

Minister's Message – November 2004

Gambling

Almost everyone in Australia will be tempted or cajoled into gambling today, for it is Melbourne cup day. We must be the only nation in the world that stops for a horse race! Have a flutter they say. Take a ticket in the sweep. It is all harmless and in good fun. Gambling we are told is recreation. Sitting at a poker machine pressing buttons – no more pulling the handle – is not my idea of recreation.

Back to the Cup. Over \$150m will be bet on the horses running around the track I heard. All that money goes into a pool, money from all sorts of people, and it is from this pool that winnings are paid. For some that money will be just a bit extra they have, for others it will be the food money for next week and their children will go hungry. And at the end of the race, for no reason other than chance, some will walk away with a lot of money, a lot of money that came from the pockets of others, while others will go home with empty pockets. Your win has come from the pocket of another, purely by chance, and that other person may be one who bet his family food money.

'He was not forced to bet' you say. 'I did not steal his money' you plead. But remember the command Jesus gave – *love your neighbour as yourself*. And who is my neighbour? Is not that person(s) whose money you have taken your neighbour? Jesus answered that question in the parable of the Good Samaritan. The Samaritan found a man unknown to him lying in the gutter and helped him back on his feet. For the gambler it may well be that your win has put a man into the gutter not lifted him out!

'Gambling in the sense of transferring something of value from one person to another on the basis of chance is not sanctioned in the Scriptures' (Baker's dictionary). If you obey the law of Christ you will not take part in gambling, even the school raffle. How tragic that our children are taught to gamble from infancy, and also a shame that some churches adopt such practices to raise money. 'I am sorry I do not gamble, I do not want a ticket, but here is a donation for your school or club'. Try saying that next time you are asked to buy just a 'harmless little' raffle ticket. Don't you think such a response would be more in line with the command of Jesus to *love your neighbour as yourself*?

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