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SERIES: CHARACTER OVER COMPROMISE

SPEAKER: NAT CRAWFORD

TITLE: Are All Religions the Same? An Interview with Ken Samples

Now let's join Pastor Nat with special guest, author and professor, Ken Samples:

NC: Ken, thank you for joining me today.

KS: Well, it's a pleasure to see you and be with you, Nat. Thanks for having me on.

NC: Yeah, Ken. Well, I know who you are. You've been one of my professors at Biola, but a lot of people may not know who you are. So tell us a little bit about yourself and your ministry at Reasons to Believe.

KS: Yeah, very good. My background, Nat, is in philosophy and theology. So I work at Reasons to Believe, which is a science-faith think tank. I'm kind of the odd ball on the scholar team, in that I'm a non-scientist and I work with lots of scientists. In the old days, I worked at the Christian Research Institute with one of my mentors, Walter Martin. We studied cults and new religions. At Reasons to Believe, I kind of bring some philosophy and theology to bear on looking at science issues.

NC: When I got acquainted with Reasons to Believe, I became overwhelmed immediately, because I am not a scientist as well. And when I started digesting some of the content, I basically fell over; my mind exploded, and my wife who was actually watching some of the content with me, she watched me just kind of melt, and it was a great experience. And I'm still consuming much of your content today. Well, you are also an author, and honestly, in my years as a pastor, Ken, there were just a handful of books that I would give out to people. I would keep a library on my shelf. And two of the books that I would always give out were two of your books, both *A World of Difference*, and also, *Without a Doubt*; these two have been essential in my library. And whenever someone came in with a question about the faith, I would hand them a copy of *Without a Doubt*. And when they were talking about worldviews and religions, I would always hand them a copy of *A World of Difference*.

So today what I would like to do actually, is kind of just unpack a little bit of one of your books. And so today, I want to talk about *A World of Difference*. It's a great book, but why don't you tell our listeners, and those watching, a little bit about that book and why you wrote it?

KS: Yeah, very good. I have to say, I'm very pleased that these books have been helpful to you, and that's very meaningful. Sometimes when you write, you wonder, who reads the books and are they helpful? So that was nice to hear, Nat. Yeah, I wrote that book, about 10, 12 years ago. I quickly came to think that a very important way of comparing Christianity with other belief systems, was to kind of look at it from the vantage point of a worldview. So this book, *A World of Difference*, kind of lays out what a worldview is all about. Then it explores the Christian

worldview. And the last part of the book looks at worldview competitors. It looks at naturalism, atheistic naturalism, pantheistic monism, postmodernism. And I even look at the Islamic worldview. So that's kind of my reason for writing it and a little overview of what's in the book.

NC: Let's talk about that then, about what's in the book. You just mentioned a worldview. Now, in my experience, a lot of people don't even know what a worldview is. So can you unpack what a worldview is? Does everyone have one? Talk about that.

KS: I think maybe the way to think about a worldview is, it's kind of like a pair of glasses. I'm using an analogy: you know, as I've gotten older, I've started wearing reading glasses, and I noticed that everything comes through that lens. You could think of a worldview is like a lens in a pair of glasses. A good pair of glasses brings reality into sharper focus, so I can read a lot better with my reading glasses on. A faulty pair of glasses will distort reality, and we can apply that to a worldview. A good worldview will bring you into touch with reality; a faulty worldview will distort reality. And you can think of a worldview too, as a cluster of beliefs: your view of God, your view of the world, your view of knowledge, ethics, history, values. So it's kind of a way of kind of making a big picture view of life, and making sense of reality. Does everybody have a worldview? I think everybody who can think through the issues does. It's usually kind of fragmented when you're young; you usually adopt it from your parents, and for a lot of people it's not well thought out.

NC: All right, Ken. Well, how can we discern a right worldview from a wrong worldview? Because today we are just overwhelmed with ideas, and with glasses, you put them on and it's real clear. Everything becomes clear. And when you have the wrong prescription, it's fuzzy, but is that the same with worldviews?

KS: Yeah, it's a good question, Nat. I talk about worldview tests, First Thessalonians 5:21, *test all things, hold onto the good*. In my book, I mention a series of tests. Let me touch on just a couple very briefly. One worldview test is what we call the coherence test. Is your worldview logically consistent? Is it internally consistent? I mean, if your worldview is filled with self-defeating ideas, I mean, that's a red flag that this worldview is not going to cut it. If, however, that worldview passes the coherence test, it's basically logical. It's basically consistent. Then we can start looking at some other tests. For example, does your worldview have strong explanatory power and scope? Can it seem to explain really meaningful realities like the world, like human beings, like knowledge and values?

Maybe another worldview test, Nat, that I think is important: is your worldview livable? Does it give you meaning and hope and purpose? So in my book, I lay out nine of them. Those three, I think are very important starting points.

NC: But you know, to do an evaluation, and to put them to the test, there has to be some type of truth out there. There has to be some type of a measuring stick, right? Okay. But, you know, today we live in a world, where truth, they say, is relative or there isn't even truth. So, is there in fact truth, and how can we know?

KS: Yeah, you're absolutely right. I mean, we live at a very peculiar time. Some have called it post-truth, postmodernism. I think though, Nat, when you drill down a little bit, you realize there has to be truth, because, if somebody were to say, there is no truth, well then, that's a truth

statement itself. [Yes]. You really can't avoid truth. Truth kind of constantly brings you back. So I would argue that there must be truth, and it is connected to reality. And ultimately, the perspective of truth that best aligns with reality, is the position that you should hold. So, you know, when people tell me, "Well, there is no truth," or "I have my truth", I simply say, "Well, look, if there's no truth, that's itself a true statement, which is self-defeating". And then I would say, "How do you know that truth differs person to person? Why not argue, as philosophers have, that there's an objective basis to truth?" [Hmm].

NC: Well, I remember hearing J.P. Moreland once say, "If someone says the truth is relative, go and steal their stereo, right? And see how much, how quickly they respond to that idea you know, of an objective morality or whatever it is", but it's fascinating, of the time we live. And it is a great challenge. But you know, the audience that we're largely addressing today is a Christian audience. You know, listeners here at Back to the Bible are very engaged in God's Word, but I don't know if they could articulate a Christian worldview. So what is a Christian worldview, in your mind?

KS: Yeah, I would relate it again to that idea of a cluster of beliefs. Our worldview begins with God - God is an infinite, eternal being. He is the Creator of the Universe. That universe is designed and has purpose, because of God's creation. Human beings are made in God's image. And so another way you could think about a worldview, is your, again, your view of God, and that God is revealed in Scripture, that God is revealed historically in Jesus Christ. One way you could also think of a worldview, Nat, and the Christian worldview in particular, is that it comes in four sequential phases, that the Christian worldview talks about Creation, then Fall, then Redemption, then Consummation. And so the Christian worldview would get into things like God being a Trinity, Jesus being the God-man, Jesus as atonement, Resurrection. I like to think, you know, the Apostle's Creed, which some people grew up reciting - it's kind of a nice little snapshot of the Christian worldview.

NC: Ken, we're talking about your book, *A World of Difference*, and you've given us a lot to think about already, but we're only halfway there. So let's keep digging in. In your book, *A World of Difference*, what you do, is you look at Christianity, and then you also compare it to other worldviews. And also, you put them through some tests. How coherent are they? Are they livable? Is it actually reasonable in believing it? So let's just talk about some of these other worldviews in the book: naturalism – okay, what is naturalism, and how does it do in that test?

KS: Yeah, very good. This is a very important worldview. This is the secular worldview. Atheism, in and of itself, isn't a worldview, but atheists typically adopt naturalism, which says that the material, physical, natural world is all there is. So the matter, space, time, energy, universe is all there is; there's no God; there's no human soul; there's no life after death. Some would say there is no objective morality. This is the atheistic perspective. This is the secular perspective. I think that it struggles in a lot of ways, Nat. If reason comes from non-reason, if mind comes from non-mind, if there's no mind behind the universe, if there's no rationality to kind of create the universe, I think that the naturalist world struggles with defining and grounding reason. I think it also struggles with grounding and explaining meaning, and purpose, and even morality. So you know, to be straight forward, I think that naturalism fails some of

those fundamental tests. Is there an ultimate meaning to life? It's hard to find fulfillment in an atheistic world, where the final word will be you know, the laws of physics.

NC: Right. Well, in today's world, it seems like there's the rise of what they talk about – “the nones”, right? People who don't have any particular religious affiliation, and maybe this falls in there, maybe it doesn't, but why do you think naturalism and atheism is so popular today?

KS: Yeah. Yeah. I'm glad you asked the question. I suspect that it is popular, because, in one sense, we are broken, fallen people. And in a biblical context, we have a natural tendency to resist God, to suppress the truth in unrighteousness. You know, Nat, my own opinion about this, is that I think that atheism is popular, especially when you're young, but as you get older, and you start to realize that you're not the master of your fate, that you are much more fragile, I think sometimes people start asking deeper questions. I also think, Nat, maybe atheism is popular - “the nones” - because maybe Christians have not done a very good job of kind of communicating what we believe and why we believe it.

NC: Preach that all day long. When I was a full time pastor, I mean, that was constantly the message. I want to know what you believe, but why do you believe it? And allowing a forum for discussion, let's talk about these topics. Let's think about it. Let's argue; let's reason; and let's see where it falls, but let's evaluate it, and let's walk through it. And that's why I tell people, you don't have to be afraid of truth. Don't be afraid of truth – pursue it wherever it leads. And I know you've done that. I've done that. And obviously we know where we've landed with our worldview on truth, but let's keep going in these topics. And then we'll come back to Christianity.

You talk about postmodernism, and we talked a little bit about that at the beginning, but what is postmodernism, and how does it do in the test?

KS: Yeah, if you think about postmodernism, postmodernism is different than pre-modernism, and even modernism. The characteristics of a postmodern mindset - there is no ultimate truth; truth and morality are relativistic. Everybody has their own perspective on these kinds of things. So postmodernism tends to be very critical of even the idea of worldview; tends to be very critical of the idea that people can know and experience any kind of objective truth. So it's deeply characterized by subjectivism, by relativism. And it's very popular today. You know, many people probably have adopted postmodernism without being able to identify it.

NC: And I would almost wonder, are Christians becoming more postmodern? Because it's so common to hear in a counseling session, or just in a discussion in a Bible study, “Well, you know, that's true for you, but it's not true for me.” And I think sometimes they may be just a little bit confused, in how they're defining words, or what, you know, a gray area, versus something that's very clear, but I do feel like postmodernism, or, for sure, relativism, has crept into the Christian worldview.

KS: Well, you're exactly right, Nat, there are religious postmodernists. I write mostly in my book about the atheistic postmodernists, but there have been Christians who have adopted particular elements. You know, again, the idea that everybody has an agenda; nobody has ultimate truth, in and of itself. But again, that worldview is very difficult to hold. It's hard to

know how to make sense of reason and rationality. When we start looking at relativism, it kind of is self-defeating; it collapses upon itself. [Right]. I think that postmodernism, it struggles with any kind of grounding of an objective basis for life.

NC: Right. And it's very clear why it does fail then. Okay. What about pantheistic monism? That was one I'm like, when I first saw that in your book, I was like, I didn't know what that is. So for our listeners, what is it? And let's talk about the test.

KS: Think about pantheistic monism as, broadly, the Eastern world's religions. Here, I'm talking about religions like Hinduism and Buddhism - kind of an Eastern sense. Pantheism - "All is God, and God is All" - so a pantheistic worldview would say, that all reality is God. The monism part is that there's only one ultimate reality, and that ultimate reality is God. So this is really kind of the philosophical side of Hinduism - mysticism. You know, it's very popular now in the West. I mean, lots of people kind of adopt New Age ways of thinking. And of course, the world in which we live has kind of shrunk. I mean, we have many people. I mean, if 50 years ago, if I wanted to talk to a Hindu, or a Muslim, or a Buddhist, I'd have to go overseas. Today, they may be my next door neighbor. I may work with them. Our kids may be on the same soccer team. So this is kind of the pantheistic, philosophical, Hindu worldview.

NC: And how does it do with the test? I mean, because so many, it is very popular, right? So, I mean, there must be something to it.

KS: Well, it is very popular, and I think people like spirituality. They don't necessarily like religion, but they like spirituality. But again, the problem is once you start locking into issues like logic and reason, I mean, the pantheistic view of God would say, that maybe the universe is an illusion, or maybe the universe is an emanation of God. It's hard to have things - like it's hard to justify things like logic and mathematics and science, if the world is kind of illusory. And then of course, it doesn't seem to be able to ground the morality that you critically need in life. So I don't think any of these worldviews have done very well on these tests.

NC: Okay. Well, let's turn to the last one then we want to talk about, is what about the worldview of Islam? I mean, the day where it's over there, that's gone. It is here in the United States, and it is in your backyard. So let's talk about that worldview. And how does it do with the coherence test?

KS: Yeah, interestingly enough, Muslims, not only like to see themselves as their own culture, their own religion, but they like to speak of Islam as its own distinct worldview. It does share some common ground with Jews and Christians, in terms of being Middle Eastern in origin, seeking to tie itself back to Abraham. You know, what's interesting, Pew Research, Nat, recently said that in 2050, there'll be 9 billion people on Planet Earth, if trends continue: 3 billion Christian, 3 billion Muslim, and then 3 billion others of religion and non-religion. I think the interesting thing is that when you begin looking at Islam, Islam does fairly well in the coherence test. Because of course they believe Allah is a rational God - he's the creator behind the world - but in terms of a livable life, in terms of a basic understanding of how you can come close to God, I raise the question, Nat: if Allah is a single solitary God, then who does he love in eternity? Before he created angels and men, is he alone? Does Allah have to create, in order to

get love? So there's some logical inconsistency. You know, it seems to me that Islam is not an easy religion to ultimately make sense of life.

NC: Right, right. Well, and I think your book actually brings a lot of clarity to it, at least from what we can understand. Okay. Well, our time is running out. So let's talk about Christianity again. You kind of give an overview of what a worldview is, but how does it do? I mean, does it really answer life's biggest questions? Is it grounded in objective truth? Help us understand how it does in the coherence test.

KS: I think it scores really highly on these tests, Nat. I mean, you know, when it comes to reason, rationality, mathematics, and logic, the Christian believes all of those things are part of the world, because the world has come from a rational mind. I think when we look at logic and science and math, they make good sense, if there is a perfectly rational God, Who created the world, and then gave us rational minds, and networked us together.

I think also Christianity scores really well in the explanatory power and scope test. I think it gives us a good understanding of the world in which we live, the universe, why the universe seems so designed for life. It also does, I think, an extraordinary job of explaining the human condition. Blaise Pascal, the great French physicist and mathematician - Pascal said, humans seem to be an enigma of greatness and wretchedness. I think Christianity does a really good job of explaining the human condition: the good things we're able to do, as well as our brokenness, and the deep need for fulfillment and satisfaction that we have.

NC: Yeah. I would agree with your conclusion as well. And I'm personally very glad that I decided not to have a blind faith, but rather to have reasons to believe, and have a faith that is life changing, soul saving, but also based on evidence and truth.

Well, as we close out our program, Ken, how do people learn more about you, about your ministry at Reasons to Believe?

KS: Yeah. Thank you, Nat. You know, we have a really nice website at Reasons.org. You can go on there and type in Ken Samples. I've written more than 500 blog articles. There's lots of tapes. And of course my colleagues have done a lot with defending the faith from a scientific point of view. So reasons.org.

NC: We encourage you to go check them out and also pick up a copy of *A World of Difference*. Probably the best place to pick that up is on Amazon, is that right?

KS: Good place to get it, and maybe at a good discount.

NC: Ken, thank you for spending time with myself and our listeners today.

KS: Oh, what a pleasure. Thanks Nat.