

# Can Smart People Believe in God?

This week, Phil highlighted that there is a common thought, that 'faith' is a posture that is diametrically opposed to reason and knowledge. However, that is probably what some would refer to as "blind faith", when we adopt a position or enter into a transaction, without checking out the veracity of claims behind it. If there is no "knowledge" or reason involved, then Christians (and, indeed, anyone who adopts any religious belief) are gullible. In his sermon, Phil referred to the Dallas Willard book, *Knowing Christ Today. Why We Can Trust Spiritual Knowledge*.<sup>1</sup> In the preface to his book, Willard quotes CS Lewis:

"God has room for people with very little sense, but He wants everyone to use what sense they have. The proper motto is not 'Be good, sweet maid, and let who can be clever,' but 'Be good, sweet maid, and don't forget that this involves being as clever as you can.' God is no fonder of intellectual slackers than of any other slackers. If you are thinking of becoming a Christian, I warn you you are embarking on something which is going to take the whole of you, brains and all.... One reason why it needs no special education to be a Christian is that Christianity is an education itself." (From *Mere Christianity*)

**GETTING STARTED:** What do you think of this comment by CS Lewis? Why do you think the *Shema* refers not only to loving God with heart and soul, but also with our minds?

## READ: 1 CORINTHIANS 1:18-31

🗨️ What did you notice/ what things stood out, as you just read the passage?

🗨️ What things did you take away from the sermon this week?

❗ In this passage, the apostle Paul highlighted that a lot of the Corinthian Christians weren't the most wise, wealthy, influential or powerful people in their city. Paul's writing though indicates that he was a deep thinker and able to argue a point. Although he had trained under the Jewish scholar, Gamaliel, he was able to engage in rhetoric / argument similar to Greek philosophers and capably engage in conversation with people of different cultural backgrounds. Yet, the power of his argument was not grounded in his verbal ability, but rather, in his conviction in his beliefs about the person and work of Christ. (2 Tim 1:12) He knew, full well, that these beliefs were diametrically opposed to conventional wisdom, so would not make sense to many people. Käsemann comments: "The cross always remains scandal and foolishness for Jew and Gentile, inasmuch as it exposes man's illusion that he can transcend himself and effect his own salvation, that he can all by himself maintain his own strength, his own wisdom, his own piety and his own self-praise even towards God. In the light of the cross God shows all this, and ourselves as well, to be foolish, vain and godless. For everyone is foolish, vain and godless who wants to do, without God and contrary to God, what only God ... can do.... Only the creator can be the creature's salvation, not his own works."<sup>2</sup>

🗨️ In Is 64 we read: "Since ancient times no one has heard, no ear has perceived, no eye has seen any God besides you, who acts on behalf of those who wait for him. ... All of us have become like one who is unclean, and all our righteous acts are like filthy rags". In Jer 17:14 we read "you alone can save". We would all like to be able to be self-sufficient and to save ourselves, but that is not how faith works. When was the last time you were in a situation where you had to ask other people to help you? How did you feel about having to ask other people to help you?

🗨️ How do you feel about being totally reliant on the grace and mercy of God to save you? Why is this an impediment to people adopting faith?

❗ Phil talked about there being universal questions that people have around 'right vs wrong', the source of human knowledge, how we find meaning in life, why evil exists and justice. He also talked about how, when we go into other cultures, we find that other people have different worldviews, values and beliefs. These underlying things, flow out in behaviours that people engage in. One writer notes that you can learn a lot about worldview, values and beliefs of a culture, by asking parents about their parenting.

<sup>1</sup> <https://dwillard.org/books/knowning-christ-today>

<sup>2</sup> E. Käsemann, "The Saving Significance of the Death of Jesus in Paul," in idem, *Perspectives on Paul* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1971), pp. 32–59, here pp. 40f. (with apologies for the non-inclusive language in this quotation).

☞ If you are a parent or grandparent (or have a parent) or are a school teacher – what are the things that people in Australia, normally discipline children over? Think of one issue (eg bullying, hitting each other, name calling, etc). What do these things say about our common values?

☞ If you take that issue and the common value that you noted above – what does Scripture say about how we should value and treat people? In what way does Scripture inform our cultural norms?

ⓘ Phil talked about the logical fallacy of ‘tolerance’. There is a certain amount of ‘labelling’ that might occur if/ when we claim to have spiritual truth or have a viewpoint regarding morality, where we can be seen to be ‘arrogant’ or ‘intolerant’. Alternatively, we might be told that a particular idea is just our viewpoint or a particular preference. At the same time, societies have particular views around what is ‘right’ vs ‘wrong’ and our legal framework highlights that we do not tolerate certain behaviours. Even our society prescribes a moral framework and punishes infringements.

☞ Euthanasia is a current issue, where there is a difference of opinion between people, and even between Christians, re whether we should engage in this practice. From a legal perspective, we are not allowed to take the life of another human being. What are the underlying teachings from Scripture – both from the creation narrative and from Old Testament law – that challenge this practice? What parts of Scripture could be used to justify this practice?

ⓘ Willard poses four questions that highlight people’s worldview. The answers to these questions have real implications for the way we live and the decisions that we make.

1. What is real?
2. What is the good life?
3. What is a good person?
4. How do you genuinely become a good person?

☞ Phil talked about the Parable of the Rich Fool (Luke 12:13-21) as the signature story, of a person who sees reality only in terms of accumulating material goods and living a life of eating and drinking. What is the problem with seeing that there is nothing beyond the physical reality?

☞ In Douglas Adam’s book *The Hitchhiker’s Guide to the Galaxy*, the answer given for the ‘meaning of life, the universe and everything’ was ‘42’. By contrast, the Westminster Shorter Catechism states that the Chief end of man is to glorify him forever. Both give an answer to the meaning of life – but either or both of these might not make much sense to other people. What words would you use, to tell someone else, about what you think is the meaning of life?

☞ I have worked with a number of people who have commented that they are ‘good people’. In the movie, *Made in Dagenham*, there is a line where the husband comments to his wife “I like a drink, but I ain’t out on the beer every night or (sleeping with) other women, or... ‘Ere, I’ve never once raised me hand to you. Ever. Or the kids.” To which his wife replied, “You’re a saint now, is that what you’re tellin’ me, Eddie? You’re a bleedin’ saint? ‘Cause you give us an even break?”<sup>3</sup> It highlights that even people in the same family can have different standards of what it means to be ‘good’. What is the difference, for you, between a person being a ‘good’ vs a ‘bad’ person?

☞ Phil commented that many people would see ‘education’ as the means by which people become ‘good’ people. Others would see that having a mentor as a way of getting better. Think about the following words from Eph 4:13 “*until we all reach unity in the faith and in the knowledge of the Son of God and become mature, attaining to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ.*” In what way does Christ set the standard of what it is, for us to become ‘good people’?

ⓘ Phil highlighted:

1. What is real: God is at the centre, life is eternal, Jesus Christ came so we can have a relationship with God, it affects who we are, and it means that people matter
2. What is the good life? The sermon on the mount shows us that the ‘good life’ is about being ‘blessed’, by knowing God and walking in his ways
3. What is a good person? This is a person whose life is pervaded by love, whose life is transformed and who loves others (1 Jn 4)
4. How can we become good people? By being disciples of Christ.

<sup>3</sup> <https://www.imdb.com/title/tt1371155/characters/nm1020089>