



# Materialism

## Pascal's Wager exposes unbelief as illogical

Mark 8:36 - For what will it profit a man if he gains the whole world, and loses his own soul?

### What is the soul?

It is one of the three parts that make us who we are:

1Thes 5:23 - Now may the God of peace Himself sanctify you completely; and may your whole spirit, soul, and body be preserved blameless at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ.

It is that part of us which represents our personality, it is the seat of our emotions, our memories, where we have our thoughts.

### What does it mean to lose your soul?

To lose control of your soul. To not be able to choose the path you will take.

### How can it be said that unsaved people are not able to choose the path they will take?

- They are under bondage to sin so to stay in their sin they must go the way of sin.
- As one lie begets another so too must people live who are living a lie denying the Truth of the Bible.  
Gal 4:3 - Even so we, when we were children, were in bondage under the elements of the world.

### What is the only real choice an unsaved person is free to make?

Whether to receive Jesus into their lives as Savior and Lord or go on in sin.

### What does it mean to gain the whole world?

To own everything in the world and have the power to do anything you want in the world.

### Is this a practical expectation?

No, this is hyperbole though some people live their lives like this is their goal.

### What would you do if you had all the wealth and power you wanted?

Charles Stanley told a story about a young man who came to him with great plans for his life. Charles kept him going by asking him, "then what?" every time the man paused. Eventually the man had to admit then he would die and he hadn't included consideration of that eventuality in his plans.

### What value is there in achieving all the success and wealth you can have in the world?

As Jesus would say, "you have your reward." There is no value except among men in the world. It has absolutely no eternal value.

### What does this verse bring to mind?

Mark 8:36 brings to mind the parable of the certain rich man:

Luke 12:16-21

16 Then He spoke a parable to them, saying: "The ground of a certain rich man yielded plentifully.

17 "And he thought within himself, saying, 'What shall I do, since I have no room to store my crops?'

18 "So he said, 'I will do this: I will pull down my barns and build greater, and there I will store all my crops and my goods.

19 'And I will say to my soul, "Soul, you have many goods laid up for many years; take your ease; eat, drink, and be merry."

20 "But God said to him, 'Fool! This night your soul will be required of you; then whose will those things be which you have provided?'

21 "So is he who lays up treasure for himself, and is not rich toward God."

### What is the message of this parable, don't build bigger barns?

No, lay up your treasure in heaven, not on the earth.

Mark 8:36 also brings to mind Jesus' encounter with the rich young ruler:

Luke 18:18-23

18 Now a certain ruler asked Him, saying, "Good Teacher, what shall I do to inherit eternal life?"  
 19 So Jesus said to him, "Why do you call Me good? No one is good but One, that is, God.  
 20 "You know the commandments: 'Do not commit adultery,' 'Do not murder,' 'Do not steal,' 'Do not bear false witness,' 'Honor your father and your mother.'"  
 21 And he said, "All these I have kept from my youth."  
 22 So when Jesus heard these things, He said to him, "You still lack one thing. Sell all that you have and distribute to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven; and come, follow Me."  
 23 But when he heard this, he became very sorrowful, for he was very rich.

**Is Jesus saying that in order to truly become a Christian we must sell all you have and give it to the poor?**

No, He is saying that in order to truly become a Christian, we must give up whatever we are trusting in as our salvation and trust in Hi, (Jesus knew the heart of the rich young ruler).

Mark 8:36 brings to mind materialism.

**What is materialism?**

- It is not just the love of money though this is a symptom of materialism.
- Dictionary: (1) the philosophical opinion that physical matter in its movements and modifications is the only reality and that everything in the universe, including thought, feeling, mind, and will, can be explained in terms of physical laws [as the person who claims they can not control their sexual urges because they were made that way] (2) The theory or doctrine [of demons] that physical well-being and worldly possessions constitute the greatest good and highest value in life. (3) Undue regard for worldly concerns.
- As Carl Sagan said: *the universe is all there is, was, or ever will be* [probably paraphrased - I tried to get his exact words but this is not the favorite quote of the dozen websites I visited dedicated to Carl Sagan quotes... there were many more I didn't visit].

**What are you betting if you pursue everything the world has to offer?**

You are betting your soul that the Bible is wrong, that life in this world is all there is.

Pascal expressed this eloquently in what is known as Pascal's wager...

- Blaise Pascal (1623-1662), was a French physicist, mathematician, and philosopher. He became known for his experiments with fluids in physics and his work in mathematics distinguished him as the "Father of

Probability Theory". From 1658 until his death, Pascal worked on a defense of Christian faith.

- Pascal's most known theological work is the *Pensees*, where he made his famous wager: *"God is or He is not... 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."*

Speaking with regard to Mark 8:36 Bishop Hooper expressed the sentiment of Pascal's Wager the night before he suffered martyrdom: *"True it is, that life is sweet, and death is bitter, but eternal death is more bitter, and eternal life is more sweet."*

		Belief	Unbelief
God is	now	Lose Little	Gain Little
	eternity	Gain Everything	Lose Everything
God is not	now	Lose Little	Gain Little
	eternity	Lose Nothing	Gain Nothing

**Is it possible to avoid Pascal's wager by just keeping an open mind, not making your mind up about Him?**

Either God exists or he doesn't. You can't avoid choosing, a refusal to choose has the same result as betting that God does not exist...

John 3:18 – "He who believes in Him is not condemned; but he who does not believe is condemned already, because he has not believed in the name of the only begotten Son of God."

**Is it fair to say that faith is logical?**

- The power of Pascal's wager is profound: reasonable men should bet on God's existence.
- Indeed God blesses people with reasoning ability. Logic is from God. He wants us to use this gift to know Him: *"Come now, and let us reason together," says the Lord* (Isaiah 1:18). If our faith is not logical, there is a problem with it.

**Note: A common argument against Pascal's Wager is that it does not distinguish among the various gods of different religions. They say, "Which religion is right?" They say that Pascal's argument is clouded since most**

**religions claim their way is the only true way to heaven.  
How might you counter this argument?**

But this modern contention fails to recognize the uniqueness of Christianity: all that must be done to have eternal life already has been done for you by Jesus Christ if you believe Him. All other religions require people to do something to earn salvation. Christianity is not a system of "dos and don'ts" – it is a relationship with the Savior.

**What is the cost that Pascal's Wager says you will have for believing in God in the here and now?**

- Since believing is the wager, it does come with some cost in the here and now: following Jesus.
- Jesus says we should "*count the cost*" (Luke 14:28) but He also said this cost is small, "*For My yoke is easy and My burden is light*" (Matthew 11:30).

**How do the benefits of following Jesus outweigh the costs in the here and now?**

- The joy of being relieved of the burden of death
- Avoiding the consequences of sin

**If you believe and God exists, what is the result after this life?**

The eternal reward for believing far outweighs the price we pay in this world...

Romans 8:18 - For I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory which shall be revealed in us.

2 Corinthians 4:17 - For our light affliction, which is but for a moment, is working for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory,

**What do you lose if God does not exist & you believe?**

- Detractors of Pascal's Wager say you do lose a lot in the here and now. This would have to be the case for them since they think that life in this world is all there is.
- The "Global Village Atheist" website put it this way: "*What you have lost is the opportunity to live the one life you will ever have to the fullest and discover the wonders of the natural world unfettered by theology.*"

Pretty weak!

**How would you respond to the "Global Village Atheist" attitude that belief in God puts people in bondage?**

- What the person who wrote this has not experienced is, "*the truth shall make you free*" (John 8:32).

- The "Global Village Atheist" argument is a deception... True freedom is actually the other way around, that bondage comes from not yielding yourself to God:  
2 Pet 2:18 – 19 - For when they speak great swelling words of emptiness, they allure through the lusts of the flesh, through lewdness, the ones who have actually escaped from those who live in error. While they promise them liberty, they themselves are slaves of corruption; for by whom a person is overcome, by him also he is brought into bondage.

**What are you risking if God exists & you do not believe?**

- Wagering wrong has the severest of consequences... The Bible says in Revelation 20:10-14 that unbelievers will be cast into "*the lake of fire and brimstone where... they will be tormented day and night forever and ever.*"
- An eternity of penalty for living life however you chose in this world, a finite period of time. It hardly seems worth the risk.

**How do people rationalize the risk of going to hell by living you life however you want to?**

The "Global Village Atheist" argues that even if God exists, it is unlikely that He would reward people "*simply on the basis of their beliefs and not on how they live their lives.*"

**How about that, does God reward people on the basis of their works?**

Yes He does, but not with salvation... We are saved by the grace of God, not anything we can do ourselves:

Ephesians 2:8-9 - For by grace you have been saved through faith, and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God.

Thank God that salvation is not based on our own efforts since God's standard is perfection:

James 2:10 - For whoever shall keep the whole law, and yet stumble in one point, he is guilty of all.

**So what if God does not exist and you accept the Global Village Atheist Wager to not believe? What are you gaining?**

- There is little to gain if God does not exist. The "Global Village Atheist" says "*what you have gained is whatever gain arises from believing truly*" but does not go on to say what this is.

Again, pretty weak!

- The truth is that you gain nothing but an attitude of *"Let us eat and drink, for tomorrow we die!"* (1 Corinthians 15:32).

**What about an objection to the obvious conclusion of Pascal's Wager that "it is wrong to believe something simply because it might lead to pay dirt" making it "selfish gain" and a "sacrifice of integrity." How would you respond to such an argument?**

- What gives unbelievers such high integrity? Every decision unbelievers make is due to selfishness. Even when they appear to be giving selflessly, God knows their true motivation which is often to be *"seen by men."* Jesus said the only reward such self-righteous people will receive is what ever adulation they can find in the world, Matthew 6:5 (they have their reward).
- Given the unbeliever's condition, the only way any one can come to Jesus is with an initial selfish motivation. But God changes the heart of those who sincerely seek Him...  
John 6:37 - All that the Father gives Me will come to Me, and the one who comes to Me I will by no means cast out.
- Sincerity can be faked before men for a time but eventually the false believers will be known by all...  
1 John 2:19 – They went out from us, but they were not of us; for if they had been of us, they would have continued with us; but they went out that they might be made manifest, that none of them were of us.

**Does God save those who come to Him simply to escape the fires of hell?**

Absolutely... It is a healthy thing to fear eternal damnation, even if this begins with only a self-preservation motive:

Matthew 10:28 - And do not fear those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul. But rather fear Him who is able to destroy both soul and body in hell.

Proverbs 9:10 - The fear of the LORD is the beginning of wisdom, and the knowledge of the Holy One is understanding.

God wants people to come to Him for salvation, He invites us to, *"taste and see that the Lord is good"* (Psalm 34:8).

**What should you do if you need assurance of eternal life and find the logic in Pascal's Wager compelling?**

- Cry out to God, *"Lord, I believe; help my unbelief!"* (Mark 9:24).
- Then study God's Word for *"faith comes by hearing, and hearing by the word of God"* (Romans 10:17).
- And know that *"he who comes to God must believe that He is, and that He is a rewarder of those who diligently seek Him"* (Hebrews 11:6).

**Is materialism increasing or decreasing in the world today?**

- It is hard to ignore the rampant materialism in the world today. In our society this materialism manifests itself as the love of money and lust for things. I see the worldwide growth of this attitude as a sign of the end times, that the return of Jesus is near.
- Jesus said that the time prior to His return will be characterized by society not recognizing God's authority, doing what is right in their own eyes:  
Matt 24:12 - And because lawlessness will abound, the love of many will grow cold.  
(People without God in their lives are lawless)
- Jesus also said the time will be like the other time God poured out His wrath on the earth:  
Matt 24:37 - But as the days of Noah were, so also will the coming of the Son of Man be.
  - One of the characteristics of the Days of Noah was that men had no thoughts for God:  
Gen 6:5 - Then the LORD saw that the wickedness of man was great in the earth, and that every intent of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually.
- Peter said one of the characteristics of the last days would be people would be scoffing at the truth about God and the return of Jesus. Instead of walking according to the Truth, they would follow their own desires...  
2 Pet 3:3 - knowing this first: that scoffers will come in the last days, walking according to their own lusts

**How is moral relativism a manifestation of materialism?**

- If you believe that this world is all there is, it is only natural to leave God out of every thought including your motivation for being righteous...
- Moral relativism is making up you own law or as the Bible says doing what is right in your own eyes which is sin:  
Deut 12:8 - You shall not at all do as we are doing here today-- every man doing whatever is right in his own eyes--
- Following law of man's making with no regard to God is self righteousness, *"all our righteousnesses are like filthy rags"* (Isaiah 64:6).

get all out of life that you can by pursuing every thing you can think of that makes life fun in this world.

Paul had the following to say about the time that will precede the return of the Lord...

2 Tim 3:1-5

- 1 But know this, that in the last days perilous times will come:
  - 2 For men will be lovers of themselves, lovers of money, boasters, proud, blasphemers, disobedient to parents, unthankful, unholy,
  - 3 unloving, unforgiving, slanderers, without self-control, brutal, despisers of good,
  - 4 traitors, headstrong, haughty, lovers of pleasure rather than lovers of God,
  - 5 having a form of godliness but denying its power.
- And from such people turn away!

**Among all these bad characteristics, let's focus in on what this passage says that people will love during the end-times... What three things will people love?**  
Themselves, money, and pleasure.

**How is being lovers of themselves a manifestation of materialism?**

- Being a lovers of themselves is mass-selfishness which is putting yourself ahead of all others including God. This is easy to do if you don't know who God is and who you are in relation to Him. Certainly if you think that this world is all there is, you don't know God.
- Being a lovers of themselves is also humanism, seeing mankind as being able to save themselves apart from God. Certainly if the only resources you are counting on is in the world, this is materialism.

**How is being lovers of money a manifestation of materialism?**

This is probably the most obvious manifestation of materialism. People who regard wealth as their savior from what ails them in the world are being materialistic, ignoring the more important spiritual reality.

**How is being lovers of pleasure a manifestation of materialism?**

Being a lover of pleasure is hedonism. If there is no judgment before God or life after death, you might as well

**What is the problem with the attitude of grabbing all the gusto you can get in the here and now?**

There is a great deception that just because something is fun when you are doing it that it is good for you. Sin can be fun for a season but always has consequences. Having no regard for the future, no eternal perspective is the way of the heathen who have no hope of life after death.

**How do we keep eternal matters in the right priority?**

Adopt an eternal perspective... Recognize that this world is not the ultimate reality, that the ultimate reality is eternal life with Jesus Christ. Strive to make everything we think, say, and do anticipating being before the Lord at our judgment.