

Catonsville Presbyterian Church

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I Timothy 6: 9-10 *“But those who want to be rich fall into temptation and are trapped by many senseless and harmful desires that plunge people into ruin and destruction. For the love of money is a root of all kinds of evil, and in their eagerness to be rich some have wandered away from the faith and pierced themselves with many pains.”*

“Why Christians Consistently Oppose Gambling”

The General Assembly of our Church, and its predecessors over the last hundred years, has addressed the issue of gambling many times with consistency. It seemed to me that it would be important, as State of Maryland considers re-introducing gambling, that at least we should consider what the church has said over the years. It has spoken in 1925, 1936, 1938, 1943, 1950, 1952, 1954, 1975, 1986, 1992, 1994 and 1996 on this subject in some depth. Other denominations have done like-wise.

Why it is that Christians consistently oppose gambling?

Isn't it innocent? Fun? Recreation?

More people go to gambling palaces than to baseball parks.

Gambling, in the public mind, has recently gone from being considered a sin, to being considered “recreation.” This is, in part, because the gambling industry has cleverly changed language, and we haven't noticed.

It used to be called “gambling”; it’s now called “gaming.”
Casinos are now “congregate gaming palaces” (it almost sounds like a church, doesn’t it?)
Slot machines that used to be called “one armed bandits” are now “video lottery terminals”.
They think we’re so dumb that we won’t notice!

What does it mean to have to sanitize language about something? We’re being misled and lulled to sleep by this well-financed industry with its hired lobbyists, lawyers, and political consultants. Misled and lulled to sleep, we begin to think that gambling is innocent. But I want to say to you that gambling is a tumor on the body politic, it sucks the organisms’ strength, and the tumor will grow if we are not vigilant.

What theologies inform the Christian opposition to gambling? Because our theologies are all we have to oppose the millions of dollars that are being passed around and the millions of dollars that are being promised. Looking at all that has been said by the General Assembly in the past and distilling it’s statements, I am going to try to reduce the reasons for opposing gambling to three theologies:

The First biblical/theological principle that leads to opposing Gambling is: Gambling flirts with another god.

It is human to be adventuresome. We like to play games, to take chances, we love the exhilaration of a close call! That’s why we have amusement parks! That’s why we have extreme sports! Risking our wealth on a venture could possibly be a good thing. Explorers! Entrepreneurs!.....These are good sides of being adventuresome! But there is a dark side to risks, which at it’s

worst, can become a death wish. It can draw us into the sphere of a non-god whose name is “Lady Luck”. Have you heard of her?

Lady Luck! I went to see the gambling casinos in Atlantic City. What tragic places they are. Mr. Trump and the others who have become billionaires have done so on the back of folk, like those who are in those rooms, and in large measure by means of their slot machines. Look around those rooms and you will see the elderly and the infirm and poor souls who want Lady Luck to smile on them. Look at the slot machines that used to take coins but now will take bills and even your plastic! See many who came for the “entertainment” of having their pockets picked. Sacrificing and becoming the sacrifice on Lady Luck’s altar, sacrificing to a god who does you no good. As our passage says, “those who want to be rich fall into temptation and are trapped”. Now, not all who gamble become Lady Luck’s disciple, but many do. But of those who don’t become addicted (and maybe you are one of them) by feeding her offering plates you enable her to snare others as surely as the recreational drug user funds the drug lords who commit the mayhem and the murder and the undermining of governments.

Christians believe there is only one God who controls our destiny. Human life is to be lived under the sovereign will of this God, and in this God’s Guidance and Providence--no other god. God’s Guidance is found in Scripture and prayer and in the company of other believers. God is the guide to our fortune and our destiny. Not the “luck of the draw,” not the “wheel of fortune,” not “come on, Lady Luck, baby-needs-a-new-pair-of-shoes!” because Lady Luck is not going to provide baby the new pairs of shoes. We believe that God created this world and ourselves, and this God, alone, knows all things good for us.

The Second biblical/theological principle that leads to the opposition to gambling: Beyond flirting with another god, gambling is about something for nothing. Something for nothing requires that there be NOTHING for many. Something for nothing requires there be nothing for many.

To want to gamble a little of your wealth in hopes of winning big wealth leads you into a system that presumes that many must lose for your fantasy....(and it is fantasy)....to be possible. For there to be a winner requires many losers.

Because the gambler has to hope that others will lose, at its heart gambling breaks community rather than building it. Personal gain at the expense of others breaks community. It is not the idea of “commonwealth” for all that has always been the Christian basis upon which hope and community rest.

Look, Maryland's budget shortfall is \$1.8 billion this year. The Governor wants to get \$400 million this year from slots and \$800 million in future years. That would mean that we would need to have gamblers put \$12.5 billion into the slot machines (all 10,500 of them) in order for the state to get \$800 million for potential programs that we care about. The total take or profit would be 10% of the \$12.5 billion and the state's \$800 million is 64 % of that. The rest would be used for sweetening the pot for horse racing; to make the winnings for horse racing even larger! Some of it would be used to underwrite horse breeders. A big chunk (24%) would go to the track owners. Welfare for the wealthy! No wonder they want this. Of the \$12.5 billion that would need to come out of Marylander's wallets, only 6.4% would have the potential of getting to education.

However, we remember that once before we were told the

lottery was going to fund education, and it has not. I'd go further and ask, who wants our children's education funded by this tainted income? What lesson does that teach?

My point is that Christians seek for others the good that we want for ourselves. Gambling, on the other hand, encourages us to get much for ourselves at the expense of others. Christianity wants to build community and believes gambling breaks community.

If the community has needs, we believe in stepping up and paying for them directly by fair taxation.

We don't advocate taking it from the few.

Gambling creates no new wealth. Produces nothing. Something for nothing for me, equals nothing for many.

The Third biblical/theological principle that seems to address our opposition to Gambling: Is this good government?

From King David in the Old Testament through Paul in the New Testament, Christianity is clear that good government is to be a God-send. It is to be about being a shepherd and a servant. That's what government is supposed to be. When the Bible calls for respect for those in public office, it is always supposing that those who govern are good stewards of that office. In every state where slots have been legalized slot operators become the largest contributors to political campaigns and largest lobbying force in the state.

It seems to me there is something evil about government injecting into our society a practice that harms many people and diminishes community. How can an alliance with the gambling industry be called "good government"?

The State Legislative Service, itself, has said that between 2 and 7 percent of all who gamble will become addicted. That is the State's estimate. We know that for teens it is much higher. The State itself feels it will need to set aside a half million dollars to treat gambling addiction that it is going to engender. How can this be good government?

In Connecticut, it is estimated that the costs of social services doubled when state sponsored gambling was introduced. What would we say to a government that wanted to sell drugs for recreational use to balance its' budget?

What does it say to our children when the State sponsors what the police used to arrest violators for: Lotteries and slot machines?

A minister in Annapolis told of a leader in his church being in the check-out line at a CVS pharmacy behind a woman with two children. She was obviously poor. She was buying milk, some medications and lottery tickets. When it became clear that she didn't have enough money for all of them, she left the milk and medications, and took the lotto tickets.

The conservative columnist, William Safire, says "State sponsored gambling is a banana republic abomination that undermines national values."

In short, Christians have never seen gambling as positive. It breaks down a society. It officially endorses poor values. It destroys homes and enriches the rich. One-fourth of the take would go to the track owners. Is this keeping the sacred trust of being a civil authority? If there are government services that we as a people want, why not tax ourselves fairly, or forego those desires? We should not be intentionally balancing the State government by preying on the

weakness of some of our citizens. *“The love of money is the root of all kinds of evil.”* How can that be good government?

Please, I ask you, re-assess your benign neglect of this subject. Talk with family and friends about opposing the referendum to alter the Maryland State constitution in November. The constitution is deliberately difficult to alter. It houses our core values as a state. Isn't it “creepy” to now change it to permit gambling? Is that who we want to be?

Please, don't ever buy a Lotto ticket. Don't ever go in and play in a casino or put your money into a slot machine. It may be only spare change or recreational to you, but it facilitates a regressive way of operating a government, supports low values, and opens the door to all kinds of crime. God is our sovereign, not Lady Luck. Something for nothing is **very** costly.

Is this what you want your government to do?

Let us pray.....

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