

SOCIAL & ETHICAL ISSUES GROUP

'PUT YOUR SHIRT ON IT – IT'S A CERT'**When I was a boy my Dad did the football pools most weeks.**

On a Thursday evening, before the coupon was posted off, I would sometimes be invited to select the games I thought would end in draws – chosen, I must admit, at random. I think my Dad once won 10 shillings.

What a contrast from the simplicity of the football pools then to today's life of gambling with its instant on-line bets on every sport, credit incentives to lure you into the gambling habit, a huge growth in high street betting outlets, and the respectability of the national lottery with its prizes in the hundreds of million pounds.

It is undoubtedly the ease provided by the internet which has created the phenomenal growth in gambling over recent years, with the annual UK betting spend now estimated at £14.5 billion.

With its huge income the gambling industry is now in a strong position to influence the sports in which it is involved, and indeed there is an intertwined relationship between some sports and gambling firms. For example, gambling firms benefit from its customers betting on particular football games. In turn the firms are in a dominant position to increase their exposure by being the sponsors of these same teams. Almost two out of every three teams in the top two English football leagues are sponsored by companies involved in gambling.

English footballer Andros Townsend is an example of how easy it is to become sucked into on-line gambling. He admits to losing four months wages in one evening. Townsend has written, 'I don't drink, I don't do drugs, I don't think I've ever been in a nightclub in my life, and yet I managed to lose £46,000 with just one tap on my phone.' Peter Shilton, England's most capped footballer, has also recently admitted to decades of gambling addiction.

Change is happening

The detrimental impact which internet gambling has had on families and on individuals is beginning to be recognised and changes are being made at various levels:

- Recently, after many years of campaigning (mainly by Christian organisations) the maximum bet allowed in fixed odd betting terminals in betting shops was reduced massively, from £100 to £2, resulting in the closure of 700 betting retail outlets.
- All of the major parties at the last election promised to review current betting legislation or to limit advertising.

**Gambling in numbers:**

430,000 adults in UK have a gambling addiction

In addition, **55,000** 11-16 year-olds have a problem with gambling

£323million – the salary in 2018 of the CEO of gambling firm Bet365 (£265million in 2017)

- Credit card gambling will not be allowed from mid-April this year.
- The NHS in England has realised the addictive potential of gambling and plans to set up a network of counselling clinics.
- The creation of the web site GAMSTOP has provided a one-stop, self-exclusion system for individuals to block themselves from any link to on-line gambling.

We probably all have different views on what constitutes gambling; it's not uncommon for churches not to allow even guessing the weight of a cake to raise funds. No matter where we stand on the issue we can't ignore the fact that – like many addictions – gambling can now be done in secret with the potential to ruin lives and destroy families.

Although our scriptures don't talk specifically about gambling, Biblical advice on lifestyle issues anticipates what's happening today. In Proverbs 15.27 it is recognised that 'A greedy man brings trouble to his family', and Paul remarks that while 'everything is permissible for me I will not be mastered by anything.' (1 Corinthians 6.12)

As an issue of justice, we need to be concerned about how some gambling companies offer incentives and bribes to encourage high-level gamblers to continue with their habit.

Continued overleaf

Gambling continued:

Out of love for our neighbours we should be encouraging laws and policies that will protect people from the devastation caused by gambling addiction.

www.gamcare.org.uk The leading national provider of help for anyone affected by on-line gambling

www.gamstop.co.uk Gambling self-exclusion scheme



Open Doors

According to advocacy charity Open Doors, **North Korea** is the country where in 2020 Christians are facing greatest persecution, followed in second place by Afghanistan and then Somalia.

Peruse their **World Watch List** at

www.opendoorsuk.org/persecution/ for a detailed insight into worldwide Christian persecution.



All eight venues, including Glasgow, booked to host meetings of **Franklin Graham's planned UK tour** this spring have cancelled

the events, and all on the basis of Graham's reported views on sexual issues and on Islam. Pressure to cancel has come not only from LGBT groups but also from those within the Christian community.

It has been claimed by some of these venues that hosting these events could breach the local authority's 'statutory equalities duties' despite the fact that religion and belief is a protected characteristic of UK equality legislation.

This is all in contrast to the impact which the visits to the UK of Billy Graham, Franklin's father, had in the second half of the 20th century. Tours were extended to accommodate the unexpected demand to hear him preach, and the impact, particularly on the church in Scotland as a result of the 1955 crusade, was considerable.

Franklin Graham's tour is expected still to take place, albeit with a lower profile.

Point to ponder: if churches can refuse to host events with which they don't agree, should publicly-funded venues be allowed to do the same? Send your views to ethical.issues@stirlingbaptist.co.uk

SCOTTISH TRANSGENDER CONSULTATION



"So God created man in His own image; in the image of God He created him; male and female He created them." Genesis 1:27 NKJV

The Scottish Government is currently holding a consultation on its proposed **Gender Recognition (Reform) Bill** which will run until March 17 this year.

In the Fairer Scotland Action Plan, the Scottish Government committed to 'review and reform gender recognition law so it is in line with international best practice for people who are transgender'. Best practice in this context appears to be the radical simplification of processes to allow self-identification of gender with little or no medical involvement. This could be seen as part of the Scottish Government's race to embrace all aspects of the LGBTQI+ agenda and whilst there will undoubtedly be differing views within our Fellowship about that, this is an issue about which we will inevitably face challenges individually and possibly corporately in the months ahead.

That being the case we should be considering the matter from a Biblical standpoint and seeking God's guidance, whether or not we seek to take part in the consultation itself.

The consultation document is lengthy and the Christian Institute hope to issue some guidance on a Biblical response by the end of this month.

The consultation can be accessed at <https://consult.gov.scot/family-law/gender-recognition-reform-scotland-bill/> and the Christian Institute webpage is <https://www.christian.org.uk>

This is the second consultation on this issue. Following the first consultation in 2018 the SNP Government faced opposition from some of its own female MSPs on the threat to women's safety should self-identification be allowed.

Over half of the responses to the initial consultation came from outwith Scotland – people who would not be affected. For every three people who welcomed the change to self-identification, two were opposed.

The Labour Party's "political destruction" in the recent election was because it "seldom speaks of the family, it says nothing about relationships, and it devalues the idea of marriage".



Labour supporter Professor Jonathan Rutherford