

8205:6/96

AMERICAN BAPTIST RESOLUTION

ON GAMBLING

SITUATIONAL ANALYSIS

Gambling, in the form of sports betting, casinos, lotteries, and all other kinds is an intrusion into people's lives and communities, many of which are already burdened by economic and social disintegration. Rich and poor alike are susceptible to the urge to gamble and may become addicted to gambling. Gambling promoters keep people coming back by giving the impression that there is a good chance to win.

A disturbing reality is that local and state governments see gambling as a source of income and become primary promoters. Government sponsored billboards and television advertisements herald the benefits of gambling. Access to gambling, once restricted, is now frequently available in the nearest supermarket, convenience store, or shopping plaza and is often targeted to persons of lower incomes, shifting the burden of government to those less able to pay. The gambling industry often draws money away from the economic and social groups they claim to aid. Revenue raised by the gambling industry has often been an excuse for diversion of other resources from the economic and social problems the industry claims to aid. Revenue raised by the gambling industry has not been the solution to the economic and social problems the industry claims to provide.

Increasingly, the gambling industry is building resorts as family vacation centers and promoting the fact that they include "safe and secure" entertainment for children and youth while their parents visit the gaming parlors. It seems like an innocent vacation; parents get a break while their children have fun. However, such resorts are gambling environments and the casinos are investing millions, anticipating that these children will return as adults.

BIBLICAL PERSPECTIVE

Games involving throwing dice or other objects were known in biblical times. These games extended to gambling but are only mentioned in reference to Jesus' clothes (John 19-24). "Casting lots" was a cultural way of determining responsibility and a religious way to know God's will (Nahum 3:10); (Josh. 18:6); (Acts 1:26). "Casting lots" is never endorsed as a way to get money.

Covetousness and greed, which motivate gambling, are strongly condemned by Biblical ethics as contrary to trusting God for our daily bread (Matt. 6:11). Sustenance is the blessing of God (Matt.6:31-34) and the result of work (Eph. 4:28). Gambling's glorification of mere chance denies divine order in nature and disregards the insistence of the church of every age that possessions are entrusted to us and we are accountable for their use. The persistent appeal to self-satisfaction is fundamentally opposed to the unselfishness which was taught by Jesus Christ and the Bible.

Caring for one another in the way God cares for us is a fundamental theme in the Bible (Amos 5:11-15; Matt. 25:31-46; Acts 2:43-45; 2 Cor. 9:6-14). Gambling is not an industry that builds up or enhances caring relationships. The very nature of the games themselves are individualistic, rather than relational. Gambling houses are not places

to satisfy a fundamental need for social gathering.

Therefore, the General Board of American Baptist Churches calls all American Baptists to:

1. Pray for God's healing intervention in the lives of persons and communities who are being hurt by gambling;
2. Help people understand that gambling can be addictive and that even apparently innocent wagering can have a negative influence especially on our children and youth;
3. Help people understand that gambling can be unethical even if a portion of the revenue is used for socially needed programs;
4. Encourage the development of more appropriate ways to generate revenue for the renewal and the rebuilding of the educational, social and economic fabric of all communities;
5. Initiate and support ministries to persons addicted to gambling, their families, persons employed in the gambling industry and others who find themselves victimized by the result of gambling;
6. Counter government promotion of gambling by contacting their state legislators to encourage them to eliminate state sponsored gambling and media advertisement.
7. Oppose gambling on the internet and other technology that makes it possible to gamble at home and other locations away from the gambling center.)

Adopted by the General Board of the American Baptist Churches, USA -
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147 For, 7 Against, 11 Abstentions
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POLICY BASE

American Baptist Policy Statement on Family Life

6. Participate in the movement to conceptualize, envision, and move toward an encapsulant system geared to need, supportive of community, conducive to local self-reliance, and structured around useful and fulfilling work for all.

American Baptist Policy Statement on Human Rights

12. The right to organize into groups to bargain with structures or powerful persons, to seek redress of grievances or to promote particular concerns;