

# THE SIN OF GAMBLING

By William Edward Biederwolf

Let it be understood therefore that I am speaking more especially to those who profess to be Christians. Certainly if it shall appear that the things under discussion tonight are impure and unholy and harmful in themselves, I shall expect everyone who claims to stand for that which is highest and purest, regardless of your profession, to register yourself against them. But if I can even so much as prove them to be questionable, it shall certainly be just as much expected of the one who professes to be a Christian that they shall give God the benefit of the doubt in making their decision and follow the teachings of His Word above such things.

## The Card Table

Let us begin with the cards, commonly called the euchre deck. And I know the first thought, already rising in the minds of some of you is concerning the question of the difference between playing with these cards and others, such as the flinch deck or the authors, and I make haste to reply that so far as the cards themselves are concerned there is none, nor do I think we can reasonably claim that the playing with these or any other decorated pieces of pasteboard may be properly called a sin in itself, and yet the difference between the use of these cards is as great as the difference between any two things can possibly be.

**The wrong lies in what history has shown them to lead to.** The question is not to be settled by what **might** be done or what **might** come from these indulgences, but **by what history has shown to be their invariable outcome.** The card table has been condemned because it leads to a waste of time, but this and many other accusations against it I shall not notice because they are equally true of other games which we hold as innocent. **I repeat again that the question must be settled by what the history of the game has proven to be true** and the one sweeping condemnation of the euchre deck is that it is and always has been the devil's chief tool for gambling. I do not say that men could not gamble over authors or dominoes or croquet or any other game, but the fact remains that they seldom or never do. If the devil forsook the euchre deck and did with any other game what he is doing today with it, I would assuredly drop that game from my amusement list and substitute the euchre deck in its place. But the fact remains that the euchre deck is the gambler's instrument.

What is the first thing a young man sees when he enters a gambling hall? Is it authors or flinch or parchesi or any other such game? No, is the euchre deck just like the one he used to see in his home and just like the one lying on the center table or in the stand drawer in your home, mother, tonight. On every table the card deck is seen. The air is foul with impure breath and fouler still with the oaths and coarse language and harsh laughs that are heard as the chips and the glittering coins mingle their seductive sounds with the clinking of the glasses and the snapping of the pasteboard cards.

Every gambler and every drunkard and every thief and every tramp and the keeper of every brothel and every low-down lecherous debauchee has a pack of filthy, finger-worn euchre cards in his possession, the same cards which are used to lay the same games which some of you are teaching your children to play in your home.

Nine-tenths of all the gambling in America, if you except pool selling, the race track and the Board of Trade is done with the euchre deck. It is the gambler's tool.

It is also a sad fact, but one which no one can deny, that nine-tenths of all the gamblers in this country learned to play cards in the home. You say, you are going to allow your boy to play in the home so he will not want to play when away from home. But what sort of philosophy is that for a game that kindles a passion in the human breast? Gambling is a passion and you might as well say I am going to give my boy a little whiskey in the home so he will not want any when outside of the home.

Mr. John Bigelow, writing on gambling, said: "Nine people out of ten when they for the first time accept an invitation to join in a game of whist or poker have no more suspicion of the passions they may be about to nurse than the maid of sixteen when she engages in her first flirtation."

John Philip Quinn, the converted Chicago gambler, said the card-playing home was "the kindergarten for the gambling saloon."

In 1893 the Civil Federation of Chicago interviewed 3,000 professional gamblers, all of whom, with but few exceptions, said they learned to play cards in the home.

In a men's meeting recently conducted by one of the most successful pastors in Ohio, a converted gambler, and ex-saloon keeper made the following statement, which created a profound impression.

He said: "I have been in the saloon business with a gambling room attached, for the last four years, and claim to know something about what I am going to tell you. I do not believe the gambling den is nearly so dangerous, nor does it do anything like the same amount of harm as the social card party in the home. I give this as my reason: In the gambling room the windows are closed tight, the curtains are pulled down, everything is conducted secretly for fear of detection, and none but gamblers as a rule, enter there, while in the parlor all have access to the game, children are permitted to watch it, young people are invited to partake in it. It is made attractive and alluring by giving prizes, serving refreshments and adding high social enjoyments. (Editor's note: Of course in Las Vegas gambling is not done in secret, but wide open.)

"Perhaps you have never thought of it, but where do all of the gamblers come from? They are not taught in the gambling dens. A 'greener' unless he is a fool, never enters a gambling hell, because he knows that he will be fleeced out of everything he possesses in less than fifteen

minutes. He has learned somewhere else before he sets foot inside of such a place. When he has played in the parlor in the social game of the home, and has become proficient enough to win prizes among his friends, the next step with him is to seek out the gambling room, for he has learned and now counts upon his efficiency to hold his own. The saloon men and gamblers chuckle and smile when they read in the papers of the parlor games given by the ladies for they know that after awhile those same men will become the patrons of their business. I say, then, the parlor game is the college where gamblers are made and educated. In the name of God, men, stop this business in your homes. Burn up your decks and wash your hands."

After he had taken his seat another converted ex-gambler arose and said: "I endorse every word which the brother before me has just uttered. I was a gambler. I learned to play cards not in the saloon, not in my own home, but in the houses of my young friends, who invited me to play with them and taught me how."

I am indebted to my friend, M. B. Williams, for the story of James Kilgore. It is well known among religious workers. James Kilgore came from the country to the city of Cincinnati, a young man to seek employment. He secured living accommodations at the home of a Presbyterian elder. A few nights after his arrival, when supper was over the euchre deck was brought out and the young man was invited to play. He said he did not know how, but the youngest daughter of the family who had invited him told him they would teach him the game. He then said his father and mother thought it wrong and did not wish him to play. "Oh," said the young woman, "I'm afraid your father and mother are a little out of date; you don't think there could possibly come any harm from it or else my papa who is an elder in the church would not permit us to play!" And there he stood, a big, bashful country youth with a beautiful city girl poking visions of love into his eyes, and he just allowed himself to be made her prisoner and she took him off to the table. He seemed to have a natural capacity for the game and before long he and his fair partner could beat any other couple in the neighborhood.

One day out of the office a little early he was met by the young man from this same home and invited over to a room to play a little while. He found himself in a room connected with a saloon, and altho' he resented the imposition, in other days he found himself there again. Money was introduced to make the game interesting and Kilgore usually played the winning card. Finding that the shortest cut to fortune lay in his skill with cards it was not long until he was launched on a gambler's career. One evening he saw an easy prey in a young man just from the country. He said, "Hello! how are the old folks down on the farm," and asked him if he didn't want to see the city. He took him to a place of ill repute with a gambling room attached. When he knocked, someone said, "Who's there?" and Kilgore replied, "Open up or I'll show you." He had been there a few nights before and had gotten into trouble and threatened to come back and clean the place out. Thinking he had come to keep his threat, a sharp report of a pistol was heard. He felt something warm spatter on his cheek and heard a dull thud on the sidewalk. He reached up with his hand and wiped the young man's brains from his face; ran to the Queen and Crescent depot and took the first train for the south. He opened a gambling room in a Tennessee town and one day the money was piled high around the table. Everyone felt the final struggle must end in blood, and just as James Kilgore was about to throw the lucky

card, there was a quick flash of knives and his gashed and lacerated body rolled on the floor. They dragged him out into the street. Someone said, "He is the one that has ruined our boys; it's good enough for him." But a Christian woman with a kinder heart said, "He's some mother's boy." She took him to her home and cared for him in the name of Christ, but that did not reform him. He went down to Pensacola, Florida, and one night on his way to a gambling room, he passed the church where a crowd was pushing in to hear John B. Culpepper, the evangelist, preach. He elbowed his way in and heard the burning words of that man of God. The memories of his old home came back, his heart was touched, he went to the front and on his knees in tears he gave himself to God. He became a preacher of the Gospel, but he preached it with his body all cut and gashed and his soul all scarred with sin. But the worst of it all is that thirteen of the best years of his life were worse than wasted, given to iniquity with their awful sowing to the wind and all because an elder of the Presbyterian church could see no harm in playing cards in his home. You say, "He might have become a gambler anyhow." Yes, that is true, but it certainly furnishes no excuse for the part played in his sad career by one who bore the name of Christ.

That gambling is more widespread today than ever before is easily proven by its literature. Fifty years ago there was but one or two newspapers devoted wholly to sports and these were only weekly or monthly but today we have over forty weeklies and one or two dailies. And did you know that fifty years ago there was but very little card playing in the home. It was the exception where after supper the table was cleared and the parents brought out the euchre deck and taught their children the gambler's game. And do you know that **the widespread gambling of our country has kept pace exactly with the increase of card playing in our homes?** And, mother, father, it's an awful charge to make, but before God, it's true, that in a large measure for every mother's heart that's bled, for every wife's heart that's been broken, for every home that has been left to battle with poverty, shame and disgrace, for every shattered character and ruined life, for every glittering blade that has been thrust across the table and bathed in human blood, for every gambler who has lost his life and sent his soul to hell, because of an acquaintance with cards and a passion for the game, the card-playing homes of this land are, I say, before God and man, in a large measure responsible.

Some years ago in a large convention of gamblers the chairman said: "Gentlemen, whatever else you do, encourage card playing in the home." Now mother, I want to ask you calmly and quietly and tenderly, do you want the same thing encouraged in your home that the gambler wants encouraged there? Is it possible that you are of one mind with the gamblers about this matter? And is not the mere fact that the gamblers of this country want cards played in your home enough to make you stop and seriously consider whether you want it there or not? What more needs to be said?

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