

**THE CHRISTIAN AND
AMUSEMENTS. IS DANCING
SINFUL?
IS CARD-PLAYING WRONG?
IS THEATER-GOING HARMFUL?**

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The Christian and amusements. Is dancing sinful? Is card-playing wrong? Is theater-going harmful? by William Edward Biederwolf

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WILLIAM EDWARD BIEDERWOLF

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THE CHRISTIAN *and* AMUSEMENTS

THIS is not a pleasant task I am about to perform. How certainly do I wish there were no occasion for an address such as I am now going to deliver. I assure you therefore it is more from necessity than from choice that I am to speak upon the subject announced for this service. That subject is the subject of Amusements and the Christian's relation to them. I recognize the fact that in speaking upon the theater, the cards and the dance I am dealing with what are beyond question the three greatest sources of amusement among the American people and I know that your prejudices are very apt to be very strong one way or the other.

I am not going to argue with you. I am simply going to tell you some things I know to be true and trust to your own enlightened Christian judgment, your own high sense of honor and your own fine sense of distinction between what is delicate and refined and modest and what is indelicate and coarse and suggestive to decide for yourself, regardless of what anyone else thinks, what your future position concerning these things is to be.

I cannot understand how any right thinking person can possibly disagree with me in the position which the facts I am about to set forth have con-

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strained me to take. And yet I dare hardly hope that every one will acknowledge as much because I know how strong your prejudices are. Some of you have come here to-night and have said to yourself and doubtless to others, "I'd like to see the preacher convince me that these things are wrong." Well, he won't, for you know that little couplet "A man convinced against his will is of the same opinion still," but if any number or even one shall this day be true to his or her better self and the Spirit of God and begin to do the will of God, I shall be repaid for all it means to me to speak to you at this time.

In the very beginning I wish to lay down two great principles as a foundation upon which to build.

First. The principle of sacrifice must be put into practice in every life that hopes to be highly successful. This is true of the merchant; it is true of the professional man; it is true of the student and it is true of the Christian.

The heights by great men reached and kept,
Were not attained by sudden flight;
But they, while their companions slept,
Were toiling upwards in the night.

And the same thing is true in Christian experience. You will remember the poet told us something about "men rising on stepping stones of their dead selves to higher things."

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And if your religion is not a religion of sacrifice, a religion that sacrifices the lower for the higher, it is not the religion of Jesus Christ.

Second. The particular things we are called upon to sacrifice depends very much upon our position—not our position in the church but our position in the world. The teaching of the New Testament will not for one moment admit that certain things are perfectly innocent for you because you are simply a church member but sinful for me because I am a preacher. I have the same right before God to do what another Christian does and what is wrong for a preacher is wrong for any kind of a Christian. And I have an idea that this whole question would not wait long for a solution and the church would become suddenly pure if its members allowed themselves only the indulgences to which you would be glad to see your pastor give himself; and I am equally sure that if you knew your pastor to be a wine-drinking, card-playing, theater-going, dancing man, you would have little confidence in his preaching and prefer some other type of minister to be with you in sickness and most of all when you were dying.

Now, there must be a difference between a person who is a Christian and one who is not. I know the Bible and nature say, "Whatsoever a man sows, that shall he also reap," and whether a man is a Christian or not he must sacrifice his over-indulgence in strong drink if he does not want to

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reap a diseased body, a ruined reputation and a life of shame. There are other things we may not do regardless of our position unless we suffer, but there are certainly some things which the world may allow itself with clear conscience but which we, because we are Christians, ought not to do. I do not know what Jesus meant when He said, "What do ye more than others?" unless He meant something like what I have just mentioned.

"What do ye more than others?" Alas! there is so often too little difference between the man who professes to be a Christian and the man who does not, if one must judge by the life that is lived; and if there *is* no difference, if there are not some things to which the world is given, which the Christian must forego, then *what a miserable farce all our preaching and all our profession really is!*

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 to-night 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 deci-

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sion and follow the teachings of His word about such things.

The Card Table

Let us begin with the cards, commonly called the euchre deck. And I know the very first thought, the 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 finch 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

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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 to-day 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 hell? Is it authors or finch or parchesi or any other such game? No, it 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, to-night. 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 play 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