

“Smart People: Tough Questions with Dallas Willard”

John Ortberg and Dallas Willard

John Ortberg: Well, good morning, everybody. I'm so glad you're here. I've been looking forward to this weekend a lot, and I want to say a bit to kind of orient us to what is going to be going on this morning. We're in the series *Can Smart People Believe In God?* And we're taking the month of December to think through real important issues. We're going to talk next week...I'll be talking about *Give Me One Good Reason Why I Ought To Believe In God*. But now, today is called "Ask the Smart Man." There were wise men in the Bible, and so we thought we ought to have one of ours at Christmastime. Let me say a little bit... What's that?

Dallas Willard: I'm not in the Bible.

John Ortberg: No, I know you're not in the Bible. Thank you for correcting me. Say a little bit about Dallas Willard and why it matters. He is a professor of philosophy. He is a philosopher at University of Southern California and has been there since 1965. He was the head of the department for a while. He was voted outstanding faculty member by the student senate. He specializes in epistemology...how it is that we know what we know...and philosophy of mind and of logic.

I was looking up in Wikipedia this last week. They have a list of philosophers in America who have influenced kind of American thought life, and Dallas is one of the folks who is listed there. He has a very serious place not just in the church world...he doesn't teach at a religious institution, although I am glad there are folks who do. He is not just a bright guy who works at a church, although I'm glad there are people who work at a church, but Dallas has a place in the world of scholarship and academic life, and the reason I mention that is because what we're talking about this weekend are the most important questions human beings can grapple with...*Is there a God? Can that God be known? What does that mean for human life?*

We can often get so caught up in just day-to-day living that we don't give hard thought, and we live in a culture in a part of the country where a lot of times people don't, or they assume there is not really much to think about or to ask, and so, we've decided to devote this month...churches often do kind of "feel good" stuff in December...but we're just saying, "We're going to roll up our sleeves and give very serious thought. I hope there will be joyful moments as we're talking, but we're actually going to think really seriously, and not in an abstract or theoretical way, but in as an accessible way as possible about what matters most to every human being, including you and me.

So, we've had our whole congregation asking very, *very* challenging, very provocative questions, and I'm very grateful for that. I do want to say a word to everybody here, especially if you're visiting. I hope this will be helpful to people that would put themselves in the believer category, but if you're questioning or skeptical...and I know many, many folks are...that these issues are of ultimate importance. We are so

glad you're here, and we want very much to be the kind of place where anybody feels like "Yeah, I can come here and be myself," and any question can get raised.

A lot of times in churches, there is this problem where people will only talk about what we think we're supposed to believe, and then we're left with real doubts, beliefs, questions, and we'd like to try to not do that. We'd like to try to be a place where we can talk openly and freely about what it is that we really think and believe, so I'm hoping this will be a very open conversation, and one that you'll find yourself thinking about afterwards.

We're asking different questions in all four services, and so, we're going to make all of Dallas' answers available online because we have some people who are sneaking back in for every service, and you don't have to pay extra for that, but we just want to let you know you can access all of that stuff online afterwards. It should be a really good thing.

Just a personal word. I wish everybody who is here could sit in this chair for a while and be alone with Dallas because as remarkable as his mind is...and he has read from Plato on about everything you can read about really important questions, and we'll talk about...his heart is better, and I don't know of anybody who lives with the kind of humility or in the spiritual reality that Dallas Willard does. And I'm so grateful, so would you join with me in welcoming Dallas Willard here?

And Dallas, the opening question came from somebody in our church who actually went to USC, and it was just Stanford 55, USC 21.

Dallas Willard: They should be wise by now.

John Ortberg: Okay, moving along. We're doing different questions in every service, and I've not talked about them ahead of time with Dallas. This is kind of a different direction. I thought we'd just start with this one... For those of us who are fond of creation...cows, goats, lambs, doves...the Old Testament writings teach that God created all of that, but they also detail the preparation and execution of burnt offerings, and this is particularly painful to read, and the purpose is not entirely clear. In a number of areas in the Bible, several if not hundreds of animals are slaughtered for burnt offerings. How does slaughtering and burning animals pay homage to God? And I think one of the deeper questions underneath this is...Is the God of the Bible portrayed as a good Being? How are we to think about this God?

Dallas Willard: Wow! That has a lot of parts to it, John, and one of them is how God is presented in the Old Testament and the New Testament, and to what extent are these concessions to the people He was trying to communicate with. You have to remember that He is redeeming a people out of realistic history, and the people He starts with...if you think of the Jews in the Exodus and Egypt...are the lowest social economic class imaginable.

John Ortberg: Let's just pause there for one moment, Dallas, because I think we've lived in a Christian context, or in a world influenced by Christianity for such a long time, we don't often think about what was life like, what were people like, what was culture and ethics like thousands of year ago. Say a little bit about what was that like.

Dallas Willard: Well, for example, human life was basically worthless, and of course, we see a lot of that today, but the individual did not stand out as something to be cared for. And that is why you have, for example, in the Old Testament corporate responsibility. If a man did something wrong...and it wasn't just

among the Jews, it was the culture generally...his whole family might be killed, and his house made a dung heap. That is one of the ways they described what happened. And they believed in what is called *corporate responsibility*. So, the story of Achan, for example, in the book of Joshua, where he stole the goodly Babylonish garment and some gold, and his family, his sisters, and his cousins, and his aunts were killed because of it, and this is attributed to God. But now, later on, God straightens all this out, and He makes clear that corporate responsibility is not a good thing of which He approves. Well, why didn't He do it at the first? See, that has to do now...

John Ortberg: And why didn't He do it at the first?

Dallas Willard: You're right. This has to do with human development...how human beings can develop in history as well as in individuals. God makes the place for meeting people where they are and leading them onward through generations to something that is better. We probably haven't arrived there yet, so we are still in the process of learning and developing and growing, and that is the good side of what in some of our language we talk about a *progressivism*, and so on.

But you have to have the *conservatism* as well because in progressivism you always conserve what was there already and make it better. You don't simply set it aside, and that is a large topic for discussion here, but God has developed people...individuals, you and me...as well as groups through a process of time.

So, we have the concept of "in the fullness of time, Christ came." Well, why didn't He come back there with Achan and Moses? And the answer is because God is developing through human history a people who freely choose Him and live for what is good in trust in Him only, and that is what is going on in human history.

John Ortberg: So, with the issue of animals in particular, would the idea be then that animal sacrifice was part of the culture and the understanding of that time?

Dallas Willard: It very definitely was, and it has good and bad things in it. For example, you have discussions about God's nostrils in various places in the Old Testament, and about the odor of the burning flesh going up and Him finding that good. Yeah, probably that needs a little finessing, along with His arm. Well, there is something to that, but it doesn't literally mean that. But when you have pulling people out of a situation where they really have very little by way of understanding, then you have to meet them where they are. God's willingness to meet us where we are is crucial to His project of redeeming us.

John Ortberg: So, part of the story, or the progress, in the Bible then is God's meeting people where they were, and then gradually leading them to a better understanding to a place where, like now, we understand that animal sacrifice is not God's ultimate will for His creation?

Dallas Willard: No, it isn't, and we're also apt to overlook the fact that there was no class, if you wish, of clergy and intellectuals. The function of the sacrifices was to provide a way of living for a class of people who were not working the farm, and if that had not happened, there would have been no growth of language, of the Bible as we know it, of Jewish history, and there would have never come the time that that wonderful place where a little town of Bethlehem could show up, and Jesus could come as a baby into a world, and grow up as a human being, and have the effect He had.

John Ortberg: So, it's really a story of God at work in all kinds of ways. He had to work with starting material to lead to a place that the human race needed to get to.

Dallas Willard: That's right, and God is not a snob. He doesn't require that we get it all right before He has anything to do with us. Aren't we lucky? So, that is very important to understand, John, in think about this. There is still a problem about the incredible suffering of animals, and animal sacrifices begin first after human beings sin. Some animals had to give up their skin to cover the nakedness that was revealed when people stopped trusting God. They didn't need clothes before that, and you can think about why that might be true. Personally, I believe it was because they glowed, and when you look at a light bulb you can't see the light bulb, can you. You don't know whether it's naked or not, and that was what Adam and Eve were like. That is why they didn't need any clothes.

And that actually is our destiny. I mentioned in the last service the great old hymn "When we've been there ten thousand years." What are the next words? "Bright shining as the sun." And now, did you know that that is you? Your function is to glow with God. That is why the old preachers say, "GLORY!" You're supposed to glow.

John Ortberg: If I were to say something like that, they would *boo* me here.

Dallas Willard: Oh no, they wouldn't.

John Ortberg: I was thinking as you were talking. You know our oldest daughter got married this year, and we'll often talk about a bride. The standard line that is used is *radiant*. And I read a while ago that even physiologically when people are in love, it will increase the blood flow so that physically there actually is a heightened coloring...that they actually glow. So, you're saying that that is kind of a remnant or a suggestion of what we were made for?

Dallas Willard: That was what we were made for. Yeah. I was watching the faces of the choir as they sang these songs. They were beautiful. That is actually the natural condition of human beings.

John Ortberg: So, we are right now in nothing like our natural condition.

Dallas Willard: We are running on very low wattage...very low. Now, when you have a grandbaby, all of a sudden you see it. Right? This is the kid glow most of the time, and of course, in love the same power comes through. Radiance is a manifestation of energy, and when we are plugged into God...

John Ortberg: Say that one more time.

Dallas Willard: Radiance is a manifestation of energy.

John Ortberg: As we talk a lot about energy, we do live in a culture where people from very different kind of spiritual traditions will want to talk a lot about energy.

Dallas Willard: Actually, it's because no matter what your religion, you recognize the need, and then you bring whatever there is in your religion, whatever religion it is, to supply that. And the only case that goes out is when you have people who are so stuck on being right that they think they don't need to glow. And being right is a tremendous burden to carry. It's a good thing. I'm not in favor of being wrong, but I often tell people that if you're right about everything, it's because you're saved. You're not saved because you're right. You're saved because of the mercy of God in moving into your life.

John Ortberg: Well then, what is the value of being right?

Dallas Willard: Well now, that is a good topic. The value of being right...

John Ortberg: Thank you! That is the first time you've said that all weekend.

Dallas Willard: No...actually, this is really what we need to talk about perhaps more than anything else because you're talking about knowledge, and we talk about faith and all of these things. The value of being right is that it enables you to deal effectively with reality. That is the value of being right. It isn't to impress someone...not even God. God knows anyway what you have, so you want to give up on impressing God.

John Ortberg: Say that one more time.

Dallas Willard: You want to give up on impressing God, and then maybe you'll give up on impressing your neighbors. But being right helps you integrate with reality. That is why it is so important. There are three general teachings about faith and why faith is valuable. One is, well, it impresses God and other people, and another is you feel better. But the real...

John Ortberg: And you reject both of those.

Dallas Willard: Well, there is something to them, except not impressing God. But the real reason that faith is valuable is because when it's true, it enables us to cope with reality. And that is true whether you're flying airplanes, or operating on brains, or whatever it may be. And you know what you want is not just faith, because you can believe stuff and still be wrong. That is where knowledge comes in. It's so important for the Church to reclaim knowledge in our day, John. It's one of the greatest issues facing the Church is whether or not we have knowledge, or do we just have belief.

John Ortberg: Say a word about what is the difference between belief and knowledge.

Dallas Willard: Belief is where you're ready to act as if something were so. You believe something when you're ready to act as if it were so, when the circumstances are appropriate. It's very important to distinguish belief from commitment. Commitment is where you're ready to act as if something is so even though you don't believe it, and you see that in sports all the time.

John Ortberg: Committed to a team?

Dallas Willard: Well, yeah. You're down 100 points, and it's one minute left, and you're still saying, "Beat them! We're going to win!"

John Ortberg: Like when USC played Stanford.

Dallas Willard: That's it. That's it. Make no mistake. The best team won on that one, John, and that was a good thing. But now, we want knowledge because what knowledge does is it puts you in a position where you actually represent things as they are. See, you can believe things as they ain't, but when you know, then things are really like that, and you have that on a good basis. So that, I kind of formally define...you know something when you're able to represent it as it is on an appropriate basis of thought and experience.

John Ortberg: Wow! Let me pause you there for a minute, and I know there are big technical debates among specialists in your field about what knowledge is, and if it's possible, but I think for most of us, a definition like that makes intuitive sense, but here is a place where I think for a lot of people who are thinking about God and faith, here is a big problem. One question put it like this...we were talking about science and the claims of science as opposed to religion, or faith...science draws conclusions based on quantifiable data, and is testable...provable, but religion goes a step beyond science and draws upon faith for its conclusions.

The truth is no one knows what happens after death. Some claim to know, but it's because they have faith, not proof as it is testable. Faith, to me, is not evidence; it is possibility, known in science as a hypothesis. A hypothesis can have strong evidence supporting it, but it is still a hypothesis. I don't deny it; I don't call it proof. Religion would say, "I need to have faith," but now we're back where we started. And I think a lot of people have this sense that science offers testable claims and therefore objectively verifiable statements, whereas religion is speculation, and faith is something short of the knowledge that science brings.

Dallas Willard: Boy, you have unloaded a bunch of big and good things to talk about here, but let me just say you have just stated the quandary of our culture, because everything that really matters in guiding human life falls outside of science.

John Ortberg: Everything that matters in guiding human life. For example?

Dallas Willard: That's right. Go over to the university here and ask for the department of reality, or go over and ask, "Now, where is your department of the good life?" or "Who is a really good person?" or "How do you get to become a really good person?" You will not find any department.

John Ortberg: We don't think of those as being connected to knowledge.

Dallas Willard: That's it. That's it, you see. And so, we are now living in a period where the single most important thing that can happen is for Christian ministers to reclaim knowledge in these areas which science cannot deal with because it doesn't quantify. There is nothing wrong with science except there really are only *sciences*. There is no thing called *science*. There is physics, and there is biology, and you can up the line a ways...

John Ortberg: But I think in most people's minds...When we're in about eighth grade, we learn about the scientific method, that you form a hypothesis. The general assumption is that there is a scientific method, and that that is what establishes claims that can be considered knowledge, and anything that cannot be treated by that method does not get to count as knowledge.

Dallas Willard: Now, that is the point on which the thoughtful Christian will want to go back and read the first of the Ten Commandments, because what we are actually doing if we accept that is we are putting something in the place of God. Really, you'd be hard put to find any scientist who would say that because they know that they do have a method, but the method of one science doesn't work in another science. Method is always tied to subject matter, and in dealing with life and with reality in general, there is no such thing as a scientific method.

Now, what there can be is careful thinking, learning, putting things together in a logical way, and we can

come to knowledge in these areas. And the greatest need today is for Christian ministers...I don't mean to be giving you a job, my brother. I know you're into this already...for Christian ministers to rise to the call to teach knowledge concerning the great questions of life...*What is real? Who is well off?*

See now, Jesus addresses those straight out, and you can't read the Gospels and get what He is saying unless you understand He is answering those questions. He answers those questions. He answers them as a thoughtful, responsible person who isn't just saying, "Now, make a leap of faith!"

See, what we call *leaps of faith* aren't leaps of faith. They're leaps of un-faith. A leap of faith is a leap made on the basis of something you actually believe, but our academic culture has developed in a way that we're challenged to leap without belief, and then to believe without knowledge. Knowledge is what is missing in the manifold discussions of faith and science in our culture. Knowledge is not limited to science. If it were, you'd be really in a bad way, you know? Because nearly every decision you...I mean, try making your decisions by chemistry and physics. You can't do it.

And you count on knowledge... You probably wouldn't even take your automobile to a shop that had out front, "We're lucky at making repairs." Now, actually, you wind up going to some places like that, but you don't look for a shop that says that. You want people to *know*. That is, you want them to be able to represent your car as it is on an appropriate basis of thought and experience. And that is how life runs. And the unfortunate effect, which is largely a reaction to the intellectual wars that have led to the divorce of the university from the Church...which was essential that this happen, so please don't misunderstand me...but those wars have taken a tremendous price which amounts to divorcing all of real life from knowledge.

John Ortberg: Say that again. Divorcing...all life.

Dallas Willard: Divorcing real life from knowledge, and placing it in a domain of something... profession, opinion, and saying you don't really know. Now, of course, once you get out of the shadow of this world of academic skepticism, you know all kinds of things, and there are all kinds of proverbs. Like here is something you know: *a stitch in time saves nine*. Now, you know that, and that is why you act on the basis on that if you're in good shape and responsible. You will act on the basis of that. We have all sorts of proverbs that are true, and we know them to be true, and we guide our lives in terms of them.

John Ortberg: And you're saying they count as knowledge even though they don't fit under the category of science?

Dallas Willard: Absolutely. And the idea that you have to check it out with some of the hard sciences, or even the soft sciences, is ridiculous. No one lives that way, including scientists.

John Ortberg: Okay, so, here is the big question, because I was very struck when I read your book *Knowing Christ Today* about that use of the word *knowledge*, and how often it comes up in the Bible. Can somebody know there is a God?

Dallas Willard: Yes, they can. They can know there is a God. You can't know everything about Him, but you can know that He exists, and you can know certain things about Him.

John Ortberg: You may not be able to compress this answer into our timeframe, but how does someone go about seeking to come to know there is a God?

Dallas Willard: Well, I would rather say that you have to fit the answer to that to the individual, but we can talk generally for just...

John Ortberg: So, it varies from one individual to another.

Dallas Willard: It will. It depends on where they are, and one of the things I often will ask a person who I sense to be sincere is I will say, "Would you *like* for there to be a God? And what kind of God would you like for there to be?" Now, see, that is the first step, and many folks really are not ready to say yes to that because they intuitively sense that if there is a God that means I'm not first, and I'm probably responsible for a lot of things that I don't particularly want to be responsible for. The people who sense that very deeply...that's why...

John Ortberg: So, in other words you're saying if somebody wants very much for there *not* to be a God, probably no evidence or arguments would be able to convince them that there is one.

Dallas Willard: That's right, because in all areas of knowledge, you have to seek knowledge. Knowledge does not jump down your throat, and we're used to that in our ordinary areas, aren't we. If you want to be a medical doctor or a mathematician or a historian, you know that you have to seek knowledge. And the same thing is true of God. Some people sort of have the idea that if there were a God, they would suddenly hear a voice...like maybe the one we hear from the Mormon Tabernacle that is very common, a great, big, deep voice...and say, "Well, that is God." Now, you know, most people if they resist God and they heard something like that, they would head for the psychiatrist, or maybe something in a bottle much closer. So, the knowledge of God is something you have to seek. Now, once you know that, then...

John Ortberg: So, you would say first of all, come to grips with whether or not you want there to be a God, and then become a seeker of the knowledge of God.

Dallas Willard: That's right. And you know, actually for those of us who are Christians, we want to deal with that question too, because as I've heard you say, for example, the real issue is not just will you get into heaven, but will you like it if you get there. Because after all, if you don't really like God, you're not going to be able to avoid Him when you get to heaven. He is going to be like the big deal.

John Ortberg: We'll talk about that, and folks will laugh, but I think for many, many people, some of these basic ideas like heaven, we kind of carry this cartoon picture in our head, and I think God is another one of those where with many people, we have really this cartoon image we will carry around, and have never given serious thought...the way we would give thought to ideas or something like chemistry to who this God might be.

Dallas Willard: And that is where we need help from others, and that is why we need traditions that we can read, accept for refinement...not blindly, but for refinement to think them through...what is God really, really like? Now then, once you have a start on that, then you can begin to talk about evidence...of course, both biblically and not. The primary evidence for God's existence is the existence of the physical world, because you begin to look at it, and you realize this didn't just pop out of nothing.

John Ortberg: The primary evidence for the existence of God is the existence of the physical world.

Dallas Willard: That's right. So, Psalm 19 says, "The heavens declare the glory of God." I heard a bunch

of people here talking about it yesterday with the rainbows and all that sort of thing, but that is primary evidence. Paul revised that in Romans 1.

John Ortberg: And how is that evidence for God...because a lot of people would say, "Really now, science tells us how the universe came into being, and we used to think we needed the Bible for it, but now science has shown us that..."

Dallas Willard: Well, that is the point at which you go back asking questions. You say now, "Would you kindly show me the peer-reviewed journal or the professionally vetted textbook that shows how the universe came into being?" Where is it? See, that is where you have to help people begin to think seriously.

John Ortberg: Doesn't the big bang show how the universe came into being?

Dallas Willard: It doesn't show how the universe came into being. Everything we knew about the universe comes after that, but to show how the universe came into being, you would have to be able to explain how the big bang happened. Now, the effort to explain it in terms of God is an effort in that direction, and of course, there are all kinds of issues that have to be worked through with that, but physical stuff is essentially the kind of thing that comes from something else. So, I encourage people to just...

John Ortberg: Physical stuff is the kind of thing that comes from something else.

Dallas Willard: Yeah, from something else. It may be from Rwanda, but we don't just say, "Well, we have these wonderful things here, and they came from nothing." Of course, if the universe came from nothing, then anything could come from nothing. On the other hand, if it came from nothing, there is no reason why it shouldn't have been a gigantic marshmallow. So, when you start thinking about it...and you do, you have to do that.

Paul, in Romans 1, talks about how the invisible things of God from the beginning of the world are seen from the things that are made, and that is over and over biblically. Now, you don't just accept that as authority. You say, "Well, let's think about how that works." And then of course, science is wonderful. That is a part of what God made the world so we could do, and I personally think that there will be science and technology in heaven.

John Ortberg: Well, we need to take a pause right now for a moment. We just thought this weekend... like, is your brain ready for a rest for a moment? ...that it would just be a good thing to give a pause where you don't have to think quite so hard. So, we're going to take an offering.

Dallas Willard: That'll take the pressure off.

John Ortberg: That's right. [offering] Well, can we welcome Dallas back up?

Dallas Willard: Thank you.

John Ortberg: This is a question that somebody just texted in, and by the way, the 9:30 service has set a new record for texting. But it has to do with both the afterlife as well as the existence of other religions, and it's a kind of thing I think a lot of folks are troubled by. It's a question that often comes up when people are talking to, say, someone who is regarded as a spokesperson for Christianity generally. And it

takes this form: What happens to devout Jews, or does somebody who is a devoted practitioner of a different way? Are Christians...? I'm sorry.

Dallas Willard: Or of our way too. We might well ask, "What happens to a devout Christian?"

John Ortberg: But see, we usually don't think about it that way. I think the general assumption is that to be a Christian means to believe that if you are a Christian, if you adhere to Christian beliefs, then after you die, you're okay, and if you don't, then you're in trouble.

Dallas Willard: Are we really prepared to accept that? It's kind of like everyone speaks with an accent except me. Everyone has a culture except me. I don't have a culture. And we're unconscious of how we relate here, and yet our very own teaching is not that if you're a devout Christian, you're fixed up with God. Our teaching is about...

John Ortberg: Let me just pause for a moment there because I think there is a lot of head scratching going on right now. Teaching is not that if you're a devout Christian you're all fixed up God.

Dallas Willard: Well, I mean, rather than say that, I would just throw it out and ask you all to think about it. Is that enough? What does being a devout Christian mean, and can you define it in a way which it assures you're fixed with God, that allows a lot of devout Christians not to be fixed with God? What fixes you with God? Now, our Scriptures, as Christians, teach us that in order to be with God you have to have a gift of eternal life. But being a devout Christian doesn't necessarily mean that because you find a lot of devout Christians who don't have it.

John Ortberg: In other words, they may be part of a Christian culture or engaged in church life, but they don't actually have an ongoing relationship with God.

Dallas Willard: That's exactly right, and so, that is why we want to say... the way the question is often put, "Well, won't devout Buddhists and devout Hindus, and..." Well, it depends on what you mean by *devout*. Now, I believe that everyone who deserves to be saved will be saved no matter where they are or what they do, and our Scriptures talk about that, and they say things like, "God looks on the heart; man looks on the outward appearance." So, if a person, as a Christian, has defined a pattern of devoutness in terms of their external behavior, profession of faith, baptism, and so forth... that may not do it. In fact, being devout, generally, is a good thing. Generally, it is a humanly defined thing, and we have to get beyond that to a life with God.

So, it's so important to understand that God is not biased about these matters, and He is open and in touch with everyone in the world, and for all who seek Him with all of their heart, and that is defined in terms of coming to love Him, and not just have the right beliefs about Him, but coming to love Him and loving their neighbor as themselves. Now, I'm not in charge of who gets in and who doesn't, and I don't know who will and who won't, but I can tell you how, and that is to align yourself experientially with Jesus Christ and learn to live in this world by the creative power of God, which is eternal living. See, that I think is most helpful, John, is to understand that eternal life is not something that happens after you die as a reward of something you did or something you did not do.

John Ortberg: Say that one more time.

Dallas Willard: Eternal life is not something that happens after you die. There was years ago a little

Presbyterian girl wrote a book called *O Ye Jigs and Juleps*, and she defined eternal life as something that happens to you after you die whether you want it or not. Eternal life begins now, and you folks here have a Calvinist tradition. It's a wonderful one. As you go back and read Calvin, you'll see that he tells you exactly that. There is a little very readable book called *The Golden Book of the Spiritual Life* by John Calvin. It's a reduction in part three of the *Institutes of the Christian Religion*. It's all in terms of eternal life. That is what made Calvinism a world-changing force. It was not their doctrine of predestination and the limited atonement and all those other things; it was the reality of God and His life in the soul of the human being.

John Ortberg: Well, this is a kind of connected question in dealing with different religions. This comes from a Muslim: I believe in God because how creation began cannot be explained in any other way, but I don't believe Jesus is God. Does that belief matter, and what reason or proof is there that Jesus is God?

Dallas Willard: It really does matter. But now, it isn't that God has a list of things that you're supposed to believe, and if you don't check those off, you're not in. It makes a huge difference to your life whether or not you think Jesus was the divine Son of God or not.

John Ortberg: See, I think a lot of people carry a vague notion that what Christianity teaches is there is a checklist of beliefs, and if you can check those all off, God will let you in.

Dallas Willard: It's like the driver's test. If you miss three, you're out. God looks at our heart. What we believe makes a huge difference to our heart. But it isn't that we become righteous by having the correct beliefs. We become righteous by trusting God and living from Him. Now, I believe the best way to do that is to learn about Christ and put your confidence in Him because that way you have the presence of God to you in a way that makes it much more accessible.

So, I would start anyone on Christ. I'd say, "Well, okay, you don't believe He is God, and I understand there are a lot of reasons in your culture why you wouldn't possibly say that, but after all, in Islam there is a very high regard for Jesus." So, I would start there with this person and say, "Follow up on that. Get to know not just what is said in your religion about Jesus, but do your best to find out what He has actually done, what He actually is, and most importantly, what is He doing now." I like to define salvation as participating in the life that God is now living on earth.

John Ortberg: Say that one more time. Salvation is...

Dallas Willard: Is participating in the life that God is now living on earth. And of course, that is just New Testament. Colossians 3, "If you now then be risen with Christ, seek those things that are above and so on." And that is the standard picture of life. Now, you don't have to have it all right to have that, because it is a gift of God, but I'll tell you...

John Ortberg: So really, for anybody who is sincerely searching, they can take a next step towards Him.

Dallas Willard: That is what I would encourage anyone to do. But in dealing with an individual, of course, you want to listen carefully to where they are and try to know how you can help them best. But the general advice I would give to anyone is, "Well, get to know Christ as best you can. Don't lay down a lot of conditions beforehand, and let Him validate Himself to you. And if He doesn't, then that is the end of the story." I mean, we don't have anything better to offer than that. Now, we can keep talking, but the honest person who will simply...

Now, I would say that about any other religion. I mean, if someone wants to talk about the Buddha or any of the people who are representing...well, get to know them.

John Ortberg: You would invite people to go down any one of those and then compare where their living?

Dallas Willard: Absolutely. That's right. Just make the comparison. We don't, as Christians, duck or dodge questions. We're not trying to let anything be anything other than what it is. Just let it be what it is. Be honest.

John Ortberg: I think a lot of people inside the Church often get anxious about that and feel like we need to be careful about don't read the wrong thing, because it might lead us to believe wrongly, but you actually think...

Dallas Willard: Well, you know, again, there are a lot of individual variations. I remember it was a shock to me when I realized it was more important for me to be a good Baptist than a good Christian. Now, a lot of people are really hung up there...a good Catholic, a good whatever...and that keeps them from being open and trusting of the truth and trusting of Jesus.

If there is anything you can say about Him it's that, well, trust Him, put it into the best examination you have and take the outcome. A lot of folks in our churches have not been taught to question, and they've been taught that doubt is a bad thing, and partly that is due to the fact that they think if you doubt then God sort of puts your case on hold at least, and maybe drops you from the subscription. But, you know, doubt is a good thing.

John Ortberg: Doubt is a good thing.

Dallas Willard: It's a good thing when we...this is one of the great, strong things about the sciences when they don't fall into dogmatism is that they encourage you to keep thinking. See, you just have to be sure don't just doubt...

John Ortberg: So, the value of doubt is that it can stimulate you to keep thinking.

Dallas Willard: Well, indeed it can, and really, until you have your answers in response to a doubt, you don't have a bucket to hold your answer in. It's the doubt that gives you a place to receive the answer. Look in your Scriptures and see how much Jesus did by asking questions.

John Ortberg: But see, I think for a lot of people where they get stuck is they feel like the whole issue of God or faith is in the permanent doubt bucket, that nobody knows, nobody knows about life after death, so we just have to put that in a bucket called *doubt* and leave it there. But then those doubts are stimulating more thought.

Dallas Willard: Actually, they become dogmatic doubts, and one of the...

John Ortberg: They become dogmatic doubts.

Dallas Willard: Yeah, if you're going to be a doubter, be sure to doubt your doubts as well as your

beliefs. And we're taught in our culture to think that a person who doubts is essentially smarter than a person who believes, but you can be as dumb as a cabbage and still say, "Why?" But our culture is set up on that.

John Ortberg: That's going to be my favorite clip online. I'll want to go back to that one a lot.

Dallas Willard: Well, maybe not as a cabbage, but...you need lips. But you want to say, "Believe your beliefs and doubt your doubts as well as doubt your beliefs and believe your doubts." See, you go the whole round, and that is what we're...

John Ortberg: I'm sorry, but again, sometimes you just say stuff and I have to think about it a little bit more. Say that one more time because you're not just trying to be funny there. You're making a point about how we need to think.

Dallas Willard: No, no. Really, this is about how knowledge grows, and knowledge grows by not only doubting your beliefs and believing your doubts, but by doubting your doubts and believing your beliefs. And you keep that going, you see. And that involves conversation with others, listening, inquiry of various kinds, going to hear a good preacher preach, going to read a book on atheism by Dawkins or somebody, you know.

Now, not everyone has the time to do that. So, in the fellowship of...that's one reason why we need one another so badly is so there'll be other people who can do what we don't have time to do, and that division of labor really works in the Church. And I know in this fellowship there will be some people who can just go right out and pick up Dawkins' book and read it and develop an opinion on it. Other people wouldn't want to, have no interest, maybe don't have time. So, that is why we have fellowship is to be open, and it is why it's so important for fellowship to be open. And especially for young people to feel encouraged that if they have doubts, that's good, not bad!

John Ortberg: This is a personal question that gets to that issue for you if you're willing to take a run at this one. With all that you have read and thought, where is an area where you would say, "I don't know"?

Dallas Willard: Well, most obvious in terms of this discussion, I don't know the ultimate nature of God, and I don't know why God exists or why He is the way He is. Now, actually, I think at some point you don't have reasons for things, and that is not necessarily bad. It depends. If you say, "I'm broke," and there is no reason, or your car won't run, and there is no reason, that is not good. But at some point you have to say, "I don't understand the mystery of God's nature." I believe I do know that God exists, and I know something about it, but not...

John Ortberg: When you say that, is that different than His character? Like, you would believe that His character is loving?

Dallas Willard: I only understand His character in a very limited way. I do believe that He has manifested His love both in creation, and in history, and in personal life, because really, for the individual, it finally comes down to "What is my interaction with God?"

John Ortberg: And one more question. If somebody were to ask you, "Why Jesus? What is it about Jesus that makes you say, 'When it comes to the big questions like God, this is the One who knows'?"

Dallas Willard: Well, primarily, my experience with Him in comparison with what I know of others. It is a comparative thing, but my experiences, which are of course tied on to study and teaching that others have given me, make me think when you look at the qualities of Jesus and what He has actually done, without starting from doctrines...those come later...you start with His character, often as it's manifest in a world that doesn't really know Him. Because you know it's hard to turn over a stone and not turn up Jesus, in our culture especially.

So, you start with that, and that quality of that compared to others, and then the power of Jesus to help me individually live there, to trust love. It's one thing to talk about it, but it's another to really trust love and think that that's a good thing.

John Ortberg: Well, I hate to do this, but we have to come to an end for this service. And Dallas has been giving a blessing to folks at each one of the services, and that is a wonderful gift to give. Would you do that now, Dallas, for everybody who is here?

Dallas Willard: Could we stand together? Almighty Lord, who has given us these wonderful songs and verses this time of life to think about You with, just to think about, won't You enter our hearts and minds now, every person here, every individual, and by the action and presence of Your loving Spirit, give light and love and guidance to everything we are and that we do, today and forever, Amen.