

The Growing Menace of Gambling

Compulsive gambling can and does destroy lives just like drug addiction and alcoholism. It is just one more sign of the moral decline currently gripping our Anglo-Saxon nations.

by John Ross Schroeder

Just living from day to day involves a certain degree of hopefully intelligent risk taking. The pioneering Americans who conquered the Western frontier exercised this quality in abundance as they crossed the Great Plains in pursuit of land and settlement. But these courageous pioneers were willing to work and wait for the eventual emergence of their material goals. They did not expect something for nothing. No quick fixes were contemplated.

Pursuing instant success is becoming a pervasive part of Western culture. Patience and anticipation of the satisfying rewards of hard work are not as evident as they once were. The growing menace of gambling is but a symptom of the times.

Americans in particular are a nation of risk takers. It is an integral part of their national cultural ethic. This characteristic goes some way in explaining over 225 years of general commercial success as a nation.

But today's outright gambling—expecting instant windfalls to solve stubborn financial problems—is both foolhardy and dangerous. Except for a very few people, instant monetary gratification is but an illusory dream. It does happen, but instant “rags to riches” is a very rare occurrence. Yet many continue to gamble in the vain hope that magically they will be one of the favored few who “strike it rich.”

Gambling in the United States

Says Susan Gluss: “America has a nasty gambling problem. From Maryland to California, states desperate for a politically painless way to increase their tax revenues are turning to slot machines and casinos” (*The Weekly*, Nov. 13, 2004, quoted from *The San Francisco Chronicle*).

The statistical picture is grim! For instance, in the year 2002 seven out of

10 Americans participated in legal gambling. Over 50 percent bought lottery tickets and over 30 percent gambled in casinos (“Gambling in America,” The Gallup Organization, May 7, 2004). The annual gambling growth rate has been nearly 10 percent for about a decade (Alex Berenson,



Gambling is portrayed as fun, sexy and desirable to make one rich.

But the truth is, with society's addiction to gambling, everyone is on a losing streak.

“The States Bet Bigger on Betting,” *The New York Times*, May 18, 2003). U.S. citizens spend more money on gambling than videos, DVDs, movies and books all rolled into one (ibid.).

Millions of Americans are problem gamblers, many on a lifetime basis. Even more disturbing is the fact that 20 percent of the nation's youths are taking up the habit, according to the National Gambling Impact Study Commission.

When I was growing up in south

Texas during the 1940s and '50s, Americans had to go to Reno or Las Vegas, Nevada, to gamble legally. *Time* magazine (July 26, 2004) states that last year residents and visitors spent \$6.1 billion on gambling in Las Vegas alone. According to *USA Today* (July 29, 2004), 37 states now have authorized slot machines. Furthermore, 47 states have some form of legal gambling—apparently bringing in nearly 5 percent of total revenues.

But is the cost in broken human lives really worth the increased revenues? We will address this question later in the article.

The problem in Britain

In the words of U.K. journalist Olivia Stewart-Liberty, “A British gambling revolution is in the cards.” She recently visited several London casinos to research and write an article for the *Evening Standard* magazine supplement (Nov. 12, 2004), concluding, “In the end, everyone's on a losing streak.”

Recently the British government's stated intention to relax national gambling laws has created an uproar in the media. A proposal of 40 new super casinos across the country has suddenly been lowered to less than 10.

Little wonder, as Britain is already the betting capital of Europe, with money spent on gambling having increased from £7.6 billion to almost £40 billion just in the last three years (*London Daily Mail*, Oct. 5 and 7, 2004). The explosion has raised Britain to a notorious third in the world, just behind the United States and Japan.

Gamblers Anonymous estimates that there are about 300,000 to 400,000 addicts in the United Kingdom. Noted columnist Simon Jenkins, a self-confessed liberal but a very competent journalist, has branded the govern-

ment's proposed gambling bill as "not deregulation but graft and corruption." He further states, "Governments have a duty to diminish the harm that people do to themselves and their families—or at least not increase it" (*The Times* [London], Oct. 27, 2004).

Good advice from Australia

Australians have urged Britain to think twice before it eases its gambling laws. They've been there, done that.

In 1997 Australia liberalized its gambling regulations with the result that 82 percent of all adults now gamble, about 40 percent at least once weekly. The "land down under" now has some 300,000 problem gamblers, the highest per capita in the world, says Anna Gizowska in *The Sunday Telegraph*.

One addicted Sydney businessman admitted to more than one suicide attempt. He said: "*Gambling in Australia is becoming an epidemic*. It almost ruined my life. My gambling addiction cost me everything: My family, my kids, my home, my business, my investments. They've all gone. I lost everything" (ibid., Oct. 17, 2004, emphasis added throughout).

The statistics tell the story. "There are more than 170,000 gaming machines in Australia to cater for its 19 million population—triple the number of machines in Europe with a population of 520 million" (ibid.).

The burgeoning human cost

Noted writer Bel Mooney observed: "The vision of a Britain dominated by the sleazy glitz of casino culture is truly depressing. What good will come of it?" (London *Daily Mail*, Oct. 7, 2004). Since 1994, Gamblers Anonymous in Britain has seen a 17 percent increase in cry-for-help calls.

Religious writer Paul Richards reported that "studies show gamblers going without food and clothes, resorting to theft and other illegal activities to get money [for the gambling habit] and suffering high rates of family breakdown" (*The Church of England* newspaper, Oct. 29, 2004).

According to American writer

Susan Gluss, "*Gambling ends up costing more than it brings in*. Economist Earl Grinols has studied the rates of crime, lost productivity, domestic abuse and other social ills in countries with and without casinos. He found that the 3% to 5% of players who become problem gamblers each end up costing society about \$11,000. States would need to seize half a casino's profits, calculated Grinols, to cover the 'social wreckage' it generated" (*San Francisco Chronicle*).

Missouri is a case in point. "Gambling tax revenue brought in a 'seeming windfall' of \$242 [million] in 2002. Yet the state lost an estimated \$572 [million] in related business failures, crime, unemployment and other social costs" (ibid.). On the other hand, South Carolina banned all slot machines, resulting in two thirds of its Gamblers Anonymous groups having to disband for lack of callers.

Susan Gluss sums up the problem: "Gambling provides only the illusion of easy money. We all pay the social and financial consequences, dearly" (ibid.).

Applying the biblical principles

Although the Bible does not mention the term *gambling* by name, the Christian principles are clear and plain. Compulsive gambling for stakes that make a difference is a violation of the Tenth Commandment forbidding coveting (we are not talking here about a private poker game among old friends for matchsticks or dimes).

This commandment forbids greed and covetousness (Exodus 20:17; Deuteronomy 5:21). Indeed the apostle Paul labels covetousness as a form of idolatry—putting something else in the place of the true God. Contrary to the advice of a popular film actor in the role of a Wall Street baron, greed is not good. The kickback is far too high a price to pay.

The Proverbs, mainly of King Solomon, are replete with admonitions that place the desire for riches and wealth in a proper, godly perspective. Taken together they advocate patience, diligence, hard work and trust in God as preparatory steps toward success.

Here are 12 of them:

- Treasures of wickedness profit nothing (10:2).

- He who deals with a slack hand becomes poor; but the hand of the diligent makes one rich (10:4).

- The labor of the righteous leads to life (10:16).

- The blessing of the LORD makes one rich, and He adds no sorrow with it (10:22).

- He who tills his land will be satisfied with bread, but he who follows frivolity is devoid of understanding (12:11).

- Wealth gotten by vanity shall be diminished; but he that gathers by labor shall increase (13:11, KJV).

- Better is a little with the fear of God than great treasure with trouble (15:16).

- The thoughts of the diligent tend only to plenteousness; but of every one who is hasty only to want (21:5, KJV).

- The borrower is servant to the lender (22:7).

- Will you set your eyes on that which is not? For riches certainly make themselves wings; they fly away like an eagle toward heaven (23:5).

- He who tills his land will have plenty of bread, but he who follows frivolity will have poverty enough (28:19).

- Give me neither poverty nor riches; feed me with food convenient for me (30:8, KJV).

These biblical principles, expressed in differently worded proverbs, show us how to handle our material blessings in ways that lead to a better life, both materially and spiritually.

Gambling is not the answer to our material woes. God is! He teaches us a way of life that includes planning, hard work and real enjoyment. A more complete account of how we can implement biblical laws and principles is found in our free brochure *Making Life Work*.

Also, if you are in debt (or even if you are not), please ask for our free companion booklet *Managing Your Finances*. Following its advice will put you on the road to getting out of debt and taking control of your money. Both publications are available in print or online. Ask for both! ♣