

# “What Do You Have To Lose?”

## WORSE-CASE DECISION-THEORETIC

By David Lee Burris, Editor/Contributor

### Basics of

# Decision Theory

	Surgery Performed	Surgery Not Performed
Cancer Present (C1)	<p><b>Very Good</b> Score: 100%</p>	<p><b>Very Bad</b> Score: 0%</p>
Cancer Absent (C2)	<p><b>Not Good</b> 40%</p>	<p><b>Good</b> 85%</p>

BAYESIAN EPISTEMOLOGY HAS ITS ROOTS IN [THOMAS BAYES'](#) WORK IN THE FIELD OF PROBABILITY THEORY.<sup>[1]</sup> IT IS BASED ON THE IDEA THAT BELIEFS CAN BE INTERPRETED AS [SUBJECTIVE PROBABILITIES](#). AS SUCH, THEY ARE SUBJECT TO THE LAWS OF PROBABILITY THEORY, WHICH ACT AS THE NORMS OF RATIONALITY. THESE NORMS CAN BE DIVIDED INTO STATIC CONSTRAINTS, GOVERNING THE RATIONALITY OF BELIEFS AT ANY MOMENT, AND [DYNAMIC CONSTRAINTS](#), GOVERNING HOW RATIONAL AGENTS SHOULD CHANGE THEIR BELIEFS UPON RECEIVING NEW EVIDENCE. THE MOST CHARACTERISTIC BAYESIAN EXPRESSION OF THESE PRINCIPLES IS FOUND IN THE FORM OF [DUTCH BOOKS](#), WHICH ILLUSTRATE IRRATIONALITY IN AGENTS THROUGH A SERIES OF BETS THAT LEAD TO A LOSS FOR THE AGENT NO MATTER WHICH OF THE PROBABILISTIC EVENTS OCCURS. TWO PROPOSITIONS COHERE IF THE PROBABILITY OF THEIR CONJUNCTION IS HIGHER THAN IF THEY WERE NEUTRALLY RELATED TO EACH OTHER. THE BAYESIAN APPROACH HAS ALSO BEEN FRUITFUL IN THE FIELD OF [SOCIAL EPISTEMOLOGY](#), FOR EXAMPLE, CONCERNING THE PROBLEM OF [TESTIMONY](#) OR THE PROBLEM OF GROUP BELIEF. – WIKIPEDIA DEFINITION

## **From Jonah Haddad @Christian Research Journal:**

Table 1 — Pascal's decision matrix

	God exists (pr=0.5)	God does not exist (pr=0.5)
Wager for God	Eternal salvation, happiness	Little gain, little loss
Wager against God	Damnation, judgment	Little gain, little loss

### **SYNOPSIS**

Choices, mundane and consequential, are made by employing decision-theoretic reasoning. Odds, stakes, risk, cost, and benefit are weighed in concurrence to determine the most prudent course of action. Sometimes available evidence guides the decision. Other times the choice falls to guess work or personal preferences. Biblical Christianity offers two options: follow Jesus and gain life, or reject Him and lose your soul. When considering decisions of eternal magnitude, agnosticism is not a viable option. Action must be taken.

Blaise Pascal famously asked his audience to *wager* on God. He reasoned that if it turns out God does not exist, the worst that could happen to the wagerer is a few minor inconveniences in this life. To wager against God and possibly lose everything is a risk no rational person should be willing to take. I argue that centuries before Pascal made his wager, **Jesus gave a similar but higher stakes wager when He asked His disciples to take up their cross and follow Him.** Jesus raised the stakes by pointing to the inevitable suffering that would accompany discipleship. In asking His audience to forsake the world and follow Him, Jesus made the wager more tangible, pointing to Himself and the benefits of knowing Him as the ultimate reward. I offer that Pascal's and Jesus' wagers, when taken together, form a rational prudential incentive to accept Christian belief.

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**“Most people employ decision-theoretic reasoning on a near daily basis. Choices, both meaningful and mundane, are subjected to continual extemporaneous, if not mechanical, analysis. Probabilities, costs, risk, and benefits are filtered/weighed against wants, needs, fears and dreams. Consider an example: “If I leave for work now, I will not have time for breakfast, but I might avoid bad traffic. However, if I take time to eat, I might be late for work. Furthermore, if I forego breakfast, I will lack energy and perform poorly. Should I take time to eat?” Or another example: “Should I take an expensive cruise for my vacation? If I do, I may not have enough money to pay for the basement remodel I have wanted for years. But I really need a break. Which is more important? Which will garner greater long-term satisfaction? Can I do both?”**

These examples represent trivial cases of decision-theoretic reasoning. Many quotidian and mundane decisions require at least a minimum of cost, benefit, and risk analysis. It’s common to give pause to daily routine decisions as we weigh how choices affect finances, relationships, and time commitments. How much more, then, should we weigh the decisions of eternal consequence? **In his *wager* argument, Blaise Pascal laid out the magnitude of eternity in full view of his seventeenth century agnostic peers. Pascal reasoned that, when evidence for God is inconclusive to an individual, it is better for that person to wager on belief and the possibility of eternal life than to wager on disbelief and risk eternal damnation. In this way, eternity may hinge on the flip of a coin – a Gamble on God.** Pascal’s wager was/is an attempt to convince the agnostic of the eternal advantages of belief. Unbeknownst to him (he died before his wager argument was published), Pascal made gambling on God a subject of discussion and controversy among philosophers and the theologians for centuries to come.

Long before Pascal extended his prudential offer to his skeptical peers, **Jesus made a similar offer: Better to trust me, deny yourself, and gain life than to pursue the world and forfeit your soul (see Matthew 16:24–26).**

In His wager, Jesus asks His listeners to weigh the value of His cross against the value of the world. Two ways are revealed: life and death. An invitation is given: forsake the transient and pursue the eternal.

*Jesus's wager*, as I shall call it, bears some important similarities to that of Pascal's. With this in mind, I will argue two things: 1) that in applying decision-theoretic thinking about Christian truth claims, it is not irrational to trust in Jesus — that is, to make a reasoned wager on Jesus, and 2) that wagering on Jesus is more than a mere intellectual exercise or coin toss; it is a life-changing relationship rooted in the reality of who Jesus is and what He has done.

To cast our lot with Jesus is to lean on a promise amplified by His resurrection and verified by the witness of Scripture.

## Pascal's Wager

A comparison of these two wagers is in order. Pascal's application of decision-theoretic analysis in his wager argument is recognized as an important, if not notorious, contribution within the history of Christian apologetics. **Pascal argued that in the absence of a convincing proof for theistic belief, the agnostic should risk belief in the Christian God and gain eternal life, rather than deny Him and risk eternal punishment. In short, Pascal's wager is not an argument for the existence of God, but for the *rationality* of belief in the existence of God.**

In the *Pensées*, where Pascal discusses his wager between theism and atheism, he states that “by reason you can neither adopt one or the other; by reason you can defend neither of the two” (418/233).<sup>1</sup> In using the term *reason*, Pascal clearly has in mind situations in which the evidence is insufficient for justifying belief.

Consider the argument as envisaged by Pascal:

God is, or he is not; to which side will we lean? Reason can determine nothing....You must wager. There is no choice, you have already begun. Which will you choose? Let us see, since we must make a choice. Let us see which one interests us the least. You have two things to lose: the true and the good, and two things to gain: your reason and your will, your knowledge and your happiness. Your nature has two things to avoid: error and wretchedness. . . Let’s weigh the gain and loss of calling heads that God exists. Let us appraise the two [total type] options: if you win, you win everything, and if you lose, you lose nothing. Wager then that he exists without hesitation (418/233).

Note that the wager argument is constructed as a decision-theoretic gamble on God’s existence. To bet on God’s existence is to adopt the cognitive attitude that He exists, and then to believe that if He does, momentous reward will be gained. To erroneously bet wrong on God’s existence is to lose little or nothing. In contrast, a misplaced bet in favor of atheism may yield momentous loss if it turns out that God does indeed exist. For Pascal, the prudential response is clearly that of the safest bet: God exists.

In Table 1, the existence of God has a 50 percent probability ( $pr=0.5$ ). The stakes are high since eternity is on the line.

Table 1 – Pascal’s decision matrix

	God exists ( $pr=0.5$ )	God does not exist ( $pr=0.5$ )
Wager for God	Eternal salvation, happiness	Little gain, little loss
Wager against God	Damnation, judgment	Little gain, little loss

It is possible to read Pascal’s wager as an argument that develops in several steps. Initially, Pascal asks the wagerer to choose the *dominant strategy*. The argument from dominance is concerned with the idea that if God exists, eternal salvation or infinite happiness ensues. Dominance alone should incline us toward a wager for God.

Second, Pascal examines *expected utility*. He offers a probabilistically calculated risk.<sup>3</sup> Setting the probability of God’s existence at 0.5, Pascal likens his gamble to a coin toss. **He is assuming indifference toward evidence in his probability assignment, rather than pointing to antecedent evidence that the coin is unbiased.** It is worth noting that while assignment of 0.5 probability seems arbitrary, evidential elements are not considered in this stage of Pascal’s apologetic. Letting the wager stand on its own merit, he says that he “ties his hands” asking us to imagine that evidential considerations are moot in assigning probability to God’s existence.<sup>4</sup> Third, it can be reasoned that if probability assignment and expected utility converge to dominate other acts in a state of affairs, *dominating expectations* should be taken into account.<sup>5</sup> Dominating expectations considers the overall probability assignment for God’s existence.

By Pascal's reasoning, and as noted above, the probability of God's existence has an arbitrary assignment of 0.5. Such clean odds are hardly realistic, but the beauty of Pascal's Wager is that by assigning infinite reward to a successful wager on God's existence, and setting the stakes low, the wagerer on God is in a position to win big.

The argument from dominating expectations states that even a terribly low non-zero probability of God's existence is *not* enough to dissuade a wager for God if the expected utility remains high or *tends* toward infinity.<sup>6</sup> As long as the reward is momentous, and the cost to the wagerer low, a pro-theistic wager on a non-zero probability of God's existence seems most prudent.

It is debatable whether Pascal intended three separate arguments, or whether his reasoning serves to demonstrate the careful progression of his argument by way of intermittent steps.<sup>7</sup> Either way, the wager is susceptible to several noteworthy objections. The popular *many-gods objection* asks why we should be inclined to wager on the God of the Bible when myriad other gods might be considered. To this, it suffices to remind the objector that Pascal's wager was offered to 17th century Frenchmen in an almost exclusively Roman Catholic context.<sup>8</sup> The point of the wager is to address epistemic options that are most tenable to the agnostic in question.

The *moral objection* questions the intellectual virtue of gambling with something so sacred as human beliefs, particularly the belief in a putative creator and lord of the universe. This concern, however, may be abated if we take the position that Pascal offers a wager only when no other apologetic for the Christian faith [to the agnostic] has achieved its goal.

The *Pensées* – a fragmented, yet thorough treatment of the cogency of the Christian worldview – examines human nature and suggests the biblical account of creation, fall, and redemption as the best explanation of anthropology and theology. This view in mind, it is not unreasonable to take the wager as a last recourse – a final persuasive plea, rather than a careless intellectual lunge away from reality.

Other objections challenge the probability that Pascal assigns existence of God, and the mathematical absurdity of infinity in the context of a wager. The *swamping objection* states that since the offer of an infinite reward creates a mathematically absurd calculation (infinity times any probability assignment is still infinity), the merits of a wager on God can't realistically be calculated. For example, most rational people would hold that a \$1 stake on a 25 percent chance of winning \$1000 is a better gamble than a \$1 stake on a 75 percent chance of winning \$2. Odds and winnings are weighed together. But how are we possibly to calculate infinity in relation to any odds? The immeasurable reward of infinity for belief in God, even when calculated in terms of an infinitesimally small probability of God's existence, still comes out as infinity and swamps any calculation against God no matter how high the probability against Him. **One one-millionth of a percent multiplied by infinity equals infinity, meaning mathematically that we should take the bet despite terrible odds.**

To answer the swamping objection one must simply modify the value assignment of the reward. Instead, infinity can easily be replaced with a momentous yet finite number, thus making the math work out. Rather than an infinite reward, the wagerer might gain, say, one million units of happiness or some other large but arbitrary measurement of recompense. A modification to the reward for belief in God would allow a reasonable probability calculation to be made and measured against the alternatives.



This sampling of objections demonstrates that Pascal's wager is not without its problems.<sup>9</sup> But let us not forget the purpose of the wager. **Pascal's intent was to ask his peers what the wisest course of action might be when confronted with the possibility of the existence of a holy, eternal creator God. Pascal's aim was not to invite belief despite evidence to the contrary. His objective was to make the agnostic [especially Montaigne] squirm in his complacency when faced with life's most important matters.**

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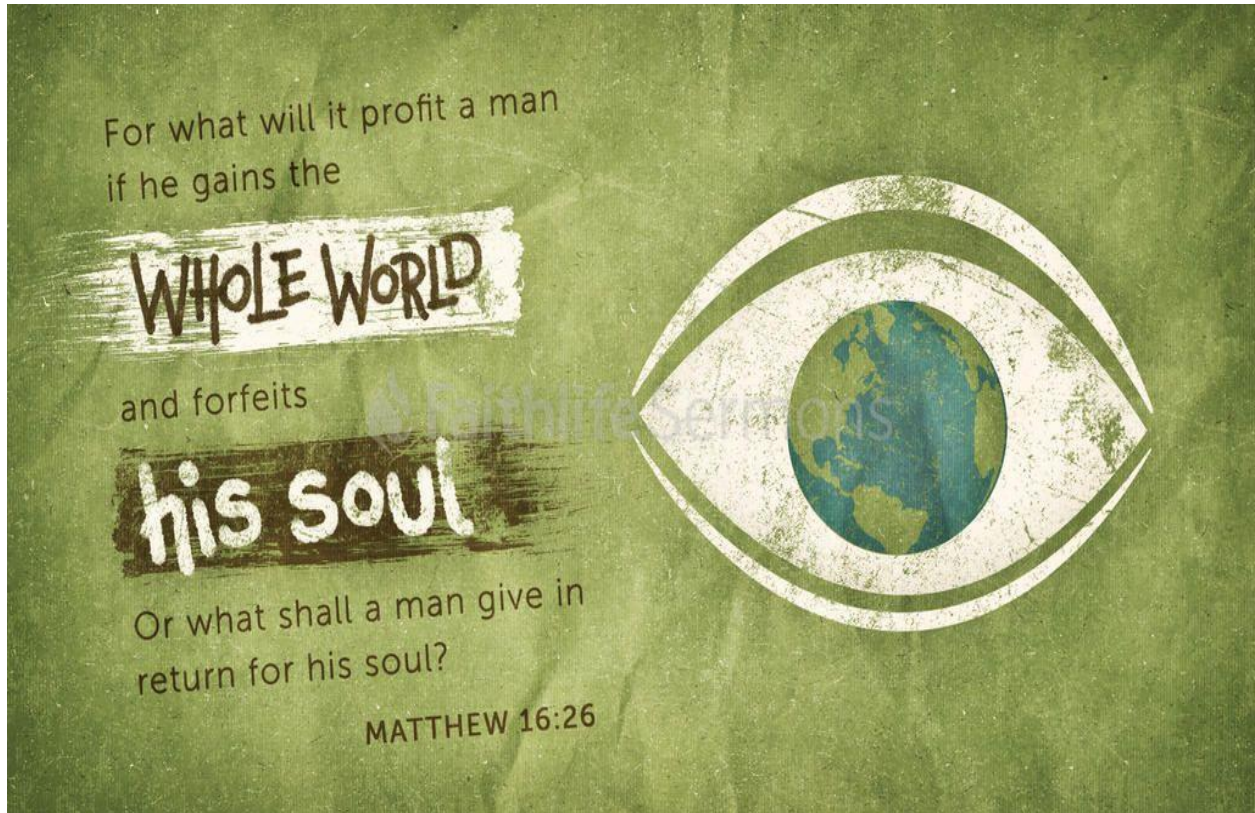
Now the great adversary against whom Pascal set himself, was Montaigne. One cannot destroy Pascal, certainly; but of all authors Montaigne is one of the least destructible. You could as well dissipate a fog by flinging hand-grenades into it. For **Montaigne is a fog, a gas, a fluid, insidious element. He does not reason, he insinuates, charms, and influences; or if he reasons, you must be prepared for his having some other design upon you than to convince you by his argument. In every way, the influence of Montaigne was repugnant to the men of Port-Royal. Pascal studied him with the intention of demolishing him.** Indeed, by the time a man knew Montaigne well enough to attack him, he would already be thoroughly infected by him.

Pascal is a man of the world among ascetics, and an ascetic among men of the world; he had the knowledge of worldliness and the passion of asceticism, and in him the two are fused into an individual whole. The majority of mankind is lazy-minded, incurious, absorbed in vanities, and tepid in emotion, and is therefore incapable of either much doubt or much faith; and when the ordinary man calls himself a sceptic or an unbeliever, that is ordinarily a simple pose, cloaking a disinclination to think anything out to a conclusion. Pascal's disillusioned analysis of human bondage is sometimes interpreted to mean that Pascal was really and finally an unbeliever, who, in his despair, was incapable of enduring reality and enjoying the heroic satisfaction of the free man's worship of nothing. **A similar despair, when it is arrived at by a diseased character or an impure soul, may issue in the most disastrous consequences though with the most superb manifestations; and thus we get Gulliver's Travels; but in Pascal we find no such distortion; his despair is in itself more terrible than Swift's, because our heart tells us that it corresponds exactly to the facts and cannot be dismissed as mental disease; but it was also a despair which was a necessary prelude to, and element in, the joy of faith.**<sup>1</sup> T.S. Eliot

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<sup>1</sup> Pascal, B. (2016). [\*Pensées\*](#). New York, NY: Philosophical Library/Open Road.

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## J. Haddad Continues @ Jesus' Wager

Centuries before Pascal's wager stirred intellectual debate among the philosophers and theologians, Jesus made a similar case for belief. He asked His disciples to choose whom they would serve.

Matthew 16:24-26 recounts the words of Jesus:

**If anyone would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow me. For whoever would save his life will lose it, but who-ever loses his life for my sake will find it. For what will it profit a man if he gains the whole world and forfeits his soul? Or what shall a man give in return for his soul?<sup>10</sup>**

Like Pascal, Jesus invites a decision. Unlike Pascal, Jesus raises the stakes by promising difficulties and trials to anyone who casts his lot with Him. The decision is not straight-forward. No matter where the bet is placed, there is something to be gained and something to be lost. **In this way, eternal life may not necessarily seem appealing when the wagerer is faced with the immediacy of self-denial, abandonment of earthy pleasures, and the physical suffering represented by a Roman cross. Conversely, self-affirmation and earthy pleasure may appear exceedingly attractive when the eternal state of the soul after death can seem to be a distant and abstract concern.**

The decision-theoretic reasoning invited by Jesus’ wager is slightly less complex than that of Pascal. Only two real options are explicit in the text. In Table 2, the first option is “follow me” + self-denial = eternal salvation and likely present suffering. The second option is “follow the world” + self-affirmation = eternal damnation and possible present happiness.

The decision matrix represented in Table 2 was constructed to include two other possible outcomes implicit in Jesus’ teaching throughout the gospel accounts. These involve false discipleship and self-worship. The point to be considered here is that Jesus does not mince words. **There is only one choice that can end well: follow Jesus at all costs and with an unwavering devotion.**

Table 2 – Jesus’ decision matrix

	Self-denial	Self-affirmation
“Follow Me”	Eternal salvation, Likely present suffering	(Eternal damnation, False discipleship)
“Follow the world”	(Eternal damnation, Christless self-deprivation)	Eternal damnation, Possible present happiness

Jesus' wager is a prudential offer in that it asks us to give up something of value for the promise of something of even greater value. But is Jesus' wager a true wager in the decision-theoretic sense elaborated by Pascal? There are some notable differences between the two. Where Pascal asks the wagerer to gamble belief on God, in a general kind of Christian theism, Jesus asks His disciples to wager a close relational bond with himself – God in the flesh, the promised Messiah. For Jesus, neither the object of belief nor the reward for believing are presented as distance abstract realities. For the disciples, the reward was standing right there in front of them. Jesus Himself would return in glory. Jesus Himself would repay each person according to what he had done.

Another difference between the two wagers is seen in how dominance, utility, and expectation are measured in Jesus' invitation. Jesus' wager lacks a probability assignment. **He assigns no odds. Rather, He offers a guarantee – a promise that the outcome will be a certain way.** Where Pascal gives 0.5 odds on a momentous reward, we might say that Jesus gives 1.0 odds on a mixed bag of momentous reward and significant momentary trials. At first blush, it seems that Jesus' wager is less akin to a risky crapshoot, and more akin to a carnival game where everyone who gambles in favor of Jesus is a winner, though they might not like aspects of the prize.

The decision-theoretic reasoning one must employ in responding to Jesus' offer hinges on how much of the present is risked in exchange for a glorious future. To some, the dominating strategy is clear: eternal bliss is worth a life of hardship. To others, no eternal promise is enough to entice forsaking an easy quiet life of simple pleasures and epicurean indulgences. **Jesus asks His disciples, and every subsequent generation, to consider the value of their immortal soul and whether they are willing to entrust it to Him.**

The decision is not as easy as it may seem. **How do I know I have an eternal soul?** Who is Jesus that I should trust Him with my life? By what authority does Jesus claim He will reward His followers? If Jesus is who He says He is (John 14:6), who the Father says He is (Matthew 3:17), and who the prophets say He is (Isaiah 53), then it is not irrational to wager on Him. **If His death and resurrection are historic realities that are backed up by eyewitness testimony, then it is not irrational to wager on Jesus.** If the Gospel accounts have accurately related how Jesus fulfills centuries of divine revelation, then trusting Jesus is more than a mere gamble; it is a conviction rooted in truth and capable of sustaining the believer through trials and hardships.

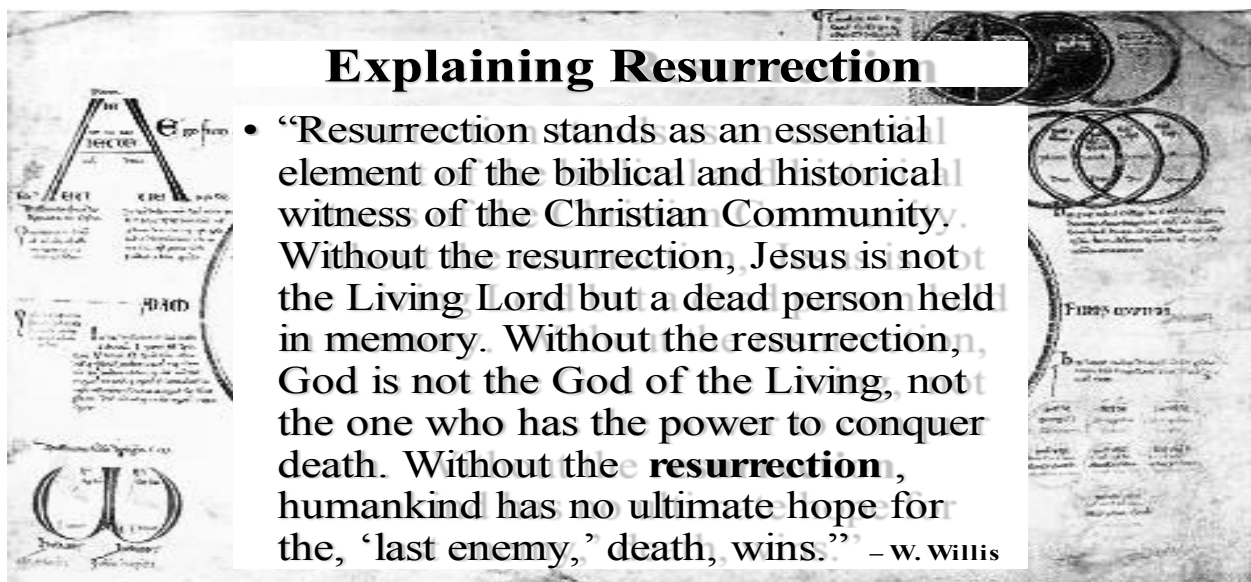
## Wager or Promise

Pascal's wager asks the gambler to take a step toward God. It is designed to invite a cognitive attitude of accepting the proposition that God exists. Pascal asks the gambler to give God a try – to accept the Christian God and see where it leads. Furthermore, Pascal warns of the danger of *rejecting* God. Oddly enough, Jesus warns of the very opposite – the danger of *accepting* God. To walk with Jesus is to face the onslaught of the world, the flesh, and the devil (Ephesians 2:1-3). Jesus asks His followers to count the cost and trust the promise. Intellectual acceptance to a mental attitude is not enough. Jesus wants heart, soul, mind, and strength (Mark 12:30). He wants us to know the risk of making Him our Lord, while receiving the benefits of the transformation He offers (Romans 12:1-2).



Notwithstanding the differences in their arguments, both Pascal and Jesus remind us that a gamble on God is a winning bet. The follower of Christ Jesus does not leave His destiny to the role of the dice or the fatalistic outcomes of a blind unthinking universe. The stars in their various alignments care nothing for humans. But the sovereign Creator of the stars does, as He orchestrates His plan of salvation in love, both in this life and in the life to come (Ephesians 1:1-14). Whatever the risk, the cost, the odds, or the benefits, following Jesus is more than a gamble; it is a lifechanging relationship that begins here and now, and extends into all eternity.” - *Christian Research Journal*

**“If His death and resurrection are historic realities backed up by eyewitness testimony, then it is not irrational to wager on Jesus.** If the Gospel accounts have accurately related how Jesus fulfills centuries of divine revelation, then trusting Jesus is more than a mere gamble; it is a conviction rooted in truth and capable of sustaining the believer through trials and hardships.” - Jonah Haddad, *Christian Research Journal*



### Explaining Resurrection

- “Resurrection stands as an essential element of the biblical and historical witness of the Christian Community. Without the resurrection, Jesus is not the Living Lord but a dead person held in memory. Without the resurrection, God is not the God of the Living, not the one who has the power to conquer death. Without the **resurrection**, humankind has no ultimate hope for the, ‘last enemy,’ death, wins.” - w. Willis

# Cold Case Christianity: Seven Proofs of Resurrection

Is the resurrection of Jesus Christ a historical event that really happened, or is it only a myth, as many atheists claim? While no one witnessed the actual resurrection, many people swore they saw the risen Christ after his death, and their lives were never the same.

Archaeological discoveries continue to support the Bible's historical accuracy. We tend to forget that the Gospels and book of Acts are eyewitness accounts of the life and death of Jesus. Further nonbiblical evidence for Jesus' existence comes from the writings of Flavius Josephus, Cornelius Tacitus, Lucian of Samosata, and the Jewish Sanhedrin. The following seven proofs of the resurrection show that Christ did, indeed, rise from the dead.

## Proof of the Resurrection #1: The Empty Tomb of Jesus

The empty tomb may be the strongest proof Jesus Christ rose from the dead. Two major theories have been advanced by unbelievers: someone stole Jesus' body or the women and disciples went to the wrong tomb. The Jews and Romans had no motive to steal the body. Christ's apostles were too cowardly and would have had to overcome the Roman guards. The women who found the tomb empty had earlier watched Jesus being laid away; they knew where the correct tomb was. Even if they had gone to the wrong tomb, the Sanhedrin could have produced the body from the right tomb to stop the resurrection stories. Jesus' burial cloths were left neatly folded inside, hardly the act of hurrying grave robbers. Angels said Jesus had risen from the dead.

## Proof of the Resurrection #2: The Holy Women Eyewitnesses

The holy women eyewitnesses are further proof that the Gospels are accurate historical records. If the accounts had been made up, no ancient author would have used women for witnesses to Christ's resurrection. Women were second-class citizens in Bible times; their testimony was not even allowed in court. Yet the Bible says the risen Christ first appeared to Mary Magdalene and other holy women. Even the apostles did not believe Mary when she told them the tomb was empty. Jesus, who always had special respect for these women, honored them as the first eyewitnesses to his resurrection. The male Gospel writers had no choice but to report this embarrassing act of God's favor because that was how it happened.

## Proof of the Resurrection #3: Jesus' Apostles' New-Found Courage

After the crucifixion, Jesus' apostles hid behind locked doors, terrified they would be executed next. But something changed them from cowards to bold preachers. Anyone who understands human character knows people do not change that much without some major influence. That influence was seeing their Master, bodily risen from the dead. Christ appeared to them in the locked room, on the shore of the Sea of Galilee, and on the Mount of Olives. After seeing Jesus alive, Peter and the others left the locked room and preached the risen Christ, unafraid of what would happen to them. They quit hiding because they knew the truth. They finally understood that Jesus is God incarnate, who saves people from sin.

## Proof of the Resurrection #4: Changed Lives of James and Others

Changed lives are yet another proof of the resurrection. James, the brother of Jesus, was openly skeptical that Jesus was the Messiah. Later James became a courageous leader of the Jerusalem church, even being stoned to death for his faith. Why? The Bible says the risen Christ appeared to him. What a shock to see your own brother, alive again, after you knew he was dead. James and the apostles were effective missionaries because people could tell these men had touched and seen the risen Christ. With such zealous eyewitnesses, the early church exploded in growth, spreading west from Jerusalem to Rome and beyond.

## Proof of the Resurrection #5: Large Crowd of Eyewitnesses

A large crowd of more than 500 eyewitnesses saw the risen Jesus Christ at the same time. The Apostle Paul records this event in 1 Corinthians 15:6. He states that most of these men and women were still alive when he wrote this letter, about 55 A.D. Undoubtedly, they told others about this miracle. **Today, psychologists say it would be impossible for a large crowd of people to have had the same hallucination at once.** They all saw the same thing, and in the case of the apostles, they touched Jesus and watched him eat food. The hallucination theory is further debunked because after the ascension of Jesus into heaven, sightings of him stopped.

## Proof of the Resurrection #6: Conversion of Paul

The conversion of Paul records the most drastically changed life in the Bible. As Saul of Tarsus, he was an aggressive persecutor of the early church. When the risen Christ appeared to Paul on the Damascus Road, Paul became Christianity's most determined missionary. He endured five floggings, three beatings, three shipwrecks, a stoning, poverty, and years of ridicule. Finally, the Roman emperor Nero had Paul beheaded because the apostle refused to deny his faith in Jesus. What could make a person willingly accept—even welcome—such hardships? Christians believe the conversion of Paul came about because he encountered Jesus Christ who had risen from the dead.

## Proof of the Resurrection #7: They Died for Jesus

Tradition says ten of the original apostles died as martyrs for Christ, as did the Apostle Paul. Hundreds, perhaps thousands of early Christians died in the Roman arena and in prisons for their faith. An isolated group may give up their lives for a cult leader, but Christian martyrs have died in many lands, for nearly 2,000 years, believing Jesus conquered death to give them eternal life.



## Truth Magazine @Second Proof of The Resurrection

The resurrection of Jesus is, of course, absolutely essential to the true meaning of Christianity. Without it Jesus was a teacher of great insight and ability, but self-deceived, and a deceiver. Without it Christianity becomes but another human philosophy, totally of this world. As Paul put it, “then is our preaching vain, your faith also is vain” (1 Corinthians 15:14), and having only a this life hope “we are of all men most pitiable” (v. 19). Jesus Christ “was declared to be the Son of God with power, according to the spirit of holiness, by the resurrection from the dead” (Romans 1:4). (Phillips says, “patently marked out as the Son of God by the power of the Spirit of holiness which raised Him to life again from the dead.”) Cancel the resurrection, and you cancel the power that gives Christianity its life. These proofs therefore are tremendously important.

The Scriptures, as historic literature from the first century, record many proofs of the resurrection. His enemies knew very well His promise to rise again after three days and used every means at their disposal to make the sepulcher sure, lest “the last error be worse than the first” (Matthew 27:26f). Yet, at the appointed time the tomb was empty. The apostles and early disciples displayed incredible faith - even unto death -for what? A ruse they themselves had worked?

We beg your attention to two proofs offered by the Apostle Peter, on the first Pentecost following the resurrection. One rested upon the testimony of believing witnesses; and the second, upon the experience of enemies who heard the witnesses.

The first proof, His enemies were asked to believe; the second, they **could prove to themselves by their own logic and experience.**

Prophecies from Isaiah and Daniel had pointed to the “rule” of a coming Messiah. (The “anointed one” was Messiah to the Hebrews, Christ to the Greeks.) The “mountain” of Jehovah’s house would be established, and the “sovereignty” and “dominion” of this government would be exercised by a descendant of King David (Isaiah 2; 9:7; Daniel 2:44; 7:14). Peter must prove the crucified Jesus to be “Lord and Christ.” Obviously, both of these hinge on proof of the resurrection, and Luke records the marvelous way the Apostle blends these two purposes (Acts 2). Get your Bible, and follow with me.

When the Holy Spirit was poured out upon the Apostles, a multitude of Jews were attracted and were amazed and marveled at what they heard (verse 7f). But others mocked, saying these men were drunk. Their rash charge set the stage for Peter's introduction. He declared "this is that" manifestation of the Spirit which Joel said would mark the "last days" (final dispensation) in which the remnant of the Jews, and "whosoever shall call on the name of the Lord shall be saved" (Joel 2:28f). He thus gave those who marveled at the demonstration of power something to consider, but with Jesus still dead this could be dismissed as a groundless boast. So, Peter offers his first proof of the resurrection: the testimony of witnesses who had seen the resurrected Jesus. Peter said God had raised Him up (verse 24) and established His testimony by other witnesses (v. 32; cf. 1 Corinthians 15:1-8). And His testimony was strengthened by the fact that this Jesus was "a man approved of God unto you by mighty works and wonders and signs which God did by him in the midst of you, even as ye yourselves know" (v. 22, all Scripture emphasis mine).

Peter then reasoned with the Jews from Psalms 16:8f, a Scripture they considered Messianic. "David saith concerning him. . ." (i.e., Jesus), "I beheld the Lord. . ." (Acts 2:25). Furthermore, the "Holy One" would not see corruption (v. 27). And finally, "Being therefore a prophet, and knowing that God had sworn with an oath to him, that of the fruit of his loins he would set one upon his throne; he foreseeing this spake of the resurrection of the Christ . . . . **On the strength of Peter's first proof, the testimony of witnesses who saw the resurrected Jesus, he has reasoned that Jesus of Nazareth is Lord, Holy One, and Christ; and that He now occupies the throne of David. Unless we are extremely well versed in Hebrew thought and their obsession with prophecies about a Messiah, we can scarce appreciate the force of the Apostle Peter's argument. The Holy Spirit was guiding him to reach these Jews with their own brand of logic and with Scriptures they all held in a proper understanding of his next statement. "Being therefore by the right hand of God exalted, and having received of the Father the promise of the Holy Spirit, he hath poured forth this, which ye see and hear" (Acts 2:33). "Being exalted" and "having received" are both singular and masculine, and must refer to Christ. It was Jesus who had been exalted, and it was Jesus who had received "the promise of the Holy Spirit." The question is, had Jesus been promised the Spirit; or, does this refer to something the Spirit had promised to Jesus?**

Robertson says, “In itself the genitive is neither subjective nor objective, but lends itself readily to either point of view.” We must therefore allow the context to answer our question. If “promise of Holy Spirit” refers to the Spirit Himself, we have the problem of deity being given to deity, of whom it has already been implied that He had the Spirit without measure (John 3:34). Isaiah wrote of “the Spirit of Jehovah” resting upon a branch out of Jesse (11:2), upon the “chosen servant” (42:1), and the “anointed” (61:1). However, these passages point to the Lord’s show of divine power (Matthew 12:17f; Luke 4:17f), and of divine approval during His personal ministry (Matthew 3:16-17). This passage refers to something the Holy Spirit promised relative to kingship; something closely suited to the proof Peter is offering.

During the Lord’s personal ministry He had spoken of a time when “living waters” would flow from His disciples; and John explains this referred to the Spirit which “wasn’t yet given, because Jesus wasn’t yet glorified” (John 7:38-39). An outpouring, such as that on Pentecost, awaited the glorification of the Son of God. When Jesus promised the Spirit to His disciples He not only stressed the necessity for His going away; He also explained that He would occupy a new and different heavenly office (John 16:7). Note, “Hitherto have ye asked nothing in my name, ask and ye shall receive. . . ” (v. 24). “I will pray the Father, and he shall give you another Comforter” (14:16). “The Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name” (v. 26). His glorification and Lordship is here clearly indicated. Now, how are these things “the promise of the Holy Spirit”? The immediate context quotes David as saying, “The Lord said unto my Lord, Sit thou on my right hand, Till I make thine enemies the footstool of thy feet” (vv. 34-35; Psalm 110:1). Jesus had cited this same Psalm (Matt. 22:43) saying, “How then doth David in the Spirit call him Lord, saying. . . .” Mark’s account of this reads, “David himself said by the Holy Ghost. . . ” (12:36, KJ). Clearly, the Holy Spirit had foretold (promised) that the Son of God would be glorified, seated upon David’s throne.

Peter’s second proof of the resurrection called upon his audience to accept the logical conclusion of their own seeing and hearing. It ran something like this: You have seen and heard proof that the Holy Spirit is poured out from heaven; and you are amazed and marvel at this fulfillment of Joel’s prophecy. But these “last day” wonders could not occur until the Messiah is exalted, and the Holy Spirit’s promise of kingship is realized. The promise of kingship was to one who would not be left in the place of the dead, and whose body would not see corruption. The conclusion is inescapable: We are witnesses to Jesus’ resurrection (v. 32); and you are witnesses to something that could only occur after Jesus had been resurrected, exalted, and made King on David’s throne (v. 33). - *Robert Turner*

# The Fallacy of Preaching Pascal



AP STAFF

ATHEISM ATHEISM CREATION VS. EVOLUTION EXISTENCE OF GOD

Evangelists and authors in the religious community sometimes commit inadvertent fallacies in what they preach, teach and write. These can stem from a lack of understanding of vital fields, such as biblical languages, church and secular history, psychology, and philosophy. While some of these fallacies are harmless, others can do more damage to a person’s soul through their inaccuracies than if nothing had been said at all. One such pulpit fallacy is that of mistakenly “preaching Pascal.”

Blaise Pascal (1623-1662) was a French scientist, mathematician, and religious philosopher. He was a brilliant young man whose father educated him, and who published his first work, an essay on geometry, at the tender age of sixteen. He continued to publish works in the fields of science and mathematics, but he died before publishing his most important philosophical works: *Pensées* and *De l’Esprit Géométrique*. Theologically, Pascal was a Jansenist—i.e., a member of a group within the Catholic Church that followed the views of Cornelius Jansen—and spent much of his time refuting the Jesuits. *Pensées* [*Thoughts*] is the title posthumously given to a series of notes that Pascal originally intended to publish under the title *Apologie de la religion chrétienne* [*Apology for the Christian Religion*] (Popkin, 1967, 6:51-52). It was in these notes series that Pascal’s now-famous “wager” was constructed.

The wager, simply put, goes something like this:

- If it is impossible for a person to believe with certainty that God exists, then that person **should believe in God anyway**—“just in case” He does exist.
- If it turns out that God **does exist**, the believer “wins” the wager by receiving an eternal reward.
- If it turns out that God **does not exist**, the person who **believes** has lost nothing (except perhaps some temporal pleasures, the loss of which is outweighed by freedom from the angst of unbelief).
- If God does **not exist**, and a person does **not believe**, then he may gain some temporal pleasures.
- If God **exists**, and a person does **not believe**, then that person is punished eternally for his unbelief.

Who **never** “loses” the wager? The believer. Why so? If God does exist, the believer “wins” by going to heaven. If God does not exist—the believer lives and dies, end of story — he has lost nothing (except a few finite pleasures). In both cases, the believer wins because he chose the “safe” thing to do.

But who loses **50% of the time**? The unbeliever. If God exists, he “loses” by not believing, and therefore goes to hell. If God doesn’t exist—the unbeliever lives and dies, end of story—he (like the believer) has lost nothing.

One of the two “gamblers” **never** loses; one loses **half the time**. Thus, Pascal concluded, it is safer to believe in God than not to believe. [Pascal continued in his reasoning by suggesting that **if someone does not know how to believe, then he should follow the customs and rites of those who do believe—as if he himself were a believer. Eventually, then, according to Pascal, the person will become a believer** (Pascal, 1995, pp. 121-125).]

PASCAL’S WAGER		
	One believes	One does not believe
God exists	Eternal reward	Eternal punishment
God does not exist	Freedom from angst	Temporal pleasures

Some ministers of the Gospel preach Pascal's Wager in an effort to convert people, suggesting that belief in God makes more sense than non-belief because of the 50% risk that is involved if God does exist.

What does this show, and why is it wrong to use Pascal's line of reasoning in the conversion of non-believers? First, preaching this seems to show a lack of faith on the part of the minister himself. If a preacher's argument for the existence of God is based on a gamble—even if it is not his only argument for God—then he should re-examine his own beliefs and see if he has truly built his faith on the solid rock of the moral, cosmological, and teleological proofs for God, or if he has built his faith upon the sands of guesswork (Matthew 7:24-27). This is damaging to the congregation for which such a man preaches, because a solid congregation needs a solid man to preach solid truths, and believing in God just because it is “prudent” to do so, shows a lack of solidarity.

Moreover, what of the man who believes in God because of preaching Pascal's Wager? Since “faith is the substance of things hoped for” and “the evidence of things not seen” (Hebrews 11:1), a **pseudo-belief in God based on statistical risk and/or wager produce a pseudo-Christian. Faith is based on knowledge and certainty, not on probabilities**, and someone who believes based on a wager is someone who cannot possess true faith in God and His existence.

Paul said that we will be “above reproach in His sight—if indeed you continue in the faith, **grounded and steadfast**, and are not moved away from the hope of the gospel which you heard” (Colossians 1:22b-23a). **Pascal's Wager does not produce a faith “grounded and steadfast,” because it does not build faith.** However, faith in God is easy to build through other means, “because what may be known of God is manifest in them, for God has shown it to them. For since the creation of the world His invisible attributes are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made, even His eternal power and Godhead, so that they are without excuse” (Romans 1:19-20).

**As Christians who are called to handle the Bible correctly (2 Timothy 2:15; 3:16-17), let us not give in to philosophies that are not in keeping with God's Word (Colossians 2:8). In our preaching, let us be honest with people and teach them to “hold fast” to faith and truth (1 Corinthians 15:1-2), and not let them be led into believing in God just because it makes the “best sense in a gamble.”**

