

# KNOWLEDGE OF CHRIST IN TODAY'S WORLD

*A Series of Eight Talks by Dallas Willard  
June 26-28, 2003*

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## SESSION ONE: How People Perish for Lack of Knowledge.

"My people are destroyed for lack of knowledge. Because you have rejected knowledge, I also will reject you from being my priests. Since you have forgotten the law of your God, I also will forget your children." (Hosea 4:6)

"Daniel, conceal these words and seal up the book until the end time; many will travel back and forth and knowledge will explode." (Daniel 12:4)

"But grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ." (II Peter 3:18)

1. People are destroyed for lack of knowledge because knowledge provides truth about reality, and they must deal with reality. If they do not have knowledge and do not act on the basis of truth reality will destroy them.
2. What we believe matters because belief governs action. False beliefs damage or destroy our lives.
3. Distinguish belief, truth, knowledge and commitment.
  - Knowledge is capacity to represent things as they are, and on an appropriate basis of thought and experience.
  - Truth: A thought or statement is true provided that what it is about **is** as it is represented in the thought or statement.
  - The 'idols' of Daedalus (Plato's Meno). Mere belief is unstable, and behavior goes with it.
4. The "*double minded man is unstable in all his ways.*" (James 1:8 & 4:8) Acting on contradictory beliefs; e.g., the reality of God and His Kingdom against the 'cosmos' as the sole reality.
5. **The four great questions of life.**
  1. What is Reality?
  2. Who is well-off? What is Blessedness? The Good Life?
  3. Who is a really good person?
  4. How does one become a really good person?(Compare Kant's questions.)
6. It is these large questions that determine direction or orientation in life: determine what our life is about.
7. The inevitability of "World View"—Orientation is a biological necessity.
8. The currently dominant World View and our "educational" system:
  - "Naturalism"
  - It is an inherently irrationalist system:
    - ◆ The disappearance of Logic—a word from Screwtape
  - The politics of contempt.
9. The gospel of Jesus in this context. "*Repent, for the kingdom of the heavens is now available to you.*" (Matt. 4:17)
10. Considering the competition to him on the four questions.
  - "Where shall we go?"

## SESSION TWO: Knowledge of God Today. How it is Possible.

*"For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who suppress the truth in unrighteousness, because that which is known about God is evident among them; for God made it evident to them. For since the creation of the world His invisible attributes, His eternal power and divine nature, have been clearly seen, being understood through what has been made, so that they are without excuse. For even though they knew God, they did not glorify Him as God, or give thanks, but they became futile in their speculations, and their foolish hearts were darkened. Professing to be wise, they became fools."* (Romans 1:18-22)

See also Acts 14:15-17; 17:22-31; Nehemiah 9:6-10

1. The three stages of theistic evidence:
  - A. Uncaused cause, a self-sufficing being.
    - ◆ The impossibility of an infinite sequences of cause of this event.
  - B. It's character as mind:
    - ◆ Self-initiation. Not causally determined.
    - ◆ "Design" capacity. Our experiential data.
    - ◆ The follies of mere "logical possibility"
      - And the anthropic principle.
  - C. "Interventions." The Covenant-making Creator.
    - ◆ Psalm 8—"What are human beings that you pay attention to them?"
    - ◆ The presence of the kingdom now. Jesus' gospel.
    - ◆ "Religious experience" not solely a matter of "mystical states."
2. Why God is a hidden God. (Isaiah 45:15; Job 23:9; Jeremiah 29:13; Matt. 6:32)
  - What would life be like if he were not?
  - What would make human history, life on earth, a good thing?
  - A community of morally glorious persons in which God dwells eternally?
  - How to be "safe" in this world.
3. Room to choose. Bertrand Russell and Norwood Hansen.
  - Why "more evidence" would not help.
  - The question is: What do you want? What would you prefer to be devoted to?
  - To overwhelm your wants would only yield "a man convinced against his will."  
—Screwtape again.
4. "Hearing God" today. — Seeking and finding.
  - Accepting the evidence because we want it to be so.
    - ◆ Spirit wants to be wanted.
    - ◆ This does not give the evidence validity, but it allows it to "carry weight" with "seekers."

### SESSION THREE: Understanding the Opposition to Knowledge of Christ in Today's World.

*"Yet we do speak wisdom among those who are mature; a wisdom, however, not of this age, nor of the rulers of this age, who are passing away; but we speak God's wisdom, which God predestined before the ages to our glory; the wisdom which none of the rulers of this age has understood; for if they had understood it, they would not have crucified the Lord of glory." 1 Corinthians 2:6-8*

1. "Godless" knowledge as the knowledge of today.
  - The real cultural significance of separation of "church" and state.
  - Man entirely on his own so far as what really matters counts. The case of abortion as illustration.
  - Autonomy and happiness as the only recognized standard.
    - ◆ The ideology of "pleasure" and "pain."
2. The three stories about reality. —The only ones with any appeal.
  - A. The Theistic story.
  - B. The Big Bang story.
  - C. The 'New Age' story.
3. What "science" is, and its human destiny. Human mastery is the overriding aim. "Knowledge is power." White and black magic.
4. How this becomes "Naturalism." The hopelessly narrow limits of Empiricist "experience." Nothing of significance survives it.
5. "Naturalism" arises out of Empiricism as Science becomes more sophisticated. The supremacy of "hypothesis" or "theory." Baconian and Galilean "science." "Hypotheses" as knowledge.
6. Naturalism still means making the "visible" world ultimate.
7. The elimination of Spirit from reality—"Spirituality" is not Spirit as Biblically recognized in God and humans.
8. "Spirit" means "unbodily personal power." This is totally rejected by naturalism and "science."
9. How "godless knowledge" has mastered the church "visible" through the educational system.
10. "Constructionism," explaining Jesus. Avoiding Lewis' dilemma. Realism and Revelation.

## SESSION FOUR: The Bible as Indispensable Source of Knowledge.

*"From childhood you have known the sacred writings which are able to give you the wisdom that leads to salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus. All scripture is inspired by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, for training in righteousness; that the man of God may be adequate, equipped for every good work." (II Timothy 3:15-17)*

*"This book of the law shall not depart from your mouth, but you shall meditate on it day and night, so that you may be careful to do according to all that is written in it; for then you will make your way prosperous, and then you will have success." (Joshua 1:8)*

1. The human burden: To find knowledge by which to live—to find an adequate basis for life in knowledge.
2. The three sources of knowledge—of information as well as misinformation.
  - Authority, thinking ("reason") and experience.
    - Watts on Logic.
3. These are intended to be used interactively. Mutually corrective.
  - What happens when not so used? Can you say "madness"?
  - This interaction makes room for responsibility and interdependence.
    - ◆ Excessive individualism kills.
4. Since there is a personal God of love, it is natural that:
  - He would speak. "He is there and he is not silent."
  - In a permanent form (written in a human tradition, but escaping human control).
  - Generally accessible—non-ethnically formulated.
  - That his book would have the form our Bible takes.
  - That we would have no "originals."
  - That those who wish to dismiss it can find a reason.
5. How the Bible is to be savingly used.
  - With humility and openness
    - ◆ With regard to our own opinions and our traditions.
    - ◆ With regard to the opinions of others.
    - ◆ With intelligence.
6. We can destroy ourselves with the Bible.
  - John 5:39-47—a careful and thorough reading.
  - II Peter 3:16
  - "When a jackass looks into a mirror, he will not see an apostle looking out."
7. The present case of what the Gospel is.—"Sin management," or life from above in the kingdom of the heavens now.

SESSION FIVE: Reason in Human Life and Religion.  
How Education Fails. The Redemption of Reason.

*"I urge you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies a living and holy sacrifice, well-pleasing to God, which is the rational thing to do. And do not be conformed to this age, but be transformed by the renovation of your mind, that you may prove what the will of God is—that which is good and well-pleasing and perfect."* (Romans 12:1-2)

1. Reason is the mental power to trace out connections in reality. It indicates the human destiny appointed by God.
2. It is so powerful that it leads naturally to self-deification. *"Now nothing which they purpose to do will be impossible for them."* (Genesis 11:6)
3. Pride stands in opposition to humility of mind, so necessary for human relations.
4. Reason is limited by the necessity of having premises to work from, the difficulty of correctness in inferences, the willingness to know truth that contradicts our desires.
5. Wesley's comments on what reason cannot do.
  - Give a clear and satisfactory evidence of the invisible world.
  - Produce hope for life eternal and everlasting.
  - Produce the love of God, love of neighbor, virtue, or happiness.  
(See his sermon: "The Case of Reason Considered.")
6. These inabilities are not just due to the nature of reason, but to how it is used by human beings who are distorted by evil.
7. How "education" as a strictly human enterprise fails.
  - It cannot get the true premises to work from and is corrupted by desire.
  - Plato (The Republic)
  - Rousseau (Emile) and Schiller (Aesthetic Education of Man)
  - Current Scene
8. Some primary issues:
  - What is the human being for? —The "Nothing" answer of today.
    - ◆ To love God and enjoy Him forever?
  - What is wrong with the human being? Sin.
9. "Education" is, no doubt, the solution, but which Education?
10. The Redemption of Reason through—
  - Making love of truth and faithfulness to logic:
    - ◆ Part of one's moral identity—what I must have to be a good person.
    - ◆ Supported by faith in the God of truth.
11. The reasonable person is the one who is devoted to truth, and to finding it and living in it by all available means.
12. Only confidence in God makes this possible. He is the God of truth. Truth sets his people apart. (John 17:17)

SESSION SIX: Moral Goodness and the Degradation of Morality by Desire and Human Supremacy.  
What Happened to Moral Theory in the 20th Century.

"Owe nothing to anyone except to love one another; for he who loves his neighbor has fulfilled the law."  
(Romans 13:8)

"...that the requirements of the law might be fulfilled in us, who do not walk according to the flesh, but according to the Spirit." (Romans 8:4)

1. Who the morally good person is: One who is intent upon promoting human goods (including good humans) that are effectively in one's reach, in their relative degrees of importance. A morally evil person is: One intent upon destroying human goods. It's really very simple. Every child knows.
2. Some cases of human goods: physical necessities, health, knowledge, varieties of experience, loving family relationships, social openness and stability, etc. etc.
  - On "leaving the world a better place." "Contributing."
3. The basic moral conflict in human life: Between what we want and what we know we ought to do to further the good.
  - Some historical "solutions":
    1. Aristotle—Good habits
    2. Hobbes—Fear
    3. Butler—Conscience
4. One must know that reality is on the side of the "ought," of the demand to do what we do not want to do. "Ought" is always derived from an "Is." Hume's foolishness.
5. Morality is invariably degraded by human supremacy, which means the supremacy of human desire—the contemporary outlook, but as old as humanity. "*Fleshly lusts which war against the soul.*" (I Peter 2:11) The "three things that are in the world": "*the lust of the flesh and the lust of the eyes and the pride of life.*" (I John 2:16)
6. What it means to say that the fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom. (Prov. 1:7)  
You cannot start somewhere else and get to wisdom, to knowledge of how to live.
7. Compared to Luke 14:26: "*If anyone comes to me, and does not hate his own father and mother and wife and children and brothers and sisters, yes, and even his own life, he cannot be my disciple. Whoever does not carry his own cross and come after me cannot be my disciple.*"  
(Compare Matt. 6:33)
8. "Ought" can only be derived from an "Is." The "is" of God's kingdom, in which I am perfectly safe and have no reason to do anything other than what is right. Compare "Business is business," etc.
9. What happened to moral theory in the 20th Century.
  - The moral consensus of 1880-1900.
  - The surrender of the spiritual nature of man.
  - Moral theory without a moral subject matter.

SESSION SEVEN: Life and Spiritual Life: The Spiritual and the Non-spiritual Person.  
Spiritual Life from Christ Makes Moral Goodness Easy.

1. What is life? Self-initiating, self-sustaining, self-directing activity.
2. Only God and his Son and Spirit have life in the full sense. (John 5:26) *"In him was life, and that life was the light of men."* (John 1:4) He gives life to all things. (I Timothy 6:13, 19)
3. "Flesh" is the kind of activity that does not immediately depend upon God's action. "Spiritual" life is life that is intermingled with and dependent upon God's action "with us."
4. The spiritual person is a person who is leading a life that is largely intermingled with and dependent upon the action of God and his kingdom. The non-spiritual person is one who is leading a life independent of God's action with them.
5. A look at Philippians 3:3-7—"good" flesh—I Corinthians 3:1-4, and Galatians 5:16-21; and why the "mind of the flesh" is death. (Romans 8:6)
6. Who you are and why you are here: You are an unceasing spiritual being with an eternal destiny in God's great universe.
7. No death. (John 8:51-53 and II Timothy 1:10)
8. All things work together for good. For who? (Romans 8:28)
9. God's intent for each of us is that we should become the kind of person whom he can empower to do whatever we want.
10. That is what I Corinthians 13 and II Peter 1:1-11 etc. are about.
11. A survey of the "Sermon on the Mount." (Matt. 5-7) The easy way to life—"My yoke is easy, my burden is light." (Matt. 11:28-30)
12. This elevates morality to its proper level—not just "I didn't do anything wrong," but the positive reality of the kingdom person, inside and out.
13. The secret to "renovation of the heart." Not will power but pervasive God power.



## SESSION EIGHT: The Mission of Christ's People on Earth. And Beyond. Being Ready for Forever.

*"I have been given say over all things in heaven and on earth. So as you go, make disciples to me from all kinds of people, submerge them in Trinitarian reality, and teach them to do every-thing I commanded you. And look, I am always with you, until the job is done."* (Matt. 28:18-20)

*"In Jesus Christ the whole building, being fitted together, is growing into a holy temple in the Lord; in whom you also are being built together into a dwelling of God in the Spirit.... In order that the manifold wisdom of God might now be made known through the church to the rulers and the authorities in the heavenly places."* (Ephesians 2:21-22 and 3:10)

*"And there shall no longer be any night; and they shall not have need of the light of a lamp nor the light of the sun, because the Lord God shall illumine them; and they shall reign forever and forever."* (Revelation 22:5)

1. "Christians" but not "Disciples."—The contemporary reality, but never the intention of Jesus and his Father.
2. A disciple/apprentice of Jesus is anyone who is learning from him how to lead their life as he would lead their life if he were they.
3. One becomes a disciple by realizing that apprenticeship to Jesus is the greatest opportunity in human life.
  - "Counting the cost."
  - The "Pearl of great price" and the field with the treasure (Matt 13:44-46)
4. The places of discipleship: Where you are. Home and work, for the most part.
5. The three dimensions of discipleship.
  - Obedience to his commands.
  - Doing what he wants in all areas of life not commanded.
  - Learning to act in his power.
6. Good news for leaders of society, government and business.
7. How our local congregations could proceed to break the grip of non-disciple (consumer) Christianity.
  - Simply carry out the "Great Commission."
  - Announce that they teach people to do everything Jesus said.
  - Hold specific training sessions.
8. "When you've been there ten thousand years." What will you be doing 400 years from now?
9. *"The earth will be filled WITH THE KNOWLEDGE of the glory of the Lord, as the waters cover the sea."* (Habakkuk 2:14)

