

ILLINOIS LUTHERAN CONFERENCE

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By the grace of God we have entered a new calendar year, and none of us knows what is in store for us during the days and months which lie ahead. The Lord may call any one of us out of this vale of tears at any time. The Lord could visibly return to judge the world and bring some real global-warming on planet earth, for it is written: "the day of the Lord will come as a thief in the night; in the which the heavens shall pass away with a great noise, and the elements shall melt with fervent heat, the earth also and the works that are therein shall be burned up." (2 Peter 3:10 KJV) Accordingly, we need to be prepared at all times to meet our Maker, "For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ; that every one may receive the things *done* in *his* body, according to that he hath done, whether *it be* good or bad." (2 Corinthians 5:10 KJV) Indeed, we will be judged according to our works since our works give evidence of a living faith in the Lord Jesus Christ or the lack thereof, "For as the body without the spirit is dead, so faith without works is dead also." (James 2:26 KJV) My friends, a living faith in Jesus Christ as one's personal Savior and Lord is essential if one would inherit eternal life and enter heaven, "For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life. He that believeth on the Son hath everlasting life: and he that believeth not the Son shall not see life; but the wrath of God abideth on him." (John 3:16, 36 KJV)

Realize that a genuine living faith in Jesus Christ as one's personal Savior and Lord will indeed bring forth the fruit of good works, works done in full accord with God's Word, for Jesus says: "a good tree bringeth not forth corrupt fruit; neither doth a corrupt tree bring forth good fruit. For every tree is known by his own fruit. For of thorns men do not gather figs, nor of a bramble bush gather they grapes. A good man out of the good treasure of his heart bringeth forth that which is good; and an evil man out of the evil treasure of his heart bringeth forth that which is evil: for of the abundance of the heart his mouth speaketh. And why call ye me, Lord, Lord, and do not the things which I say? Whosoever cometh to me, and heareth my sayings, and doeth them, I will shew you to whom he is like: He is like a man which built an house, and digged deep, and laid the foundation on a rock: and when the flood arose, the stream beat vehemently upon that house, and could not shake it: for it was founded upon a rock. But he that heareth, and doeth not, is like a man that without a foundation built an house upon the earth; against which the stream did beat vehemently, and immediately it fell; and the ruin of that house was great." (Luke 6:43-49 KJV) **Note well the critical importance of hearing the Lord Jesus' sayings – God's Word – and doing it, being fruitful in the faith, rather than doing that which is opposed to the Word of God.**

*In this month's ILC Topical Bulletin the question will focus on a particularly popular practice that many professed Christians indulge in and many church-bodies excuse as mere entertainment, that being: **GAMBLING**. Gambling is widespread in many forms. For example, there are state-run lotteries in abundance; there is Indian gaming in numerous casinos in several states; there is Las Vegas with its iniquitous pride in its nickname of "sin city"; there are raffles, roulette wheels, and bingo games even in churches which are supposed to be houses of God; and, there are many other betting activities carried on by civic organizations and the like in various communities within the United States. Thus, a question that should concern every Christian is: **What does God's Word, the Holy Bible, teach in regards to gambling?***

Although the term “gambling” does not occur in the Holy Bible, the principals involved are certainly addressed. Let’s consider a common definition for the term “gambling” as taken from Webster’s New World College Dictionary, 4th edition: “1 to play games of chance for money or some other stake 2 to take a risk in order to gain some advantage.”

Thus, the term “gambling” can be accurately defined and summarized as: playing a game for gain of another’s money or goods while placing some of your own money or goods at risk.

Dr. Martin Luther had some thoughts on the subject as follows: “**What About Gambling?** The question is put whether gamblers are thieves and should be held to restore what they have won. That gamblers commit the sins of greed and covetousness (at least those who play for gain) and, therefore, are thieves before God and lust after that which belongs to another is very clear. For no one gambles (*ludit*) with another in order to give him what is his (for he could do that without gambling), not in order to lose what is his, and not in order to seek the gain of the other man as though it were his own. This is why gambling is always contrary to love and is motivated by greed, because a man seeks, to the harm of another, what does not belong to him... Yet he is not held to make restitution, because in the eyes of men he is not robbing and is not, against the will of its owner, taking property that does not belong to him. On the contrary, the owner has, by the agreement to gamble, consented to part with his property. For both place what belongs to them in peril knowingly and willingly. Therefore, he who loses, loses with his own knowledge and consent. For it is an entirely just law that he who loves danger should perish in it — unless perhaps they cheat while gambling. But the best punishment — if this could be — would be that both lose... or at least that the treasury of the state relieve both of their gain, because they have carried on their gambling against the edict of the state and the canon law of the church.” [What Luther Says #4315 (W 1, 504 — E op ex 12, 188f — SL 3, 1322f)]

*Comment: Observe that in Luther’s day the state and the church were opposed to gambling, while nowadays the state sponsors gambling and most churches condone gambling and encourage it. For instance, there are churches that host bingo games, while other church groups organize river-boat gambling trips and the like. Hence, we are in the last days as foretold in the Holy Bible, for it is written: “This know also, that in the last days perilous times shall come. For men shall be lovers of their own selves, covetous, boasters, proud, blasphemers, disobedient to parents, unthankful, unholy, Without natural affection, trucebreakers, false accusers, incontinent, fierce, despisers of those that are good, Traitors, heady, highminded, lovers of pleasures more than lovers of God; Having a form of godliness, but denying the power thereof: from such turn away. For the time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine; but after their own lusts shall they heap to themselves teachers, having itching ears; And they shall turn away *their* ears from the truth, and shall be turned unto fables.”* (2 Timothy 3:1-5; 4:3-4 KJV)

Nevertheless, despite downward trends in church and state, every sincere Christian still needs to be interested in the following question, as mentioned earlier in this bulletin: *What does God’s Word, the Holy Bible, teach in regards to gambling?*

The fact is: gambling is sinful because it indeed involves the sins of coveting and stealing, as well as lack of love for God and one’s neighbor, as will be made crystal clear as we consider a number of passages from Holy Scripture. Let us never forget: “All scripture *is* given by inspiration of God, and *is* profitable

for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness: That the man of God may be perfect, throughly furnished unto all good works." (2 Timothy 3:16-17 KJV) Our Lord desires that we be fruitful in the faith of Jesus Christ by performing good works, works done in full accord with God's Word; so, we are not to wilfully do evil works, for we Christians are God's "workmanship, created in Christ Jesus unto good works, which God hath before ordained that we should walk in them." (Ephesians 2:10 KJV)

It is important to note how God wishes us to obtain money and goods while we dwell in this world, for God does NOT desire that we gamble to obtain money and goods, but rather that we work, for the Holy Bible says: "In all labour there is profit: but the talk of the lips *tendeth* only to penury." (Proverbs 14:23 KJV) The English word "penury" is a translation of the Hebrew root word מַחְסוֹר machowr {makh-sore'} which means "lack, want, need, poverty" [abridged BDB Hebrew/English lexicon]. "For yourselves know how ye ought to follow us: for we behaved not ourselves disorderly among you; Neither did we eat any man's bread for nought; but wrought with labour and travail night and day, that we might not be chargeable to any of you: Not because we have not power, but to make ourselves an ensample unto you to follow us. For even when we were with you, this we commanded you, that if any would not work, neither should he eat. For we hear that there are some which walk among you disorderly, working not at all, but are busybodies. Now them that are such we command and exhort by our Lord Jesus Christ, that with quietness they work, and eat their own bread." (2 Thessalonians 3:7-12 KJV) Note that those who refuse to work for their daily bread are walking "disorderly" in this world, and that word is a translation of the Greek root word ἀτακτοσ ataktos {at-ak'-toce} which means "deviating from the prescribed order or rule" [abridged Thayer's Greek/English lexicon]. *Accordingly, it is God's will and command that we work to obtain food, clothing, and shelter while living in this world; therefore, we are NOT to gamble to obtain money and goods.*

God commands: "Thou shalt not covet thy neighbour's house, thou shalt not covet thy neighbour's wife, nor his manservant, nor his maidservant, nor his ox, nor his ass, nor any thing that is thy neighbour's." (Exodus 20:17 KJV) The English word "covet" in the above passage is a translation of the Hebrew root word חָמַד chamad {khaw-mad'} which means "to desire"; to have "selfish desire"; "lust after" [BDB Hebrew/English lexicon; & Theological Wordbook of the Old Testament]. *Comment: we are NOT to selfishly desire and lust after that which is another's property. Therefore, gambling is sinful since the gambler truly does desire another's property and thereby breaks God's Commandment by coveting.*

God commands: "Thou shalt not steal." (Exodus 20:15 KJV) The English word "steal" is a translation of the Hebrew root word גָּנַב ganab {gaw-nab'} which means "to steal; to get by stealth, deceive, and thief" [abridged BDB Hebrew/English lexicon; Strongs Hebrew/English dictionary]. *Comment: based on the definition of the term "steal" it is obvious that gambling is stealing since it is a sneaky way to obtain another's money or goods.*

The Holy Bible also plainly commands: "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." (Ephesians 4:28 KJV) *Comment: the foregoing Scripture passage commends work while condemning all forms of stealing, which includes gambling.*

The Lord Jesus summarizes the entire Law of God for us in the following words: "Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind. This is the first and great commandment. And the second *is* like unto it, Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself. On these two commandments hang all the law and the prophets." (Matthew 22:37-40 KJV) *Comment: does gambling show love to God or love to one's neighbor? NO! Gambling shows a love for money and other worldly goods!*

*Nevertheless, the Holy Bible has something to say about love for money and the things of this world: "But 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 raiment let us be therewith 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." (1 Timothy 6:6-10 KJV) "Love not the world, neither the things *that are* in the world. If any man love the world, the love of the Father is not in him. For all that *is* in the world, the lust of the flesh, and the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life, is not of the Father, but is of the world. And the world passeth away, and the lust thereof: but he that doeth the will of God abideth for ever." (1 John 2:15-17 KJV) *Comment: think carefully about the aforementioned Scripture passages!**

Realize that gambling is definitely sinful since it indeed involves coveting and stealing, for even if one does not win-the-game he or she is playing, one has already sinned in one's heart. Jesus says: "That which cometh out of the man, that defileth the man. For from within, out of the heart of men, proceed evil thoughts, adulteries, fornications, murders, Thefts, covetousness, wickedness, deceit, lasciviousness, an evil eye, blasphemy, pride, foolishness: All these evil things come from within, and defile the man." (Mark 7:20-23 KJV)

Take it to heart that gambling is sinful! Therefore, if you've been gambling, stop doing it and repent, whether you've purchased lottery tickets, raffle tickets, spent time at a casino, or gambled in any other way. The Holy Bible says: "Let the wicked forsake his way, and the unrighteous man his thoughts: and let him return unto the LORD, and he will have mercy upon him; and to our God, for he will abundantly pardon." (Isaiah 55:7 KJV) Yes, turn to Jesus with a penitent heart that relies on Him for forgiveness, for "If we say that we have fellowship with him, and walk in darkness, we lie, and do not the truth: But if we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship one with another, and the blood of Jesus Christ his Son cleanseth us from all sin. If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us. If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us *our* sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness." (1 John 1:6-9 KJV)

Thank and praise God for His grace and mercy shown to us in Jesus Christ! Let us show our gratefulness to God for His undeserved love by striving to live in full accord with His Holy Word, thereby giving evidence that "We love him, because he first loved us." (1 John 4:19 KJV)

m.e.l.