

HOW DO WE TALK ABOUT TRUTH AND FAITH?¹

As we are sharing the Faith with others we need to be clear and to make clear two important ideas:

- Truth is not like ice cream
- Faith is not wishing

Truth Is Not Like Ice Cream

Häagen-Dazs Butter Pecan ice cream; did you know there is more fat in a pint of Häagen-Dazs than there is in a pint of lard? But what a way to go, right?!

Consider this statement: “Häagen-Dazs Butter Pecan ice cream is delicious.” Is that statement true or is it false?

Many people agree its true that “Häagen-Dazs Butter Pecan ice cream is delicious”. But there are a few people who believe that it’s false. For those of you who say its true, are you troubled in any sense by those who say its false? When we talk about ice cream flavors it seems to be that some could say it’s delicious and others could say it’s not and we don’t have a problem with this. It doesn’t cause conflict or confusion.

But how is it that a statement, ““Häagen-Dazs Butter Pecan ice cream is delicious.”” can be true and false at the same time?

In making the statement, “Häagen-Dazs Butter Pecan ice cream is delicious”, it sounds like we’re talking about the ice cream, but really we’re talking about *our opinion* of the ice cream. We’re not really talking about the *object* – Häagen-Dazs Butter Pecan ice cream, but we’re talking about the *subject* – me and you and our like or dislike of Butter Pecan ice cream.

The statement “Häagen-Dazs Butter Pecan ice cream is delicious” can be both true and false when it is spoken by *different subjects*; different people. It is a *subjective claim* because it reflects each individual’s preference. We may joke with each other who has better taste in ice cream, but we don’t look down on any one who likes a different flavor than we do. This kind of truth is not in the realm of right and wrong.

What if I said, “Häagen-Dazs Butter Pecan ice cream is a medicine that cures diabetes.”

How many agree?

Disagree?

What if I said I believe it is? Would you be uncomfortable in saying I was wrong? If I insisted I was right, we would have a debate, we would look at the evidence for the claim itself because here we’re dealing with something different. We’re not dealing with our preferences, we’re dealing with the nature of ice cream as it relates to diabetes. Our focus is on the ice cream, on the *object* of the ice cream. This is an *objective claim* that can only be true or false.

Subjective claims (“Häagen-Dazs Butter Pecan ice cream is delicious) are neither true nor false.

Objective claims (Häagen-Dazs Butter Pecan ice cream is a medicine that cures diabetes.) must be either true or false.

We’re not going to argue over a *subjective claim* - what’s the best flavor of ice cream. But if we disagree on an *objective claim* we’re going to have a discussion to bring out the evidence for or against our position.

This teaches us that things can be true in two ways.

¹ Adapted from teaching series by Greg Koukl of Stand to Reason (www.str.org)

Things can be true in an *ice cream* sort of way; they are true for you because they are your preference. Some one can have a completely different opinion about ice cream, that is, what's true for them is not true for you and we don't have a problem with this kind of *subjective truth*.

Things can be true in an *insulin* kind of way. In this case, there is a right answer and a wrong answer and getting the answer right is absolutely necessary because of the consequences. "Insulin" kind of truth is not about personal preference, but facts and evidence. This is *objective truth*.

In our culture there is tremendous confusion about this issue. This is because many people treat religious claims and moral claims as *ice cream* kinds of claims and not as *insulin* kinds of claims. Therefore, less and less are you going to hear the claim that "Christianity is false." Instead, you are going to hear that "Christianity is true... for you. But it's not true for me."

This way of dealing with the claims of Christianity, as *ice cream* and not *insulin* explains a few things. For instance, how could it be that all religions are equally valid ways to God. This is called religious pluralism. Most people who hold this view do so, not because they know the mind of God, that He's pleased with any sincere attempt to reach Him. In fact they are usually offended by any one who claims to know the mind of God. Most people who hold this view believe all religions lead to God because in reality no religion leads to God. In their view, religion is essentially a game we play to make ourselves feel better. All religions are man-made constructs either designed to control human behavior or to help us cope with life. In their view it doesn't matter your religious beliefs as long as it makes you feel better. So you find the religion that makes you feel good just like you eat the ice cream that makes you feel good. Religion is reduced to an *ice cream* kind of thing; a matter of personal preference.

This reduces religion to a placebo; a little pill we take when we think we're ill. It doesn't help you get better, but you believe it does so it makes you feel better. It's a psychological trick. Many people believe religion is like a placebo; there is no ultimate reality behind it, but if it makes you feel better have at it.

What is not tolerated is to claim our religion is true and others false. That is absurd given the nature of religion in their view. According to religious pluralism we are dealing with *ice cream*, not *insulin*.

Greg Koukl was on a radio panel with a Jewish Rabbi and a Catholic Priest. A caller asked how to go about choosing a religion. The Jewish Rabbi replied the caller should choose a religion that feels good. He was treating religion as *ice cream*. The Catholic Priest encouraged the caller to find a religion with which he resonated. Again, treating religion as *ice cream*. Greg encouraged the caller to investigate the various religions and follow the one that is true. Greg's response angered the host, Rabbi and Priest because Greg treats Christianity as *insulin*, not *ice cream*.

We should be prepared for a negative response when we claim that Christianity is true, that Jesus is the only way to God and that all other religions fail to make us right with God. Now we don't dump these claims on someone all at once; we are always thinking about things in terms of conversations in an on going relationship. When it is appropriate to make one of these claims we will need to help the other person understand that we are making an *insulin* kind of claim. Your friend may say, "Well that's your truth." I encourage you to respond by asking, "What do you mean by that?" This is an important question to help the other person understand the kind of claim we are making. They may answer, "Well, you believe it." To which you might reply "Well yes, I believe it or I wouldn't be talking about it. But my believing it doesn't make it true. I could be wrong about what I believe. So you can't call a belief a truth. I do believe Christianity is true and I have reasons why I believe. When I say *true*, I'm not talking about my preference, but what I believe to be fact."

A helpful approach is to say, "I could be mistaken. Now I don't think I am; I have reasons for why I believe. But I'm not infallible." This conveys a humble reasonableness. It also points to the kind of statement we're making; we are talking about things that are either true or false, right or wrong, not the flavor of ice cream I prefer.

There is a real temptation to soften our presentation of Jesus and His claims to avoid an angry response. We certainly need to communicate spiritual truth graciously, but we must not relativize the Faith by saying such things as "Well, that's just what I believe." or "That's what I was taught growing up." No one is going to be upset if you're just sharing what's true for you or what your parents foisted on you. But no one is going to be helped if all you give them is ice cream.

Faith Is Not Wishing

The term *faith* is greatly misunderstood and misrepresented in our culture. It's often referred to as *blind faith* or a *leap of faith*. Faith has come to mean possessing the ability to gin up belief in things that can't be true. If you are a religious person, you're a person of faith because you have the ability to believe in fairy tales like Noah's Ark and the resurrection of Jesus. But if you're a scientific person, you're a person of facts, living in the real world.

When talking with an unsaved friend about faith we need to define our terms well. In fact, it might even be more helpful to use different words that convey the same idea. *Trust, rely on, place your confidence in* may be more effective words and phrases to help your friend understand that we're talking about having a settled conviction about something based on evidence.

We need to help our friend see that we all exercise faith in everyday life.

When we take our seat on an airplane we are *trusting in, relying upon, placing our confidence in* the pilots, the aircraft and the airline company's safety record. When we eat a meal purchased at a restaurant we are *placing our confidence in* the reputation of the chefs and restaurant managers to handle food in a sanitary manner. When we go under the knife we are *relying upon* the surgeon's record of successful surgeries.

The faith, the trust we exercise in God and Jesus Christ is the same as in flying, dining or surgery. Trust is not a blind leap, but a response to evidence and knowledge. Here is the biblical pathway to faith we see over and over in Scripture:

Evidence >> Knowledge >> Trust

Exodus 7-12 records the showdown between God and Pharaoh. What was God's purpose in each of the plagues He brought upon Egypt?

Exodus 7:15–17 (ESV)

¹⁵ Go to Pharaoh in the morning, as he is going out to the water. Stand on the bank of the Nile to meet him, and take in your hand the staff that turned into a serpent. ¹⁶ And you shall say to him, 'The LORD, the God of the Hebrews, sent me to you, saying, "Let my people go, that they may serve me in the wilderness." But so far, you have not obeyed. ¹⁷ Thus says the LORD, "By this you shall know that I am the LORD: behold, with the staff that is in my hand I will strike the water that is in the Nile, and it shall turn into blood.'

The progression: plague >> Yahweh is the LORD >> let Israelites go

In the New Testament we see the same progression to faith.

Mark 2:1–12 (ESV)

¹ And when he returned to Capernaum after some days, it was reported that he was at home. ² And many were gathered together, so that there was no more room, not even at the door. And he was preaching the word to them. ³ And they came, bringing to him a paralytic carried by four men. ⁴ And when they could not get near him because of the crowd, they removed the roof above him, and when they had made an opening, they let down the bed on which the paralytic lay. ⁵ And when Jesus saw their faith, he said to the paralytic, "Son, your sins are forgiven." ⁶ Now some of the scribes were sitting there, questioning in their hearts, ⁷ "Why does this man speak like that? He is blaspheming! Who can forgive sins but God alone?" ⁸ And immediately Jesus, perceiving in his spirit that they thus questioned within themselves, said to them, "Why do you question these things in your hearts? ⁹ Which is easier, to say to the paralytic, 'Your sins are forgiven,' or to say, 'Rise, take up your bed and walk'?" ¹⁰ But that you may know that the Son of Man has authority on earth to forgive sins"—he said to the paralytic— ¹¹ "I say to you, rise, pick up your bed, and go home." ¹² And he rose and immediately picked up his bed and went out before them all, so that they were all amazed and glorified God, saying, "We never saw anything like this!"

The progression: paralytic walks >> know that the Son of Man has authority on earth to forgive sins >> believe Jesus is divine.

It is extremely important to establish faith is not wishing, but a thoughtful response to evidence found both in the Bible and the world around us. Do not allow your friend to dismiss religious faith as “blind” or “a leap in the dark”.

We are ambassadors for Christ. We are continually growing in these qualities that make for an effective ambassador:

Knowledge – *an accurately informed mind.*

Wisdom – *an artful method.*

Character – *an attractive manner.*

In this lesson we thought about how to talk about *truth* and *faith*; two ideas greatly misunderstood and misrepresented in a culture. We need to help our friend understand that *truth* is not like ice cream and we need to resist the temptation to relativize our witness in order to avoid a negative response. If what we believe is true, our unsaved friends and family need the *insulin* of the Gospel.

We also need to explain to our unsaved friends that the faith of Christianity is not wishing; it is neither “blind” nor “a leap in the dark”. Rather, our faith is a thoughtful response to the evidence presented both in the Bible and in the world around us. It is critical we clear up confusion concerning faith because we know that it is “by grace through faith” that we are saved.