our brows?

What if I go to the casinos but do not gamble? Suppose that I go for the food and the entertainment. Is that OK? I cannot answer for you, but for me it would not be. I suppose that one can listen to Mozart in a brothel or read Shakespeare in an opium den, but why? For what purpose? To what end? I’d feel uncomfortable in that environment. I’d feel that my presence would indicate my approval of, or at least my indifference to, that going on around me. And I would not approve.

“And when they had crucified him, they parted his garments, casting lots upon them, what every man should take” (Mark 15:24). I do hope that, had I been there, I would have disapproved of what was going on around me, even if I weren’t doing the casting, even if I were just joining the guys later, in the buffet line.