

Question: Have you ever heard of the name **Blaise Pascal**?

Blaise Pascal was a French mathematician, inventor (*he accidentally invented the roulette wheel in 1655 while working on a perpetual motion machine*), scientist, physicist, theologian and philosopher.

He was born June 19, 1623 and died in Paris at the young age of 39 - August 19, 1662. At the age of 31 he experienced a conversion to Christianity, and he began to write out his thoughts, his ideas and *his apologetic*, - or his defense of the Christian faith.

Mr. Pascal had planned to write an exhaustive defense of the Christian faith in which he would give all of the *evidences* that he had come to believe for the Christian faith - but he died prematurely.

And all of his thoughts now have been put together in a compendium that is simply titled the *Pensees*, and that word means **to think** or **to deliberate**.

Blaise Pascal was very respected in his day and age as a scientist, as a mathematician and as a philosopher and theologian. Now in the middle of that little volume *Pensees*, one of Blaise Pascal's most famous writings, arguably his most famous writing has come to be handed down to us, and is simply known as the Wager. And today we refer to it as Pascal's Wager.

Before we actually show you a summary of the Wager, we should remind you that Blaise Pascal was a mathematician.

And this raises a legitimate question:

How would it be that a very intelligent, erudite man would come to be a Christian?

You may be surprised to learn that it was actually mathematics that led him to a saving relationship with the Lord Jesus Christ.

You know we are living in a day and age in which science is being set over here and religion over there. And we are being told that in order to be an intelligent person you must put your religious faith on the shelf and believe what science has handed down.

That would be a great topic for a separate study.

But we want you to know that history bears out and there are even many contemporary individuals that would confirm that you can still be a very intelligent individual and have a rock solid faith in the Lord Jesus Christ.

You don't have to put your intelligence on a shelf to become a Christian.

In fact, Jesus didn't come to disable men's minds. Jesus came to enable and to set free the minds of men and women.

So then, what about Blaise Pascal? What was his wager? Let us just give you a summary of Pascal's Wager and then we will begin to look at the significance of it.

Here it is, this is what Blaise Pascal said, "**God either exists or He doesn't.**"

That seems very simple and logical. Based on the testimony of both general revelation, (that is nature, the creative works) and special revelation (that is the scriptures) - Pascal said, it is safe to assume that God does in fact exist.

It is, he surmised, abundantly fair to conceive that there is at least a 50% chance that the Christian Creator God exists.

He said, therefore, since we stand to gain eternity, and thus infinity, the wise or safe choice is **to live as though He does exist**. If we are right, we gain everything, and lose how much? - nothing. If we are wrong, we lose nothing and we gain nothing.

Therefore, **based on simple mathematics**, Pascal reasoned that **only the fool would choose to live the Godless life.**

This is a simplified version of the Wager. God either exists or He doesn't.

Please understand that Pascal founded the essential rules that govern all games of chance and that can be used by gamblers to define perfect playing and betting strategies.

Furthermore, these laws of probability have found modern applications in a whole series of situations ranging from speculating on the stock market, to estimating the probability of a nuclear accident.

Pascal was even convinced that he could use his theories to justify an intelligent belief in God.

He stated, quoting Pascal: "the excitement that a gambler feels when making a bet is equal to the amount he might win multiplied by the probability of winning it."

He then argued that the possible prize of eternal happiness has an infinite value and that the probability of entering heaven by leading a virtuous life, no matter how small is certainly finite.

Therefore, according to Pascal's definition, religion was a game of infinite excitement and one worth playing because multiplying an infinite prize by a finite probability results in infinity.

Do you understand the significance of that? It's basically a distillation of his Wager saying, "it's better to be safe and err on the side of intelligence than then sorry and err on the side of ignorance." Ignorance being a lack of knowledge.

Have you ever gambled? ...ever bet on something? Chances are – you have. (no pun intended).

The truth of the matter is, as we have very likely at some point in time, we have all made some kind of bet. For example: I'll say maybe when I was young I would have said to my brother, I will bet you a nickel I could jump over that puddle.

You know that's a harmless bet and then there are more advanced kinds of bets.

The point is not to talk about the merits and demerits of gambling because I think there really are no merits. but listen very carefully - there is one gamble that everybody in the world **is going to make and that is the gamble of your life** whether they realize it or not.

Now when you make a gamble or a wager you consider three factors.

Let's go over these very carefully, so we understand each of them. We want to set the parameters for this. And then we are going to go directly to an incredible story right in the gospel of Mark that will give an example of this for us in an incredibly simple way.

When a person makes a bet or when you think about a wager or when people who do wager, there are three factors that affect whether or not it is an intelligent wager or a wager that is probably not best to enter into.

1. The first is the size of the prize.
2. The second is the size of the risk.
3. And the third is the chances or the probability of actually winning.

So you have 1) the size of the prize, 2) the size of the risk and 3) the chances of winning.

Now let's just take a modern-day common gambling situation, - the lottery, and let's plug the lottery into our little three-tiered equation and let's see if we can think why some people would spend their hard-earned money on a lottery ticket.

Let's begin with the first one.

The size of the prize to be gained. Is the lottery a large prize or a small prize? The one people get excited about is Large. Usually very large. Several million dollars in some cases, and probably for most of us that would be very nice to have. So the size of the prize is very large (usually).

Now the second is, what's the size of the risk? I don't know because I don't buy lottery tickets, but I'll "bet" you there are just a couple dollars or two. So what's the size of the risk involved if a lottery ticket cost just a dollar or \$2. Is it a large risk or a small risk? Small. It's a pretty small risk.

So notice what we have so far. We have a large prize, several million dollars. We have a small risk, and so everybody is thinking it's time to run out and buy lottery tickets - Right?

But the third element is where the rubber meets the road. Isn't it?

What are the *chances of actually winning the promised prize*? What are they? Small or large? Small. Very small, Very, Very small. In fact, the statistical probability of actually winning the lottery are astronomically low. 1 or a few winners out of hundreds of millions of people – a very, very small chance of winning.

It's said that the chances of getting struck by lightning **twice** is greater than the chances of winning the New York state lottery.

Now why would somebody purchase a lottery ticket knowing that the chances of winning are so infinitesimally small?

Chiefly because of this: The size of the prize is so large that it motivates them. The size of the risk is so small even though they know their chances are very, very small that they will win, we can at least understand somewhat the beginnings are of the rationale as to why somebody would enter into that kind of wager.

Now PLEASE don't misunderstand, we are NOT recommending gambling on anything.

That's not a principle of being a good steward. But we can at least enter into the mindset of somebody who would buy a lottery ticket: The size of the prize is large. The size of the risk is miniscule, the chances of winning are - well... sure they're infinitesimally small, but because the risk is so small what do they really lose? A few \$\$

Let's change things around a little bit and let's see if we can make a wager that might be attractive to some and unattractive to others.

Consider with me that we are just going to flip a coin.

Now what are the chances that it'll come up heads? 50 percent. Is it 50% every time? Yes - and let's say that the parameters of this wager are simply this. We are going to flip coin and if you call it heads and it is heads, you instantaneously win say \$100 trillion, no taxes. It's yours, direct deposit right into your bank account, \$100 trillion. ... a VERY large sum of money... that would be nice.

Now let's say that if you lose, you call heads and it comes up tails. Well, then you lose all your possessions and spend the next five years of your life in prison - at forced hard labor, ok? Then at the end of your prison sentence you will be executed.

I am thinking that you are a pretty bright person, and my hunch is there are a very few people in the world, if any who be willing to take that wager. Now let's think about this for just a minute.

What's the size of the prize in this fictitious wager? Is it large? Yes. It's quite large. But what's the size of the risk involved? It could be potentially very large, isn't it? And in the end you're going to die anyway...

To lose everything you own and to the next spend five years of your life in prison - at forced hard labor and then be executed. It's a very large risk. But what makes the wager potentially attractive?

What are the chances of actually winning the promised prize? 50 percent.

Are you seeing that we can evaluate any wager, any gamble, any bet, if you just plug it into this three tiered equation? The size of the prize, the size of the risk and the chances of actually winning.

You can begin to realize whether or not, this is an intelligent, rational wager or a wager that you shouldn't spend time or money on.

Now, go with me in your Bible to **John 3:16** ... Are you wondering what does this text have to do with a wager? What does this text have to do with gambling?

**John 3:16** - probably one of the very best known passages of scripture in all of the Holy Bible.

**John 3:16**, Jesus here is having that clandestine conversation with the wise man Nicodemus.

In the midst of that conversation, as it sort of draws to a climax, Jesus says in **John 3:16** "For God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish but have everlasting life."

Now let's just for a moment enter into the mind of a skeptic.

Let's enter into the mind of somebody who has not yet made the decision to follow Jesus and Jesus here makes this remarkable claim to Nicodemus.

Jesus here says, God so loved the world, Nicodemus, that he gave his only begotten son, that whoever believes in him should not perish, (size of the risk), but have everlasting life (the size of the prize).

Now what does the word everlasting mean? It means it lasts for how long? Forever. Forever - like the great song, 'Amazing Grace' says, "when we've been there ten thousand years we've no less days to sing his praise then when we first begun."

So after we've spent the first **billion** or so years of eternity, we would still have only the opening seconds of eternity behind us. Are you with me? In other words it's a very, very, very long time. We almost can't comprehend it... in fact, the Bible actually says we can't imagine the things God has in store for us. **We can't even imagine it.** I don't know about you, but I can *imagine* a lot of things...

So the size of the prize, now remember here we're entering into the mind of a skeptic. We're trying to understand how would we explain to somebody who is not yet made this decision, why they should consider making this very decision.

Now if we accept **John 3:16** on its own terms. If we accept the words of Jesus as valid and as legitimate (because there's a least a 50% chance that God does exist...), let's now plug this *Gospel wager* into our three-tiered equation.

1. **What is the size of the prize** to be potentially gained, if we accept the Gospel wager on its own terms? What's the size of the prize? **Huge**. Yeah, huge would be an under-statement. It would be infinitely large. Is that true? It would be a true mathematical infinity. When we've been there a billion years we still have a billion, billion, billion, billion more years to be there, after all it's everlasting life. So the size of the prize is infinitely large.
2. **Now what's the size of the risk?** There's really no risk. Let's skip this one for now and come back to the size of the risk, and let's ask the next question.
3. **What according to this wager are the chances of actually winning?** Now, if we accept it on its own terms, for God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten son that, what's that next word? **Whosoever**. How many would that include? That would mean everybody, that's another way of saying everybody. So then according to Jesus how many could actually win the promised prize? and what would be your chances of winning? **100 percent**.

Now we've answered two of the three questions. The size of the prize is infinitely large. The chance of winning is what? 100 percent. If we accept the Gospel claim on its own terms.

Now we only need answer that second question.

**What is the size of the risk** involved to submit your whole life, all your goals, your aspirations, everything that you are about - to the Lord Jesus Christ?

Let's look at the Gospel of Mark, chapter 10. here we find the story of the rich, young ruler.

The rich young ruler came to Jesus and said, in essence "good master, I would like to go to heaven. What do I need to do?" What did Jesus say? He said keep the commandments.

The rich, young ruler said "I've done that."

But Jesus said he only lacked one thing. He should go and sell all that he had and give to the poor, and come and follow Jesus.

The Bible says he went away sorrowful, because he was very rich.

Now this turned the disciples' world upside down. Here was not only a Jew, but here he was a wealthy Jew and in the disciple's paradigm, in the disciples' world - if you are Jew, you are surely in, and if you were a rich Jew, well, this was a sure indication you had the favor of God.

And so you are in God's favor twice over and yet Jesus said something very remarkable when the rich young ruler walks away. He said "it is difficult for a rich man to enter the Kingdom of Heaven."

Now this must have put the disciples beside themselves - They protested, "who then can be saved?"

And that sets the context now for our story.

In **Mark 10: 26,27** "and they were greatly astonished saying among themselves who then can be saved. Jesus looked at them and said with men it is impossible, but not with God. **For with God how many things are possible? All.**

**All things are possible with God.** Then Peter began to say to him, see we have left all and followed you. Now Peter said something here that is very interesting and let's see what is the statement behind the statement that Peter is making.

Peter says there in verse 28, "see, *in other words* look, we have left all and followed you."

Now what had Jesus said to the rich young ruler? Sell how much? All. All that you have and he had gone away very sorrowful.

Now, Peter here does something that's very intuitive. He has seen that the rich young ruler was not willing to give up all. Now surely the rich young ruler had more in terms of material possessions than Peter. Yet, Peter here ventures, he has the guts, to look to Jesus and say, "but Jesus we have left all and followed you..."

...now what's implied in what Peter is saying? - what he was really saying was: "What's in it for us?"

Now, notice something. Jesus gives Peter a remarkable answer and that answer has two elements, two tiers or levels.

Now notice Jesus answer in vs 29, Jesus speaking, "assuredly I say to you, there is no one who has left house or brothers or sisters or father or mother or wife or children or lands for my sake and the Gospels. Verse 30: **who shall not receive a 100 fold...**"

Notice the next four words. "**Now in this time.**" How many fold? 100. A 100 fold and what are those four words. **Now in this time**, houses and brothers and sisters and mothers and children and lands he had and notice the next five words "**and in the age to come, eternal life.**"

Now do you see the two parts Jesus' answer? Remember what was the implied question in Peter's statement. "See Lord, we have left all and followed you" - and the implication is **what's in it for us** and Jesus doesn't rebuke Peter and say anything like "You're just doing it for selfish motivations." - Jesus understands that sometimes our motivations are not as pure as they could and should be.

What Jesus does is he encourages Peter by saying to him "Peter, I'm going give you a two-tiered response and the first part is he says I'll give you a 100 fold better, more satisfying, more exhilarating, more fulfilling life now in this time and in the age to come, eternal life."

Notice the remarkable claim here of Jesus. **This is a testable claim that Jesus has made.** Jesus has just said to Peter that if you follow me I will give you what? **a 100 fold better life in the here and now.**

In other words according to Jesus - following him and being a disciple of his is not just a pie-in-the-sky profession, but it is a better, fuller, more filling and exhilarating, satisfactory life in the here and now.

Now, if that's true and we're writing this letter to you to testify to you right now that it is true in our own experience, but if it's true - let's enter back into the mind of the skeptic.

Remember the three questions.

1. The size of the prize? How large is the prize? Infinitely large,
2. The size of the risk? If Jesus claim is true that the life of the Christian, the life of the disciple is 100 fold better in the here and now, **then the size of the risk is**

**non-existent.** In fact, there is actually a positive benefit to be gained by entering into the wager. Do you understand that? Now promise is either true or false. **That is a testable hypothesis.** The Bible says taste and see that the Lord is good. You could become a follower of Jesus,

Honestly, you could look back after 2, 3, 4, or 5 years and you could evaluate transparently, candidly and even empirically, you could evaluate "has my life been better, fuller and more satisfying since I became a Christian?" You would say "yes, definitely!" If you say no, *then nothing has been lost.* Why would you not want to take this bet?

I want to testify that if I could exchange the last 20 years of my non-Christian life for the last 6 months of my Christian life, I would not make that exchange because just one month with Christ, one day with Christ, one minute with Christ, the King and Sovereign Ruler of the Universe in your life is better than a lifetime without Him.

Now think about that. We can begin to understand why Blaise Pascal said *only the fool would choose to live the Godless life*, it's not simply because the size of the prize is infinitely large & the size of the risk is non-existent.

In fact, there is a positive benefit to be gained by ***simply entering into the wager.*** The chances of winning are what? **100 percent.** Now, any sane, rational person should be beginning to like the sound of this Gospel wager.

Now, Jesus also included an important element in his answer that you should look at for a minute.

He said *with persecutions*, (vs 30) what did He mean by that?

Mainly this: When we surrender our whole heart, our whole life and everything to Jesus, there is somebody on the other side of this equation that is not pleased with that decision. His name is Satan. That name means "adversary" or enemy.

And when you make a decision to follow the Lord Jesus Christ with all your heart you can just guarantee that there will be troubles and difficulties because we are caught in the middle of a cosmic war between good and evil.

Remember, Jesus never promised smooth sailing, but He did promise a safe landing.

There may come at times persecutions, there may come at times tribulations and difficulties, but please know that it's persecution with the assurance of eternal life. Never forget that.

Tribulation with the assurance of Jesus at your right hand is far better than a life of pleasure, leisure, luxury and ease, without the confidence that Jesus is with you and nothing in the end except decay and death. Jesus said a 100 fold better life in the here and now, will there be persecutions at times? Sure.

Will there be difficulties at times, tribulations? Sure.

In fact, many times when people first begin to follow the Lord, they find that there is a resistance they experience with others in their life. But listen, *if there is a resistance from the world, it is a very good indicator that you're on the right path.*

**IN CLOSING:** That is Pascal's Wager - and we recommend it to you today **but with this caveat:**

Even though by definition this is based in mathematical game theory - **It's not a game... Your life is not a game** - or at least you shouldn't live it like it is....

You cannot simply "make the bet" and hope for the best. If God is "all knowing" as scripture claims, then He is going to know you are faking it and are just in it because you don't like the stated alternative... You would basically be lying about it – hedging your bet, so to speak.

If that's your attitude, then Pascal's Wager isn't worth the paper it's written on because it would be nothing more than playing the odds and you've completely missed the point and you don't really have any belief in God and it only amounts to a lame excuse for "*believing*" in God, - and it's hypocritical at best.

If you believe in God for the sole reason that you're afraid to go to face God's judgment and suffer the result of your life's work, then your belief is not true because your fear is controlling you.

You are not a Christian because you choose the "bet" of Pascal's Wager, you are a Christian because you have accepted Jesus Christ as your Lord and Savior from sin, and confessed and forsaken a life of sin.

Remember, Pascal said "only the fool would choose to live the Godless life" The wager is a pointer to God.

Jesus said, "this is the way, walk ye in it" - that means there is something to do, we are to follow His example in our life.

And yet my witness to you as an ambassador of the King of the Universe – is **that He is REAL**. He is on the throne.

If you choose to serve the Lord Jesus Christ with all your heart, mind and soul, when you come to that day you'll be looking forward to an eternity of joys and blisses and glories in the celestial kingdom that you cannot even imagine.

Don't you want to be there? Can you imagine anything better than being in that glorious celestial kingdom? The size of the prize-ininitely large, the size of the risk - non-existent, and listen carefully, the chances that you can win?

**100%** - YES, you can have eternal life through accepting Lord Jesus Christ as your personal savior. **The chances are 100 percent.**

We invite you to make that decision today. We invite you to seriously consider making Jesus Christ your savior, & your friend.

Why don't you do that just now?

Take the bet.... You've got nothing to lose by taking it, but everything to lose by not taking it.