

SPOCK ON RELIGION

Whenever I am asked about my religion, I am tempted to say, "No religion." Religion usually implies someone or some group of people following a list of good as opposed to bad deeds in some sort of attempt to gain entry into some form of paradise after death.

All religions agree on the certainty of death and that the desired paradise is perfect. The question then becomes, "How good do I have to be or how well must I follow the prescribed rituals to enter this perfect place?" The most logical answer is, "I would have to be perfect." Anything less would cheapen the reward, souring the perfection of the would-be paradise by turning it into a place where all citizens have gained access with the wink of an eye. Upon acknowledging the imperfection of humanity, we typically revert to some more attainable balance such as, "My virtues must outweigh my vices" or "I must simply be sincere" or "I believe in God or go to church, etc., so I'm covered." Even the truly non-religious settle the score with something like, "I don't know if there even is a paradise nor could I imagine such could ever be proven, but I'm confident I've done my best, so I'm sure I'll gain access if the subject ever comes up; and if that's not good enough, I refuse to humble myself before the [in my humble opinion] unfair policy-maker(s)."

But, the problem soon becomes, "Who is the standard? Who must I be better than (or as good as) to enter paradise?"

To make a long story short, I was not raised in a religious home. Yet, I became a born-again Christian on 18 October 1980, because the events of the 8,239 days of my life up to that point had led me to conclude that that standard was none other than a man named Jesus of Nazareth, an Israeli carpenter who lived about 2000 years ago.

I have never once regretted my decision to follow him, and as it turns out, the Biblical paradise known as Heaven is indeed a perfect place. Nobody gets in with a wink either. It is a genuine, untainted, eternal, perfect paradise. Its residents are perfect as well, having been perfected not by works of righteousness which they have done, but by the washing of regeneration and renewing of the Holy Ghost.

Not being raised as religious, I was for generally uninterested in the historical character of Jesus. What could a man who had been dead for centuries teach me? People were not very scientific or logical back then, were they? My gods were science and logic. My role model was Spock, the *Star Trek* alien with pointed ears who prided himself in seeking out such things. I was a nerd, which is basically a good student especially in sciences and math. I excelled in chemical and mechanical engineering at private university known for schooling nerds. With seemingly limitless arrogance and egotism, the only two things I admitted to lacking next to Spock were pointed ears.

The story of Jesus was explained to me. As with every new hypothesis, I eagerly applied the tests of logic and science, perhaps out of genuine interest, but more likely out of a perverted desire to ridicule others. What would Spock or any other space alien conclude about the Jesus account? Certainly, this "Jesus" character would quickly vanish in a poof of logic.

Jesus claimed to be the “Messiah” or “Christ”, the fulfillment of dozens of Old Testament prophecies which would identify him as God the Creator manifest in human form. God would be born as a human child. This child would be known among other titles as “Son”, the mighty “God”, and even the everlasting “Father”. As Isaiah foretold, “For unto us a child is born, unto us a son is given: and the government shall be upon his shoulder: and his name shall be called Wonderful, Counsellor, The mighty God, The everlasting Father, The Prince of Peace.” So, Jesus claimed to be and accepted worship as the Creator God, not just the Son of God as I had always been told. I later learned that the title “Son of God” is synonymous with “Messiah” and “Christ” as is the title “Son of Man”.

First, I had to apply a little science to determine if there even was or is such a Creator God. The answer was remarkably simple: Heat exists, therefore a Creator exists. Follow logically:

- Estimates vary, but cosmologists agree that at some point in the remote yet finite future, the entire Universe will grind to a halt in what is termed the *Heat Death of the Universe*. All motion, even on the subatomic level, will cease. It will then be forever frozen at Absolute Zero. Zero heat.
- If the Universe were now infinitely old, it would *already* be at Absolute Zero. But since you are reading this, you are not so frozen, are you?
- So, heat is present. Heat exists.
- So, the Universe is *not* infinitely old. The Universe is of *finite* age.
- So, there was a point in time of the finite past “before” which there was no Universe, nor any of its components! Almost all cosmologists agree that *nothing* existed before this point in time which we call the Creation of the Universe.
- Science demands that all events must have a cause. Science cannot adequately explain the cause, purpose or presence of any of the six basic components of the Universe: Matter, energy, time, mathematics, order and information. Yet, we know that these components are real because we can measure them.
- Logic demands there must be a deliberate cause outside of, before or above the created Universe. This cause we call the Creator.

So, yes. There is a Creator, whatever he, she or it may be. I perceived the height of foolishness would be to say the Universe just happened without any purpose or cause. Such would be like saying, “This chair just appeared under me by itself without any intelligent cause.”

Next I applied a little logic to the whole question of whether believing in a god would be even necessary to enter any would-be paradise. How would Spock analyze this? And, what about the idea of eternal punishment in a place of torment?

I happened upon something offered by the great mathematician and physicist, Blaise Pascal (1623-1662), who is almost always found in lists of the highest IQs in history. It has become known as *Pascal's Wager*. The Believer and the Unbeliever make a bet, so to speak. Here is how it is presented logically:

If Eternal Paradise/Punishment is Fiction:

The Believer neither gains nor loses anything, breaking even;
The Unbeliever neither gains nor loses anything, breaking even.

If Eternal Paradise/Punishment is True:

The Believer gains everything and loses nothing;
The Unbeliever loses everything and gains nothing.

So, there are two possible fates for each soul:

The Believer may either break even or enter Eternal Paradise;
The Unbeliever may either break even or enter Eternal Punishment.

Therefore,

The Believer makes the *wise* choice because he cannot *lose*;
The Unbeliever makes the *foolish* choice because he cannot *win*.

Now, Pascal's Wager is not intended to prove that Jesus is the only way to paradise, but rather it served as a wake-up call for me to seriously evaluate the whole question of the afterlife. Logically, I needed to become a believer of some sort. Yet, how does one just suddenly believe if one, in all honesty, does not believe? A miracle, perhaps?

Considering the severity and eternal nature of the worst fate, I wondered, even if there is only one chance in a billion that Eternal Punishment is real, what foolish reason could there be for stubbornly refusing to at least investigate the question? Could I take even the smallest chance with my eternity? No way! Could I afford to be haphazard or lazy about the subject by dismissing it as unfathomable? No way! In fact, believers claim that it is so easily fathomed that a child could do so. Spock would have seen his eternity as his #1 priority and so should I. Anyone can be hit by a car or otherwise killed instantly or die while sleeping any given day. There is no promise of tomorrow. In fact, there will soon be a day that will be my last – perhaps today. I had to settle the question of eternity ASAP with all due diligence, hopefully scientifically and logically.

Heretofore, whenever anyone had asked me what the purpose of life is, I always had stood secretly dumbfounded. I was supposed to be one of those guys with all the scientific answers, yet I would quip silliness such as, "Life is its own purpose." I soon asked myself in the mirror, "If you don't know what the purpose of life is, what exactly are you *doing* here?" So began my spiritual quest.

What was the purpose of my life? Or, as kids my age put it, "What am I going to do with my life that will really matter in the end?" I was studying chemical engineering. Maybe I could discover some cure for some major disease, perhaps saving millions of lives! Then, I realized that I would only be *extending* lives. They would all still eventually die, so what good would I really be doing? Maybe I would be extending the lives of people in unhappy marriages, so where would even be the *temporary* good of my cure in many cases?

So, my beloved science and math, while still true, were quickly seen as dead ends. I still had not solved the riddle of life, but I figured that if I did, I would have to tell people. I saw the only truly meaningful vocation would be to assist people to the afterlife, assuming I could find the way myself. I could see money as relatively unimportant, applicable only for temporary comfort.

Realistically, nothing in this physical life, world or Universe really matters. *Physically*, our only certain fates are the Heat Death of the Universe, and long before that, our own personal deaths. True meaning, if there is any, must reside in the *spiritual* realm. But, becoming a spiritual leader or follower was rather repulsive to me, especially since such people are often viewed as extremists. Yet, if I came to know the ultimate truth, would it really matter what naysayers thought of me?

I do not wish to put down or criticize all of the religions I sought wisdom from. But basically, I found they fall into two categories:

1. Man, *through* merit, must strive to achieve paradise or joy *by his own efforts*.
2. Man, *without* merit, receives paradise and joy *as a free gift* from a loving and forgiving deity.

Category 1 covers the vast majority of faiths, whether man's efforts are prayers, meditation, good deeds, solitude, or even violence. Many faiths proclaiming the Bible as God's Word fit into this category, man's efforts being the keeping of sacraments, the paying of indulgences, praying to or for the dead, abstaining from certain foods, circumcision, worshiping statues and paintings, lighting candles, making pilgrimages, martyrdom, etc.

Category 2 covers being born again as Jesus taught in John 3. Being born again is totally unique among beliefs. Many believers even go so far as to say that it is not even a religion, but rather being set free *from* religion. Others likewise claim that it is a *relationship* with God, not a religion.

Although I did not study every known belief of every indigenous tribe on every continent, I did study and wholeheartedly pursue about a dozen of the major religions. I found, upon seriously looking into the testimony of Jesus, that a full evaluation of every religion was not necessary. Other men were seen as prophets or wise men or great teachers or philosophers, but Jesus made a very bold claim that blew them all away, decidedly classifying himself as Other.

Jesus uniquely claimed not merely to point the way toward, but to *actually be*, the most-high Creator God. He repeatedly pointed to Himself. In John 14:6, he said,

I am the way, the truth, and the life ...

Unlike other professing men of God, he is not merely pointing the way; he *is* the way. He is not merely sharing the truth; he *is* the truth. He is not merely offering eternal life; he *is* the life.

Jesus never once said, "Thus saith the Lord ...", a phrase used by the Hebrew prophets some 415 times. Rather, he often said, "Verily I say unto you ..."

After reading the book, *Mere Christianity*, by C.S. Lewis (1898-1963), author of the popular *Narnia* tales, I decided to apply the logic test to an observation he made. Here, I could picture Spock raising an eyebrow.

Jesus claimed to be the Creator God in human form, the only-begotten Son of God.

If his claim is *True*:

We should immediately worship Jesus because he is *Lord*.

If his claim is *False*:

Then, if Jesus was *aware* of his falsehood, he was a *Liar*.

Or, if Jesus was *unaware* of his falsehood, he was a *Lunatic*.

As we can clearly see, any man who claims to be the Creator God is either Liar, Lunatic, or Lord. Jesus left us no other option about himself. So, we must logically avoid the patronizing nonsense of seeing him merely as yet another prophet, teacher, sage, rabbi, guru, saint, wise man, avatar, miracle-worker, or political/spiritual leader.

Until seeing the three choices logically laid out, I had not understood why the people of his day hated Jesus so much. Why did they demand him to be tortured and crucified? What was his big crime? Clearly, they saw him as a dangerous deceiver or madman, perhaps even demon-possessed. The only other choice would have seen instant worship. There was no middle ground of indecision.

How would I have reacted had I lived during his day? It is easy to evaluate his claim logically today and reach a sane decision, but perhaps back then I would have been part of the bloodthirsty crowd yelling, "Crucify him!" The image of demanding the crucifixion of anyone is not how I picture myself. But realistically, seeing him as either Liar or Lunatic was and is a vote for his torture and death.

Jesus draws, then and now, the line in the sand regarding where we stand with him. Our stand is very important and, with no middle or indifferent ground to fall back on, we all make a decision regarding his Lordship. But, be either encouraged or forewarned: Whether we judge Jesus favorably or unfavorably, so shall we be judged by him. Make the wise choice, even if one cannot discern the scientific or logical.

Thus far, we have mainly discussed logic. But, what about science? Many scientists assert the aforementioned *Heat Death of the Universe* scenario as proof of a Creator. But, many cannot or do not wish to understand it. Fortunately, God still does miracles that any honest soul will agree are scientifically impossible apart from the divine hand. As usual, children can discern them. But you, the seeker, must put some effort into investigating real miracles. Many televised miracles are fake. Interview a few pastors and medical professionals. Ask them if they have medical proof of any healing that completely baffled all eyewitnesses apart from God as the source. Examine the medical records, lab tests, x-rays, etc., *yourself*.

But, here is the caveat: You will be overwhelmed by what you discover, either overjoyed if you are seeking God, or abhorrent if you are seeking to *dismiss* God. In fact, people seeking to *avoid* God rarely conduct any serious investigation into miracles. If this describes you, check your ego. Dare to be different. Bear in mind that real miracles are *good* news, not bad.

Here are a few miracles I have personally encountered, but these must remain second-hand accounts to the reader as I have lost track of those healed. Email me if you wish to hear of more.

- A man's hand is severely torn by a circular saw. Blood is everywhere. He praises Jesus. Within a minute, the blood is washed away, revealing a perfectly healed scar extending from the front to the back of his hand between the thumb and forefinger.
- A girl's throat is slit. Blood is everywhere. She calls upon Jesus. The bleeding stops, yet a fully healed scar remains on her neck. MRI scans reveal two internal circular scars, indicating both her jugular vein and carotid artery had been severed.
- A well-known homosexual prostitute in Hollywood is afflicted with full-blown AIDS calls upon Jesus when he is informed he has a brief time to live. Instantly, cancerous glands under each armpit are healed. Grotesque stretch marks remain and medical records show that the swelling had been up to the size of cantaloupes. Within a minute of realizing a miracle has occurred, he realizes he is no longer homosexual.
- A man's foot is crushed in an accident. It is uncertain if he will ever walk normally again. Upon a prayer group's appeal to Jesus, his foot is instantly healed and he walks effortlessly. Subsequent x-rays show that all the metal pins that had been implanted had vanished as well.
- In Eastern Europe, a blind man is healed of cataracts. The news travels and multiplies with subsequent healings. Within hours, several hundred blind in the area also come for prayer and are healed, even of exceptionally clouded eyes, often within seconds and before each prayer is completed. All who come are healed in the name of Jesus.

There are other types of miracles seen today. For example,

- Food dwindles to almost nothing at an evangelistic outreach to the poor. Several hundred more than expected arrive and are hungry. Without even a formal prayer, suddenly a large vat of stew is miraculously refilled. It proves to be equal to the crowd's need to the last spoonful.
- A family in a car at a high speed swerves and is heading straight toward a metal railing. The brakes are locked into a skid. The daughter cries out, "Jesus, save us!" The family emerges from the car which is found on the other side of the railing. The car, the railing, and the family are completely unharmed, although the car must be towed from the ditch to get back around the railing and onto the highway again. A long set of tire skid marks remain on the highway leading up to the railing at the exact point where the car is found in the ditch.

Spock prided himself on being logical and emotionless, However, falling in love with Jesus would undoubtedly bring a smile to his face.