

LETTERS FROM GRANDPA # 195

Dearest grandchild,

Today's letter will deal with a famous phrase from history "Pascal's Wager". Blaise Pascal was a famous French mathematician, inventor, and theologian. He was born June 19, 1623 and died Aug. 19, 1662. He was a brilliant child prodigy who was educated by his father. At the age of 16 he shocked the mathematical world by writing a treatise on geometry that revolutionized economics and social science. In 1642, while still a teen ager, he did pioneering work on calculating machines. In three years he produced 50 prototypes and finished 20 machines.

His mathematical brilliance enabled him to reduce gambling to a science. As you know, professional gambling devices are calibrated in such a way that the "house" will always be the ultimate winner. Pascal understood this and even invented the roulette wheel.

In 1654, however, Pascal had a profound religious experience and devoted the rest of his life to God. He was in poor health for most of his life and died just two months after his 39th birthday. With the ever present thought of death on his mind he came up with what has been called, "Pascal's Wager". As a man who understood statistical probabilities he argued that a "rational" person should seek to believe in God and live his life as if God existed. He reasoned that if there is no God, such a person would only suffer a finite loss. If God does exist, however, the "believer" will be blessed with an eternal reward. He concluded that since there are only two possibilities, heads or tails, it is not wise to wager eternal happiness for a few temporary pleasures.

Here is a brief outline of his thinking.

- You must wager! It is not optional! You did not ask to be born, but you were. You do not want to die, but you will. Consequently, you must wager one way or the other.
- A rational person will weigh the options of what you have to gain, against what you have to lose. If you die and find there is no God you basically lose nothing. If you die and find there a God you lose everything.
- He concluded, therefore, that without hesitation everyone should immediately wager everything on God. The risks of gain and loss are not equal. It is foolish to gamble so much to gain so little.
- For those who do not believe, Pascal recommended a search for evidence. The consequences are too important to do otherwise. Even after evidence is secured, however, he knew that belief in God was still not a mathematical certainty. He knew that believing in God and not believing in God are both a gamble. Pascal was confident, however, that believing in God was without question the better gamble.
- Today juries are charged with weighing the evidence and reaching a verdict "beyond a reasonable doubt". Since many things are "possible" that are not "reasonable", absolute certainty is an impossibility. It is "possible", for example, that you are not reading this article but merely having a dream. Such a thought, however, is not "reasonable". The book of Romans teaches that to present our bodies to God as a living sacrifice is "reasonable" (Rom. 12:1). The word translated as "reasonable" in the KJV is "logikos", from which we get the word "logical". Pascal "believed" that presenting ourselves to God is "logical". Worshiping an idol is not "logical". Isaiah made fun of idolaters by pointing out that they cut down a tree and use part of it to make an idol to worship, and another part to build a fire to bake bread (Is. 44:14

– 20). What if the idolater got it backwards and burned the god and worshiped the fire wood? Idolatry is not reasonable!

Solomon wrote the book of Ecclesiastes. The word Ecclesiastes comes from the Hebrew word “Koheleth” which means “teacher” or “preacher”. So wise King Solomon wrote this book to “teach” some of his wisdom. As a king with unlimited wealth and authority, Solomon could experiment with everything. Consequently, he denied himself no thing his eyes desired and no pleasure his heart craved (Eccl. 2:10). The whole book of Ecclesiastes describes in detail his unlimited accumulation of wealth and his unlimited experience of pleasure. The last two verses of the book, however, reveal his “conclusion”. After a lifetime of experimentation, Solomon concluded: **“Now all has been heard; here is the conclusion of the matter: Fear God and keep his commandments, for this is the whole duty of man.” (Eccl. 12:13)**

While I don’t get to see you as much as I would like, I still pray for everyone of you every day. I “hope and pray” that you will live a long and prosperous life, but I “know” you will die. It is appointed unto everyone once to die and after that the Judgement (Heb. 9:27). The only way anyone will avoid death is by being alive when Jesus comes (I Thess. 4:16 – 18).

I’m betting that Jesus is coming again, and I want to be ready to meet Him. I am praying that you too will be betting the same way!

I love you,

Grandpa Boyce