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On the Gamble of a Lifetime

by Daryl E. Witmer

The old man sat there on the side of his hospital bed. I looked deeply into his face. We had known each other for a long while. Now he was facing his last few weeks on earth — maybe even his last days — and he knew it.

"But what if I'm right and you're wrong?" I asked. "What then?"

We had discussed spiritual matters many times. Our relationship had always been candid, especially on matters of faith. He knew exactly where I stood and I knew where he stood. In the end we usually agreed to disagree. But through the years, in spite of our differences, we had been able to maintain a healthy respect for one other. Even now, welcoming my visit, he was open to considering my challenge. "Go on," he said.

"Alright, think about it," I said, "What *if* you don't just die like a dog? What *if* you don't get recycled? What *if* there really is a Judgment Day? What *if* there is a real hell? What *if* the Bible is

altogether truthful in that which it affirms about Jesus of Nazareth, and about how one must be saved, and about matters of eternity. What then?"

He shrugged. But he was listening carefully. He was thinking.

"Look," I said, "if you're right and I'm wrong, what have I got to lose by having lived as if this were all true? If you're right and there is nothing after this life, it's no big deal for either of us. That's true. **But if I'm right and you're wrong, you've got everything to lose.** You're no fool. Why don't you see that? Aside from everything else, what a wild gamble you're taking! A lot of people gamble every day, all across America and around the world, rolling dice and pulling levers on slot machines. But who would ever go for a deal with odds like this?!"



Blaise Pascal was a brilliant French scientist and mathematician. He lived hundreds of years ago, from 1623-1662. He was only 39 years old when he died, but today you will find his name in every reputable encyclopedic reference in print and online. Among his many other accom-

plishments was fact that he was the very first to set forth a formal theory of probability. So when it came to taking a chance, Pascal was an authority.

So here is something that Blaise Pascal once wrote. It eventually became known as *The Pascal Wager* or *Pascal's Wager*:

"What do you risk on the idea that there is a God? If there is no God and you live as if there were, what have you lost? Likewise, if there truly is a God and you live as if there were none, what do you risk losing? And which is the safer risk? Let us weigh the gain and the loss in wagering that God is. Let us estimate these two chances. If you gain, you gain all; if you lose, you lose nothing. Wager then, without hesitation, that He is. Jesus Christ is the end of all and the center to which all tends. Whoever knows Him knows the reason of everything."

Now it's certainly true that there are far nobler reasons, and a more compelling case, for investing one's faith in the God of the Bible. For instance, there is the evidence for faith, the honor of Christ, and the glory of God as Creator. But the simple straightforward logic of *Pascal's Wager*, even on its own, should give serious pause to every thoughtful skeptic.

The old man in the hospital bed listened to my challenge that day, seemed to think it over, and then changed the subject. The Bible says that **faith comes by hearing God's Word**. Even *Pascal's Wager* will quite possibly not be enough.

More Evidence in Defense and Confirmation of the Christian Faith