

What is Pascal's Wager?



Prior Admittedly, this is probably not one of your Top 10 questions in life. You may have never even heard of “Pascal’s Wager.” Well, just think of how smart you’ll be after reading this article. You’ll be the star of the show everywhere you go with your newfound knowledge. You can impress your friends and bore your enemies! 🤖

Answering this question isn’t so much about “answering the question” as it is about learning how to think more critically and, along the way, getting much better at effectively sharing our faith.

So, what exactly is Pascal’s Wager? It was a wager that belonged to Pascal. Any questions? OK, see you next week. Don’t forget the test on Monday will cover chapters 10-13! (Sounds like my old college days.) I suppose I could be more serious, but it isn’t easy for me.

Pascal is actually a reference to Blaise Pascal, a French mathematician, philosopher, and physicist (1623–1662). He is famous for numerous reasons:

- Co-developer of the Theory of Probability
- Unit of pressure named after him (the pascal)
- Established the scientific discipline of Hydrostatics
- Inventor of the barometer
- One of the first inventors of the mechanical calculator
- Computer programming language named after him (Pascal)
- The reason I hated computer programming in college... because I had to learn Pascal! (It’s a wonder I later became a computer programmer for 12 years!)

He was also a very strong Christian. He applied his fascination with mathematics and probability to his faith, which led to “Pascal’s Wager” which, paraphrased, is as follows:

God either exists or He does not. If you choose to live as a Christian and it turns out God does not exist, you lose nothing but have lived a happier life than those who didn’t believe in God. However, if God does exist, you have gained everything (eternal life), and the skeptic has lost everything!

Pascal, earlier in his life, had applied his theory of probability to gambling scenarios. Many of the principles behind modern insurance policies utilize logic developed by Pascal. In other words, make decisions based on the best probability. What have you got to lose?

Many Christians have used this approach in witnessing, and I can understand the initial appeal. However, there are definitely concerns with this line of thinking, so I would highly recommend you avoid such a tactic as this.

Many things seem pretty good at first glance, but when scrutinized, they don't look so good anymore. That's where I am headed with this. It's not to criticize Pascal. It is done with the intent to use critical thinking skills to ensure our methods are biblical.

The first issue that comes to mind is that this wager is implying you should trust in Christ, not because Christianity is true and there's strong evidence, but because it is more probable that you will ultimately benefit from that decision as opposed to skepticism. It's kind of like saying, "Give it a try. You'll find out once you're dead whether it was the right choice." On the contrary, we urge people to trust in Christ because the Bible's claims are actually true, and it states that Christ is the only way to heaven. There's also power beyond simply making a choice. The Holy Spirit indwells the new Christian and confirms they are a child of God (Romans 8:16).

A second issue is that it negates or downplays Scripture itself. One such example would be Romans 1:19-20, which states:

For what can be known about God is plain to them, because God has shown it to them. For his invisible attributes, namely, his eternal power and divine nature, have been clearly perceived, ever since the creation of the world, in the things that have been made. So they are without excuse.

We don't have to wonder whether or not God exists. Nature itself loudly proclaims that He does!

Thirdly, the skeptic could easily (and logically) say that we are shortsighted in our reasoning. We are implying either the Christian God exists or He doesn't; there are no other options. What about the existence of a different God? What about one that perhaps judges based on your intentions and whether or not you did the best you could, at least much of the time? Even the atheist Richard Dawkins recognizes holes in this "wager." He posited that maybe, if there is a god, he would more harshly judge someone who simply exercised blind faith and often acted hypocritically than a sincere unbeliever who meant well and lived a decent life. This is a valid counter-argument.

We believe in Christ (and the Christian worldview) because Jesus Christ came to this Earth (we're celebrating His initial arrival this month), He died on a cross for the sins of the world, and He rose again three days later! That's why others should place their trust in Christ, not because the odds are in their favor.

As an interesting side note and one that somewhat relates to Pascal's Wager, here's a line of reasoning I came up with that will probably make you think, "Hmmm, that's so true. Very interesting!"

What you do with it is up to you. I'm not even saying you need to incorporate this into your conversations with skeptics. It's just interesting. The context of this is important in light of what I shared earlier in this article. This is strictly considering the Christian worldview and an atheist worldview.

Question of the Month

A Christian will never know they were wrong, but they will know for certain if they were right.

An atheist will never know they were right, but will certainly, and very unfortunately, know if they were wrong!

You probably figured out why this is true, but just in case you missed it, here's the explanation.

If a Christian is wrong and there is no God, when they die, they will not be conscious to realize, "Wow, I guess God doesn't exist. I was wrong!" They will just be dead. However, if they were right, they would not only know they were right when they died; they would spend eternity with that loving God! On the other hand, if an atheist is right, they will never know because when they die, they will not be conscious to realize, "Wow, I was right! God doesn't exist. I knew it!" They will just be dead. However, if they were wrong, they would know for sure they were wrong but tragically, it would be too late to do anything about it! Just something to chew on. (Not a suggested reason to believe or not believe.)

Christianity is not a "Try it out, what have you got to lose" proposition. It is deeply rooted in reality, accompanied by mounds of historical, prophetic, and scientific evidence.

Let's use this season (that the entire world recognizes) to enter into life-changing conversations. Just be willing and available. God will provide everything else.

If you have any questions about this or any other issue, please don't hesitate to [contact us!](#)