



The contrary of a truth can never be demonstrated - Thomas Aquinas

Confident Christians

Why Truth Matters

During the winter of early 2007, a 50-year old man was found drown/frozen to death in a Rhode Island pond. Evidently the man had been walking on the pond and ventured onto a section where the ice was too thin to support him. One of the sad aspects to the story was the man had traveled hundreds of yards away from the section of the pond that was regularly monitored and validated by park officials as being OK to skate and walk on, with it being clearly marked with signs and buoys that only danger awaited anyone who went beyond its established perimeters. Officials at the scene commented that it was not uncommon for the warning signs to be ignored by people, with them concluding "It's kind of difficult to regulate human behavior."¹

Today it seems that many people ignore and question truth in whatever manner that it presents itself. But no more does this happen than in the area of spiritual matters. The extreme degree of political correctness that exists has spawned an attitude of agnosticism that rejects with firm hostility any claim that absolute truth exists in matters of spiritual faith. Pluralism – the acceptance of all truth claims, even those that plainly oppose each other – rules the day, with tolerance being redefined as not just respecting other's views, but accepting all views as right and true.

Are there consequences for rejecting what is really true – in other words what reality actually is? If so, and if absolute truth exists, then is there a way for determining what is absolutely true in matters of faith? Let's find out.

Does Ignoring Truth have Consequences?

As the above real-life example illustrates, it is pretty easy to understand why ignoring truth can be dangerous:

Person1: "Want to go ice skating?"

Person2: "Is the ice thick enough?"

Person1: "Who cares?" (this is the currently in-vogue postmodern response)

Person2: "Because we could die if it's not!"

Disregarding what reality is (i.e. truth) can lead to undesired or tragic consequences. Further, even those who try and reject the concept of absolute truth betray their real position when faced with various situations in life where knowing the truth makes a key difference. Just a few examples prove this point:

- Truth is demanded in health and medical situations. Taking the correct amount of a medication can save whereas overdosing on the same medication can cripple or kill.
- Truth is demanded in financial situations. Everyone expects to be told the truth in regard to how much money they have in the bank or when dealing with a financial consultant who is investing their money.

¹http://www.beloblog.com/ProJo_Blogs/newsblog/archives/2007/02/16/.

- Truth is demanded in transportation situations. Knowing that red means stop instead of go means all the difference in the world. Further, being misdirected onto the wrong flight at an airport can be quite unpleasant.
- Truth is demanded in advertising situations. Misleading the public with false advertising is a crime.
- Truth is demanded in manufacturing situations. People trust that the brakes on a car have been manufactured properly, tested, and will act in a way that is expected.
- Truth is demanded in legal situations. No one takes an oath on a witness stand that starts with, “I promise to tell part of the truth/what I want the truth to be...”
- Truth is demanded in relationships. Nobody wants to be lied to and have their spouse be *relatively* faithful to them, but instead they demand *absolute* faithfulness.

Another key thing to understand about truth is that it is impervious to how we want things to be. Truth is immune to sincerity, belief, and desire. For example, if someone accidentally picks up a cup full of poison, but thinks it is lemonade, it does not matter how sincerely the person thinks it's lemonade, how much they believe it's lemonade, or how much they desire that it be lemonade, they are still going to suffer from the ill effects of the poison.

One final thing to understand about the protective capability of truth in society is that, in its absence, force and power rule the day. If there is no way to determine the truth about matters, then either someone or some body of people will dictate what truth is and force everyone else to follow that mandate. Oftentimes, they will go to great lengths to cloak their position and make it appear that approval for their stance comes from everywhere, even from above. For example, during World War II, every Nazi soldier wore a belt buckle with the words “Gott Mit Uns” inscribed on it, which when translated into English means, “God is with us.” Obviously, the Nazi position was completely wrong, but it goes to show that when truth is either ignored or suppressed, any worldview like racism or other like positions can be force fed to a society and made law.

It's plain to see that even those who espouse a relativistic viewpoint on truth would not live that way themselves when it comes to the above examples. So the question is: if truth is demanded in these areas (and many more), and if ignoring the truth can lead to an undesired or tragic outcome, then why think that the same is not true when it comes to matters that are spiritual in nature?

In today's world, anyone who claims to have the absolute facts when it comes to spiritual truth is labeled arrogant, narrow-minded, intolerant, or something much worse. Political correctness (an odd thing to force into matters of faith) and Pluralism are used as power tools to place opinion and feeling above fact and truth. An opinion is a matter of preference or taste – for example, some like broccoli or a particular politician's stance on a position, but others do not. But having a particular opinion or taste is much different than determining the actual truth about a matter.

In the end, the reason absolute truth is denied in the spiritual realm is that people do not believe it can be known. This is agnosticism, plain and simple, whether the claim is you *can't* know the truth or just *don't* know the truth. But if there is such thing as absolute truth (and there is), and you can know/recognize truth in the physical world, then it stands to reason there must be same way to know also know truth spiritually. But before we look at the steps needed to discover absolute spiritual truth, let's examine the most common examples of why people say you can't determine spiritual truth or why it doesn't matter.

Just a Matter of Faith?

Many times people will say that spirituality is just a matter of “faith”, with the message being that faith somehow means either believing in something that is not true or just believing something that makes you feel good. Many people believe that faith is something you have in the absence of truth and evidence. Faith is what you have when you're not sure of something – whether something is actually true or not.

But that is not the meaning of the word faith in the New Testament of the Bible. The Greek word is “*Pistos*”, which is derived from the verb “to be persuaded” and means to be persuaded as to something that is true and has authenticity. Greek Lexicons provide the following definitions:

- the state of being someone in whom confidence can be placed;
- reliability;
- that which evokes trust;
- state of believing on the basis of the reliability of the one trusted;
- pertaining to being worthy of belief or trust
- conviction of the truth;
- the character of one who can be relied on.

So having faith does not mean checking your brains at the door and leaping off into the dark unknown. The actual opposite is true – it means an intelligent confidence that is placed in something that is worthy of trust, is reliable, and matches reality.

So can such a thing be had in the spiritual world? Most people say it’s not possible and provide a number of bad analogies to support their stance.

Exposing the False Positions of Spiritual Pluralism

The most-used example of how everyone thinks they know spiritual truth, but really don’t, is the six blind men and elephant story. Six blind men approach an elephant and begin to examine it. One grabs the tail and declares it’s a snake; one grabs an ear and says it’s a fan; and one grabs a leg and says it’s a tree. “See?!” victoriously cries the pluralist or agnostic, “this is exactly what it’s like when people try and determine spiritual truth!”

However, there are a number of problems with this analogy. The first and foremost issue is that it proves an absolute truth instead of exemplifying agnosticism or pluralism. The story showcases the fact that the listener knows it’s an elephant the blind men were touching, so while trying to prove that you can’t know truth, it actually points out the fact that truth does indeed exist and that it can be known (i.e. the storyteller knows the truth). Further, while pluralism says that all truth claims are equal and valid, it misses the mark with this story because it proves no one had the truth – they were all wrong, with no one even being remotely correct, AND the storyteller and the audience know they were wrong. So this story is a poor example of why you can’t know spiritual truth.

Next, people will try and say that all religions really teach the same thing so it’s not important to know spiritual truth, but rather the key thing is to practice the golden rule (love your neighbor as yourself/ do unto others as you would have them do unto you) and live in peace. There is no question that adhering to Christ’s command to treat others as you want to be treated is an important aspect of right living, but the assertion that all religions teach the same thing is extremely flawed. All religions do not teach the same thing, and instead of being the same in key areas and different in minor respects, the reverse is actually true. All religions differ greatly in:

- Their concept of God (one, many, what God is like)
- Salvation (how you get right with God, if you are even out of relationship with God)
- Jesus (who He is, what He did, what His purpose is)
- What happens after death (is there a Heaven and Hell)

As poet Steve Turner writes in his poem “Creed”:

“We believe that all religions are basically the same,
at least the one that we read was.
They all believe in love and goodness.
They only differ on matters of
creation, sin, heaven, hell, God, and salvation.”

So rather than differing on minor things, the various belief systems part ways at the most important elements and teachings.

Now here is an important thing to understand: just because various faiths appear to look the same in some respects, it does not mean that they are all correct. In the same way a genuine and counterfeit \$50 bill share some similarities, one is the true McCoy and the other is a fake. Key differences separate the two with one being acceptable to a government's economy and the other not.

Why think the same does not hold true in the area of spirituality? If differences matter greatly in all other areas of life, why wouldn't they when it comes to matters of faith?

Another Bad Spiritual Analogy

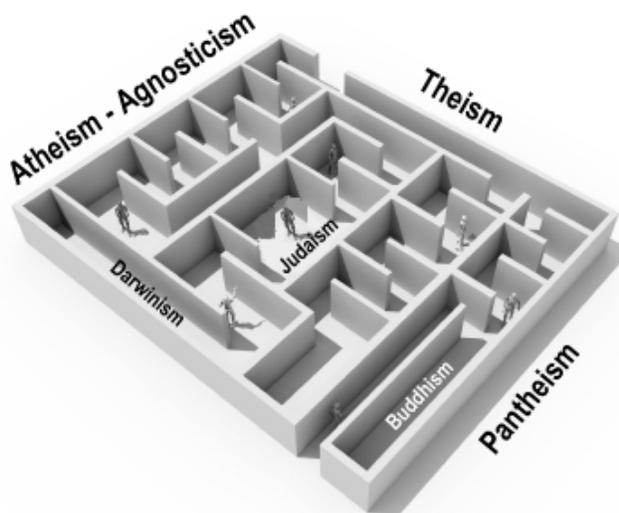
Another bad statement made about faith is: “All roads lead to the top of the mountain”. In other words, there are many ways to get to God (if one exists), with all of them arriving at the same destination. But think about this: how does one know that all roads lead to the top of a mountain? Someone would actually have to be at the top of the mountain and be able to survey the entire structure to know if all the roads that start at the bottom and move up the various sides actually arrive at the peak. Now in this analogy, who is the only one at the top of the mountain? The answer is God Himself. So the one using the analogy is actually saying they are God or at the very least know God to reach the conclusion that all roads lead to the pinnacle.

In addition, as has been shown, all roads cannot lead to the top of the spiritual mountain because they are radically different in their major teachings. The sign posts for one faith point one way, another faith signals a different route, with the two being irreconcilable because of their radically different doctrines. The “roads” simply don't point to the same place.

When this is understood, the better analogy to use when talking about the quest for spiritual truth is that of a maze. There are different distinct routes that can be taken with some paths leading to dead ends and only one path that finds its way through to the end. Getting through the maze means making all the right turns until the end of the maze is found.

How to get through the Spiritual Maze

So how does one get through this maze?
What sources of help should be consulted?
Some may look to culture, but different cultures act in different ways (e.g. in some cultures they help their neighbors, but in others they eat them) so that is of no help.
Some may look to governments and majority rule, but it's very easy for the majority to be wrong about matters. And some may look internally to themselves, but this can be a problem because everyone at some time has been wrong about something or another.



Instead, a more methodical plan is needed to find spiritual truth. The core steps consist of the following:

- Ask the right questions
- Think logically
- Examine converging lines of evidence
- Exclude what is found to be false
- Embrace what is true and remains

Starting out on the path mandates that the right questions be asked, but of course the first question is – what are the right questions? The key questions, in order, are as follows:

1. Does absolute truth exist?
2. Can logic be used?
3. Does God exist?
4. Can God be known?
5. Is Jesus God?
6. Does God care about me?

Coming up with the truthful responses to the above questions will lead to ultimate spiritual truth, and answers to the big four areas of life – origin, ethics, meaning, and destiny.

First you need to know if absolute truth exists. If it doesn't, then you really can't be sure of anything (spiritual or not) and you end up either an agnostic, not knowing if you can really know anything, or as a pluralist and therefore accept every position because you're really not sure which one, if any, are right.

But if absolute truth does exist, then you move on to the next question of if logic can be used in matters of spirituality. Some say this isn't possible, but the question is – why not? In fact, logic is vital when examining spiritual claims because it helps you understand why some claims should be excluded and others embraced. For example, Islam and Judaism claim that Jesus is not God, whereas Christianity claims He is. One of the core laws of logic is the law of non-contradiction, which says something cannot be both "A" and "Non-A" at the same time and in the same sense. So applying this law to the claims of Judaism, Islam, and Christianity means that somebody is right and somebody is wrong. Jesus can't be both God and not God. Used properly, logic is a potent weapon against pluralism because it clearly demonstrates contrary truth claims cannot be true.

Next comes the big question: does God exist or not? If not, then you end up an atheist and a naturalist (someone who does not embrace anything supernatural or beyond this physical world and universe). But if God exists, then the question that naturally arises next is: what *kind* of God exists?

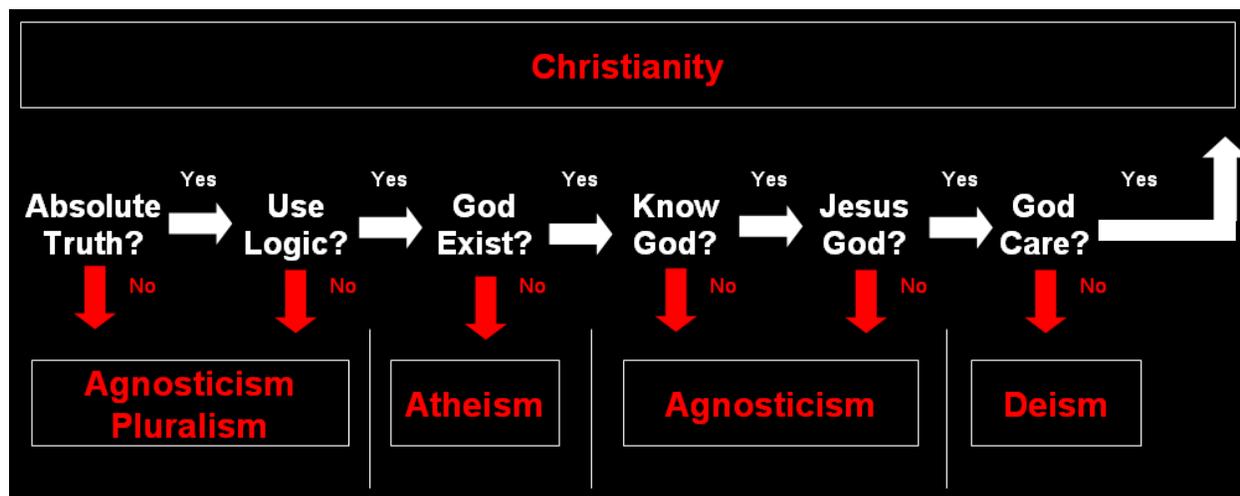
If God exists then it's important that we know Him and understand what the One who created everything out of nothing is like. This, perhaps, is one of the thorniest questions to deal with because there are many different faiths that believe in a deity or deities, and so getting to the bottom of who God is can take some effort. Because of this, some throw up their hands and say you can't know God. For these people, their quest for God ends in agnosticism (you can't know what God is like). But those who press on in their pursuit of God will then likely arrive at different conclusions about Him. To some, He will be a far-off, distant Being (Islam, Deism). Others will believe He is the same as the physical world and universe in which all people live (Pantheism). Still others will embrace the idea of a multitude of gods that exist in a hierarchy leading up to one or more chief deities. And then finally, some will believe that God wants us to know Him intimately and understand that He has a plan and purpose for all our lives. How can all these different views be reconciled? Aren't we just back to the six blind men and elephant?

The answer to the next question will help – is Jesus God? If Jesus is not God, then the "knowing God" situation remains very muddy and you cannot really move on – you remain in a fog and in some form of

agnosticism. But if Jesus is God, well then things become crystal clear and only one question remains: does God care about me?

If Jesus is God, then the answer to this question becomes quite easy to answer. His words and actions are unmistakable on the subject, with the reply being “Absolutely!”

If you were to graphically depict the process of working through the above six questions, it might look something like the following:



Answering “Yes” to each of the questions used to determine absolute spiritual truth only leads to Christianity, while any “No” answer causes the seeker to end up (in some form or fashion) in a state of uncertainty.

The Toughest Question of All?

In 1999, the movie *The Matrix* was released and featured Keanu Reeves as a computer hacker named Neo who can't shake the feeling that something in his life and in the world in which he lives is not right. Through a series of event, he ends up meeting with a mysterious figure called Morpheus who says the he can show Neo the truth *if* he wants to see it. At one part in the movie, Morpheus holds out two pills in front of Neo – one red and one blue – and asks Neo to make a decision:

“You take the blue pill, the story ends. You wake up in your bed and believe whatever you want to believe. You take the red pill, you stay in wonderland and I show you how deep the rabbit hole goes. I'm only offering you the truth... Nothing more.”

What about you? Do you really want to know the truth? Many people don't. Nietzsche once said, “It is our preference that decides against Christianity, not arguments.”

Are you willing to push aside your own personal bias, perhaps years of indoctrination in some faith, maybe encounter unpleasant treatment of those around you to know what's really real? If so, then it's time to discover the truthful answers to the six questions previously posed.

Conclusion

The man who froze to death in a Rhode Island pond during the winter of 2007 ignored the truth about the dangers of straying outside the established limits of where the ice on the pond could be trusted. In this case, knowing the truth clearly mattered. Moreover, people demand truth each and every day of their life in all sorts of areas. In the end, ignoring truth is perhaps the most dangerous thing one can do, but sadly, most don't consider truth important. As Winston Churchill once said, "Men occasionally stumble over the truth, but most of them pick themselves up and hurry off as if nothing ever happened."

Because truth matters in the physical world, why would anyone think that it's inconsequential in the spiritual world? The fact is, extreme devotion to "tolerance" and hostility aimed at anyone claiming to have the truth about spiritual matters have simply made it unfashionable to stand up for reason, logic, and truth in today's world. Although some try to get around this by arguing that all truth claims are correct, simple logic easily refutes their position. This being the case, it becomes evident that there must be a way to find spiritual truth.

Finding the single path through the spiritual maze requires time and effort, but it's time well spent. If atheism is not correct, and God exists, then it's critical that both He and His purpose be understood. Consequences exist in the physical world for ignoring truth – why think anything different will be had in the spiritual world?

Eternity is simply too long a time to be wrong.