

Sports Betting Is Coming to Your Church, Are You Ready for It?

Sports betting isn't just a problem for casinos or sports bars anymore – it's knocking on the doors of America's churches.

That's the message pastors heard loud and clear at a recent summit hosted by the Southern Baptist Convention's Ethics & Religious Liberty Commission at Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary in Texas. If your church isn't talking about sports gambling yet, it might be time to start.

As reported by The Christian Post, the summit was held at Travis Avenue Baptist Church and brought together pastors, researchers and advocates to confront what many believe is becoming a major spiritual and cultural issue – the rapid rise of digital sports betting.

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With just a smartphone and a few swipes, young men (and increasingly, women, too) are being drawn into a world that Pastor RaShan Frost says is built on deception and destruction. "The essential idea against gambling is that it thrives under the conditions of human covetousness, denying God as a provider and failing to be content in His provision," Frost says.

This isn't your grandfather's poker game.

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Since the 2018 Supreme Court ruling that opened the floodgates for legalized sports betting, digital platforms have exploded across the country.

“We’ve become just inundated with ads for all these opportunities to gamble money,” Frost adds, pointing to a growing trend among young men “who now have smartphones and their dad’s credit card and can really get into a lot of trouble.”

And it’s not just spiritual harm pastors are worried about. Frost warned that gambling reduces athletes to commodities and noted “18- to 22-year-olds receiving death threats” after bad performances that cost gamblers money. What kind of culture are we creating when a missed shot or dropped ball turns into a reason for rage?

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Pastor Matt Henslee of Plymouth Park Baptist Church in Irving, Texas, found out just how deeply embedded the issue had become when he learned that teens in his youth group had already normalized sports betting. “That’s when it really hit home for me,” he said.

The summit offered more than just warnings. From using small groups as a platform for discipleship to urging pastors to engage lawmakers, speakers shared tools to address the crisis.

Greg Davis, president of The Alabama Citizens Action Program, put it bluntly: “Gambling is a lie; it’s a con job. Legislators don’t see what pastors see.”

The reality is clear: sports betting is no longer just a cultural issue – it’s a pastoral one. And if churches don’t take proactive steps now, they may find themselves behind the curve in helping their members, especially the next generation, navigate this growing trap.

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James Lasher *is staff writer for Charisma Media.*