

A Biblical Perspective on Gambling

By Jerry A. Collins

- *What is gambling?*
- *Is gambling biblical?*
- *How can we determine if a gamble is good or bad?*

What is Gambling?

According to *Webster's Collegiate Dictionary*, 10th ed., a "gamble" is defined as "an act having an element of risk; something chancy; the playing of a game of chance for stakes," and "gambling" means, "to play a game for money or property; to bet on an uncertain outcome; to stake something on a contingency."

The essence of a gamble seems to involve three things:

1. possible gain
2. possible loss (risk)
3. chance (the uncontrollable)

Gambling differs from risk-taking. The difference is in one's focus while taking the chance.

Gambling has to do with the possibility of winning or not winning. Risking has to do with the possibility of losing or not losing. A person can risk without gambling but cannot gamble without risking.

This brochure will provide a biblical perspective of gambling in a general sense.

Gambling and the Bible

God does not gamble because He already knows the outcome. Since God is omniscient (knowing all things actual and possible) and sovereign (the ultimate source of power, control, and authority), He never gambles. God does, however, expect us to gamble. The fact that we are neither omniscient nor sovereign makes the very nature of our relationship with Him a gamble. The parable of the talents in Matthew 25:14-30 encourages us to gamble. The parable describes the master dividing money between his three servants according to their abilities. While he is away, two of his servants doubled the money they were given and the third simply hid what he had received. When the master returned, he rewarded the first two servants for the profits they made and judged the third for playing it safe. The parable is teaching us to use the time, talents, and treasures given to us by God for spiritual and eternal rewards in God's kingdom.

It is a good gamble to choose to move in the direction of something God is doing, so it is a good gamble to invest ourselves in God's kingdom and His righteousness since it is something God wants us to do.

We have to determine whether a gamble is good or bad. We can make a bad gamble (I will rob this bank for money) or we can make a good gamble (I will be honest so the truth can be known). Of course, God never expects us to make a bad gamble.

A good gamble is one for which a reasonable case can be made for winning. That is what makes Christianity a good gamble.

The less chance involved, the more reasonable the gamble--It is a reasonable gamble for a life insurance company to bet that you will not die before age 65.

The less reasonable a decision, the worse the gamble--it is less reasonable to gamble on making a hole-in-one than a two-foot putt.

If a person is not gambling, he is not living a Christian life (Hebrews 11:6). Becoming a Christian is a gamble, faith is a gamble, and applying the Bible is a gamble.

From our perspective we cannot get chance completely out of the picture, but Christianity diminishes the role of chance when **we take the initiative** to move in a godly direction because of the reasonable thought supporting it from nature and God's Word.

- Jacob gambled that he would be reconciled to his brother Esau (Genesis 27:41, 32-33).
- Ruth gambled when she followed Naomi rather than returning to her country (Ruth 1:15-18).
- David gambled that he would defeat Goliath (1 Samuel 17:32, 41-50).
- Nehemiah gambled that the king would let him return to Jerusalem (Nehemiah 1:12:6).
- Peter and John gambled speaking in Jesus' name in spite of persecution (Acts 4:17-20).
- Paul gambled speaking before a hostile mob (Acts 21:35-39) and the Sanhedrin (Acts 23:1-10).

Obedience to a command of God is gambling because we must exercise faith in God Who has taken the initiative.

- Noah (Genesis 6:13-14)
- Abraham (Genesis 22:1-3)
- Moses (Exodus 3:7-10)
- Gideon (Judges 6:14)
- Samuel (1 Samuel 16:1-3)
- Mary (Luke 1:38)
- Paul (Acts 16:6-8)

The gamble began for these men and women of the Bible when they decided to obey God and follow His instructions.

So godly gambles are decisions we initiate (faith) or God initiates (obedience) whereby we...

1. focus on the possibility of gaining something
2. while possibly giving up something (risk)
3. based on our knowledge of God and some element of the unknown (chance).

Determining a Good or Bad Gamble

Gambling is not necessarily wrong, but there are pitfalls which are biblically wrong that we must avoid when taking different kinds of gambles. Here are three examples of possible good gambles and three examples of bad gambles.

Examples of possible good gambles

1. Business can be a good gamble if it does not lead to greed. *And He said to them, Beware, and be on your guard against every form of greed; for not even when one has an abundance does his life consist of his possessions* (Luke 12:15).
2. Investing can be a good gamble if our focus is not to get rich. *But those who want to get rich fall into temptation and a snare and many foolish and harmful desires which plunge men into ruin and destruction. For the love of money is a root of all sorts of evil, and some by longing for it have wandered away from the faith, and pierced themselves with many a pang* (1 Timothy 6:9-10).
3. Insurance may be a good gamble since it makes provision for future needs. *A good man leaves an inheritance to his children's children, And the wealth of the sinner is stored up for the righteous* (Proverbs 13:22).

Examples of bad gambles

1. Casino playing is bad gambling because you don't have a reasonable chance of winning.
2. Lottery playing is a very bad form of gambling because it is a vain pursuit. *He who tills his land will have plenty of bread, But he who pursues vain things lacks sense* (Proverbs 28:19). The lottery creates an artificial world to live which diverts our attention from our responsibility to a hope that we can get lucky.
3. Blind faith decisions are the worst form of gambling because they are evidenced by disobedience caused from faulty reasoning. Consider, for example, Adam and Eve (Genesis 3), Satan (Ezekiel 28 and Isaiah 14), Saul (1 Samuel 15), Ahab and Jezebel (1 Kings 16:29-34), and Ananias and Sapphira (Acts 5).

Questions and Answers

Q: *What is gambling?*

A: The essence of gambling includes:

1. possible gain
2. possible loss (risk)
3. chance (the uncontrollable)

Q: *Is gambling biblical?*

A: Yes. Becoming a Christian is a gamble, faith is a gamble, applying the Bible is a gamble. All the heroes of the Bible were gamblers.

Q: *How can we determine if a gamble is good or bad?*

A: A bad gamble is blind faith. A good gamble is a reasonable decision based on the knowledge of God as revealed in the Bible.