

Overcoming Doubt
WITH A WAGER?

I used to think that as I matured in the Christian faith, my doubts would stop; but that hasn't happened. It doesn't matter how long you've followed Christ, you can still doubt God and His goodness.

Unfortunately in some Christian circles doubt has become an unspeakable sin. In these circles people only speak of strong faith and courageous obedience. In the Bible, however, there is a lot of evidence of doubt (Psa. 13:1-2; 77:7-9; Matt. 28:17; Mark 9:24).

Doubt by itself is not a sin. It's what we do with it that makes the difference. Do we let it master us? Or do we make it serve us? When the presence of doubt by itself stops me from believing, it has become my master. When doubt moves me toward God to test His claims and promises, it becomes my servant.

Doubt is a God given gift designed to protect us against naïve belief. God wants us to test the things we believe (1 John 4:1). While God does not allow us to test Him in order to bring Him under our control (Deut. 6:16; Matt. 4:5-7), He does invite us to test His claims and promises (Psa. 34:8; Isa. 7:10-12).

How then do we test God's claims and promises?

By far the most effective way to do that is to accept the invitation of Psalm 34:8 and rely on God's claims and promises for ourselves. As we rely on God's promises of love, forgiveness and direction, we overcome our doubts and get to know God better.

Another way that we can test God's promises and claims is by gathering evidence for Him and His goodness from the world around us. This exercise is called Christian apologetics. 1 Peter 5:15 tells us always to be prepared to give an answer (or *apologia*) for the hope that we have. Throughout the summer we will look at

different kinds of evidence for God and His goodness, starting with the evidence of the odds.

Blaise Pascal (1623-1662) was a math genius who was also an obsessive gambler until he became a devout Christian. As a Christian he applied his gambling experience to his belief in God and came up with *Pascal's Wager*. Here's how it goes.

- God either exists or He does not
- Reason by itself cannot provide absolute certainty.
- Therefore you *must* wager. Neutrality is not an option.

There are four possible outcomes for your wager. Consider what's at stake for each possible wager and decide for yourself which is the best bet to make.

You Wager ...	That God does not exist	That God does exist
You are wrong	Moderate Gain High Risk	No Gain Moderate Risk
You are right	Moderate Gain No Risk	High Gain Moderate Risk

Pascal argued that the only smart bet to make is that God exists, since you only risk a bit of freedom and pleasure in this life while you stand to gain eternity.

Even though Pascal's Wager has its weaknesses, I find it helpful in moments of doubt. In those moments, I wager that God exists because (1) living for Him has done me no harm, (2) life apart from God isn't all it's cracked up to be and (3) it takes at least as much faith to believe there is no God and afterlife and it does to believe in them.

Further, I wager that the Christian Gospel is the one and only way to find God's favour because, unlike every other religion, it does not depend on my pitiful effort to please God but on God's amazing grace shown to me through Jesus Christ. That's my final bet!