

How Can I Know What's True?

The Japanese composer, Mamoru Samuragochi, has been called the “Japanese Beethoven” for creating beautiful symphonies despite being deaf. In an interview for TIME magazine he said, “If you trust your inner sense of sound, you create something that is truer. It is like communicating from the heart. Losing my hearing was a gift from God.”

Unfortunately, Samuragochi was exposed in February of this year as a fraud. He had been paying another man, Takashi Niigaki, as his ghost-composer for the past 18 years. Niigaki said, “At first he acted... as if he had suffered hearing loss, but he stopped doing so eventually.” After a while the two men started carrying on normal conversations.

Samuragochi threatened to commit suicide if Niigaki told the truth. But Niigaki came forward anyway telling a CNN reporter, “I am an accomplice because I continued composing just as he demanded, although I knew he was deceiving people. I can't fool the people anymore.”ⁱ

Today we begin an eight-week study of Bible doctrine. Doesn't that sound exciting? Some of you think this will be about as exciting as watching paint dry. But let me just point out that if Mamoru Samuragochi had built his life upon solid biblical truth, he would not have done things that eventually led him to consider suicide as the only way out. So, whatever it seems like to you, this will be perhaps the most important eight weeks of your year.

We begin this week with the foundational question: “How can I know what is true?” Our relationship with truth is like our relationship with people. It's a matter of trust. How do we know what (and whom) can be trusted? There are three basic tests we can apply to help us answer this question. These are...

I. The Tests of Reliability, Consistency and Practicality

There are many opinions in this world, aren't there? How do you decide which are true and which are false? We all accept something or someone as our authority. For some people it's science, for others it's their own reasoning ability, for still others it's God; but we all use some authority to help us decide what is and is not true about the world. So, how can we decide which authority to trust?

I propose that we use these three tests of reliability, consistency and practicality. What are these? Well, the first test, reliability, probes to see whether, over time, the advice of any particular authority proves to be true or false? How well does that authority's description of the world line up with your experience of the world?

For example, did you ever have anyone tell you when you were growing up, “Don't cross your eyes or they'll stay that way”? So, you were scared to death to even cross your eyes by accident! But then, you had a friend in school who crossed his eyes all the time and they never seemed to get stuck. In fact, as you got older, you didn't know one person with crossed eyes who said, “Yeah, I did it when I was a kid

and they stuck that way.” So, whoever told you not to cross your eyes turned out not to be a reliable authority, at least on the subject of eye crossing.

Now, a second test of truth is consistency. What does this mean? It means, does this authority’s explanation of truth remain consistent or does it contradict itself – first advising one thing and then another? If it’s not consistent, how can we know which advice to follow?

And a third test is a test of practicality. Can I actually follow the advice of this authority or is it impossible? Do I know anyone who has successfully followed this path of truth and found it to be able to deliver what it promises? And finally, does the truth proposed actually solve my problem or is it irrelevant to my real need?

Now, where did I come up with these three tests? I found them in Scripture. God invites us to test, examine and compare Him to all other so-called authorities.

Taste and see that the LORD is good... (Ps. 34:8)

“Come now, let us reason together,” says the LORD. (Isaiah 1:18)

...“Test me in this,” says the LORD Almighty, “and see if I will not throw open the floodgates of heaven and pour out so much blessing that you will not have room enough for it.” (Malachi 3:10)

...if serving the LORD seems undesirable to you, then choose for yourselves this day whom you will serve, whether the gods your forefathers served beyond the River, or the gods of the Amorites...
(Joshua 24:15)

“Taste, reason, test me, choose for yourselves...” God invites us to do our due diligence concerning what is true. So, these are three legitimate tests that will help any person to evaluate what is true or which authority to trust. Now, let’s apply these tests to several “authorities” today who claim to know the truth about how this world works. The three authorities we will test are: Humanism, Spiritism and Christianity.

II. Testing Humanism, Spiritism and Christianity

Humanism is another word for naturalism. Naturalism is a philosophical belief which acknowledges only natural elements and forces, denying the existence of the supernatural or “spirit world.” The Humanist trusts the scientific method as the only sure method of arriving at knowledge. If something cannot be observed, tested, and experimented on, it cannot exist. Only what is empirically testable is meaningful and so can be true or false; all else is unreal. ⁱⁱ

Let’s start with consistency. Are Humanists consistent in maintaining this position or do they make exceptions to their philosophy? For the most part, I believe they are quite consistent. A major force behind the creation of something called the “Humanist Manifesto” is Roy Wood Sellars. He writes:

What, then, can we know about the external world? Essentially what science has worked out.” ⁱⁱⁱ

Now, just because Humanists rely on the scientific method as their only tool for discovering truth doesn’t mean that all scientists are Humanists or that the scientific method isn’t a legitimate means of discovering some kinds of truth. But it does mean that all Humanists reject any other methods or means of truth discovery. In this, they are consistent.

How about reliability? Well, that's another story. Humanists will have a very difficult time relating to any person of faith of any religion because they simply deny the reality of the supernatural world. So, the word "miracle" is nonsensical to them. The evidence of a person's miraculous recovery from a deadly disease is a huge predicament for them, because they literally have no category with which to deal with such an event.

Dr. Diane Komp was a pediatric oncologist at Yale New Haven hospital. She said when she graduated from medical school she would've described herself as "post-Christian," meaning she had moved on from the Christian beliefs of her childhood and embraced the "naturalism" so prevalent in her medical school. But the more she treated children with cancer and the more she witnessed how they died, the less she was able to maintain her "post-Christian" position. From hearing children tell of angels singing to them to witnessing what could only be called "miraculous healings," Dr. Komp was being overwhelmed by evidence of a spiritual reality she simply could no longer deny.

And it wasn't just evidence from children. Sometimes it was the parents, like one young mother named Naomi. Naomi and her husband Jim were so excited at the birth of their first child, Henry. But Henry was born with cancer in his adrenal gland that then spread to his liver. Naomi and Jim were Christians but they hadn't been back to church since their wedding. But through the ministry of the hospital chaplain, both Naomi and Jim restored their faith in God.

Though Jim and Naomi prayed fervently for Henry, he did not survive. Dr. Komp remembers wondering to herself how they could stay faithful after their hope for healing had vanished? After the funeral, Naomi wrote a letter to Dr. Komp, telling her of a dream she'd had a few days before Henry passed away. In the dream, she and Henry were in the kitchen of the church Naomi grew up in. Henry was crawling around on the kitchen floor and every time he got to the center, he'd stop, point and say, "God," like He was there.

In the dream, Naomi said to another mom who was in the kitchen with her that it gave her goose-bumps when he did that. The next time Henry came to the center, he looked at his mom and then fell over and died. In the letter to Dr. Komp, Naomi then wrote:

Suddenly, God walked into the kitchen, scooped up my little one and perched him upon his arm. Henry sat on God's arm with a hand on God's shoulder, laughing and chattering with him. God saw how sad I was and felt sorry for me, and so he handed Henry to me and said I could keep him for a while longer until he returned from an important mission. Henry was fine with me, though not as animated as he had been with God.

As God was leaving, I asked him, "Will I have other children I can keep?" God stopped and looked at me with so much love, it was overwhelming. He said gently in a way that made me feel especially cared for, "Everyone's life has a plan." I tried to see in God's eyes if that meant yes or no, but there was nothing in his eyes except love, overwhelming love. That was my answer.

In the years since Henry's death, Jim and Naomi became the proud parents of two healthy babies and Dr. Komp became a believer and follower of Jesus Christ.^{iv} Humanistic naturalism has no competent explanation for what Jim and Naomi

experienced. The best they can do is call it wishful thinking and coincidence. I think most people on this planet would say that explanation is, "weak and desperately hopeless." Which demonstrates how impractical humanism is as a means of discerning truth that really matters. The scientific method is wonderful for discovering certain forms of physical truth but it is blind to truths about the soul.

And what about Spiritism? I'm using the word Spiritism to describe any system or religion that believes there is a spirit world. So, unlike Humanism, Spiritists believe that besides the physical world there most certainly is an invisible world of the spirit and that people are not just flesh and bone but also spiritual beings. How do these systems do when tested for reliability, consistency and practicality?

Well, if they have a written text, a sacred book, then they do reasonably well with reliability and consistency. After all, if they were totally inconsistent, full of unanswerable contradictions, then they probably wouldn't have lasted as a religion or a spiritual system or whatever it is they call themselves. So, Islam has the Koran and Mormons have the Book of Mormon and Hindus have the Bhagavad-Gita and you can spend days and years searching them to see if they are reliable and consistent. But I think there is a more pressing matter, a more important test that should be run first. That is the test of practicality. In other words, does the proposed truth actually "solve my problem" or "meet my most pressing need"? All world religions and smaller sects and cults, all the way down to individual spiritist counselors and mediums, CLAIM that they can solve your problem and meet your need. So the first question we should ask of any of them is this, "What do you say is my most pressing need?"

Buddhism has become quite popular in Western nations today. How do they answer the question of our greatest need? Buddhists basically have no concept of sin, just ignorance or mistakes. Buddhists achieve salvation by eliminating all desire and coming to the realization that your "self" does not exist. Tiger Woods is a western Buddhist. How well did his belief that there's no such thing as sin help him to be a good father and husband?

Hindus believe that sin is failing to do what is right toward God or His creation. However, they believe that sin cannot be forgiven but only paid for by the sinners being re-incarnated over and over until they live a "good enough" life to achieve Nirvana. Working our way to perfection is a common theme in most non-Christian religions.

Like Mormonism... Mormons believe that we are capable of obeying the Law of God. They claim that they believe in the same God Christians believe in; in fact, they claim to BE Christians but that's not true since their Jesus is light years away from our Jesus. For example, their Jesus was married and is the brother of Satan. Call him what you want but that's not my Jesus!

Muslims also believe in a person they call "Jesus." They say he was a prophet but certainly not God. They say he did not rise from the dead and his death does not pay for our sins. But then, they don't believe our sins need to be forgiven either, like the Hindus, just replaced with obedience.

So, Hindus, Mormons, Muslims all believe there is something called sin which offends God but either it can't be forgiven, doesn't need to be forgiven or can be out-

weighed by perfect obedience. They all would say that our greatest need is to work harder at obeying God. If that's their solution to my greatest need, then I don't need to test any other part of their belief system because I've tried their solution and guess what? It doesn't work!!! I've tried really, really, really hard to obey God's law and from personal experience I can tell you this – I can't do it. So, if that's the way to God, then there's no hope for me because I CAN'T DO IT!!! What about you?

And it is at this point of desperation that C. S. Lewis reminds us of what is true. It was during a British conference on comparative religions where experts from around the world were debating what, if any, belief was unique to Christianity. C. S. Lewis wandered into the room and was asked his opinion. He said, "Oh, that's easy. It's grace." Philip Yancey writes:

The Buddhist eight-fold path, the Hindu doctrine of *karma*, the Jewish covenant, and Muslim code of law – each of these offers a way to earn approval. Only Christianity dares to make God's love unconditional. ^v

Christianity clearly states our greatest need is not only being separated from God but that it is our sin that causes the separation. (Is. 59:2):

**But your iniquities have separated you from your God;
your sins have hidden his face from you, so that he will not hear.**

And how many of us have sinned? (Rom. 3:23)

...for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God.

Then what does Christianity's book, the Bible, say is the remedy? Not works! Not obedience that outweighs your sin! No, it's receiving the free gift of God's grace:

For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith – and this not from yourselves, it is the gift of God – not by works, so that no one can boast.
(Eph. 2: 8, 9)

As we read earlier, God Himself said through Isaiah, "*I, the LORD, speak the truth; I declare what is right.*" Why is it that so many people disbelieve what God says and believe instead these other humanistic philosophies or false religions? II Cor. 4:4 reveals the truth on that matter. It says:

The god of this age has blinded the minds of unbelievers, so that they cannot see the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God.

Well, if they've been blinded by supernatural evil, what can we do? Two things: first in Eph. 1:18 Paul says:

I pray also that the eyes of your heart may be enlightened in order that you may know the hope to which he has called you...

First, we pray. Whom are you praying for, that God's Spirit will open their eyes? And secondly, Jesus said: (John 3:21)

But whoever lives by the truth comes into the light, so that it may be seen plainly that what he has done has been done through God.

If we pray and if we live by the truth of God's grace, the Holy Spirit will open blind eyes and set people free. Friends, this is eternal truth. Do you believe it? Will you live it? Let's pray...

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- ⁱ Tim Hume, Junko Ogawa and Yoko Wakatsuki, "Uproar as 'Japanese Beethoven' Mamoru Samuragochi exposed as a fraud" CNN (2-6-14)
- ⁱⁱ David A. Noebel, *Understanding The Times* (Manitou Springs: Summit Press, 1991), p. 114
- ⁱⁱⁱ Roy Wood Sellars, "Critical Realism," in *American Philosophy in the Twentieth Century*, ed. Kurtz, p. 367
- ^{iv} Diane Komp, *A Window to Heaven* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1992), p. 74-77
- ^v Philip Yancey, *What's So Amazing About Grace?* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1997), p. 45