

Is Gambling Really the Problem?

Is gambling, legal or illegal, really the problem in our society? The short answer is yes. It is a problem in our society because potentially many individuals either become addicted or misuse personal funds on their addiction, causing emotional stress and troubles. The long answer is no. It is not really **the** major problem in our society. There are a few bottom-line problems that must be present first to make a vice so invasive and crippling in a society. They are hypocrisy, dishonesty, duplicity, an attitude of entitlement, social and functional illiteracy, and spiritual apathy. These negative characteristics have led too many of us to be at risk of making unwise decisions about vices that usually invade every society. These vices include prostitution, rape, sexual abuse, incest, spouse abuse, drug abuse, child abuse, racism, prejudice in all its forms, alcoholism and gambling addiction, adultery (relationship unfaithfulness), just to name a few.

Ironically, what I call a “vice,” can rightly be a behavior of an adult who has the constitutional right and freedom of choice to behave that way. The truth is that in a free society everyone has the freedom of choice. These kinds of “vices” might be destructive forces we all have to live with until the Lord’s return. They may hold no power over a person’s life and perhaps the society, when that person has intrinsic values (principles of living) that are constructive, uplifting, beneficial and productive to him or herself and the community.

One may argue that one of these vices might be worse than the others. It is true that some of these impact innocent ones and others impact the larger community, while some of these vices mostly impact individuals and others indirectly. Nevertheless, they are all serious vices. But note that the most vulnerable among us, our children, are victims of violence in all forms, and in particular sexual violence (rape and incest). We can also include the many victims of spouse abuse or domestic violence. Where are the loud voices against such criminal activities? The Bahamas is reportedly the country with one of the highest incidents of rape, sexual abuse, spouse abuse, and child abuse in the world. Are we having a “No” campaign against these evils in our Bahamas? Or are we, in our silence or passive behavior, saying “Yes, leave them alone. We do not have these problems.”

MY APPEAL

My passionate appeal is to the religious, political and social leaders who spent so much time and money on a recent gambling campaign. I encourage them to put even greater force and money against child abuse, rape, incest, spouse abuse, and domestic violence. You see, adults can choose to gamble or not to gamble. Little children have no power of their own and adults too often take advantage of them. I have not heard many cries against the men who leave innocent ones infested with deadly diseases. I have not heard the protest against fathers who leave sperms in their little sons’ rectums. I have not heard cries against spouses who physically harm their partners and think it is their god-given right to control and own their spouse. Gambling can be addictive; but it is an adult choice. Children cannot defend themselves. What are we doing about that? Which one of these vices is society’s worse?

During my research I discovered that there are approximately 20 million pathological gamblers (addicted individuals) in the United States. In the early 2000, studies funded by the National Gambling Impact Study Commission (NGISC) suggested that “pathological gambling is confined to about 1 percent or less of the U.S. adult population. According to research commissioned by the NGISC, the rate could be anywhere from 0.1 percent or 0.6 percent to 0.9 percent.”

Let us argue that in The Bahamas the percentage is the same (number buyers numbers or persons who participate in other local forms of gambling). If we increase that percentage number up to three percent of the people living in The Bahamas that would give a figure of 3,500 to 10,500 persons who are addicted to gambling. Any one of these figures is serious. However, we have no way of knowing because we are not a research society. Nevertheless to further my argument, I want to suggest that the number of adulterers is ten to twenty times more. That's about 30,000 to 60,000 persons, I am suggesting, who are committing adultery. (Remember this is only conjecturing. There is no scientific evidence for these figures, but anecdotal research may agree based on the divorce rate and the number of illegitimate children born here). Do you realize that in The Bahamas there might more persons living with HIV/AIDS than persons who are problem or addicted gamblers? In 2009 there were 6000 people living with HIV/AIDS in the Bahamas. According to Global AIDS Response Progress Reporting Monitoring the 2011 Political Declaration on HIV/AIDS it states that as of "December 31, 2010, The Bahamas had a cumulative total of 12,096 reported HIV infections." What have we done about that? What are we doing about sexual indiscretion that leads to such results?

Here is my question: What pain does adultery cause? Here they are: murder, rape, sexual abuse, molestation, depression and other mental illnesses, spouse abuse in all forms, obesity, etc. Why are we not having a campaign against adultery? Because individuals in society are free to make stupid choices. Even God gives us that freedom. What is my point you may ask? We need to set our priorities straight as a nation. We need to start valuing personhood more. If gambling remains or goes, what personal, intrinsic values will be there to govern our thoughts and behaviors? What national policies will be there to reduce addictive or compulsive behaviors?

CHURCH GET ON BOARD

I encourage all church leaders to make sure they understand their role and function. The challenge is when the church tries to purge the nation through the government instead of ministry and preaching to its congregants. While the government must remain secular, the church should only teach principles of living. If the members would live godly lives, the nation would be godly also.

Leaders of the church are not to live duplicitous lives. While a spiritual leader's voice is very loud against gambling, he or she might be sleeping with another person and the entire neighborhood knows. While the spiritual leader might be jumping and screaming behind the pulpit on the weekends, this leader might be impregnating teenage girls or beating his spouse. I encourage members to hold their leaders accountable. Report their abuse and do not cover it up. Raise your voice for the innocent ones, our children.

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