

How does the truth set us free?

You shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free. (Jn 8:32)

The great need of the hour is to understand that it is truth that makes us free and not an experience. Truth is derided as mere 'head-knowledge' but such is far from the case. Spiritual experiences do not make us grow (compare the Corinthians, the weakest of churches but the most gifted) but if false, then such experiences will cause great damage. It is God's truth that changes us. How?

1. The truth is Christ. (Jn 1:17, 14:6, 17:17; Eph 4:21) When we receive the truth we receive Christ. The truth is a reflection of his glory in rational terms. We grow by learning more of Christ and apprehending him in his fulness by the Spirit. Thus sanctification is by truth (Jn 17:17, 19).

2. Truth is mediated by the Holy Spirit. (Jn 16:13) He inspired the Bible writers to put down God's own infallible words, and he never works apart from this word (1 Jn 5:6). Any supposed manifestation of the Spirit in experiences which ignores, debases or downplays the Bible is certainly not of God's Spirit. God's truth always comes by spiritual revelation in the heart, not by human understanding, and this revelation is by the Spirit (Eph 1:18, 5:9; Ps 119:18; 1 Pt 1:22). Learning does not guarantee truth (2 Tim 3:7).

3. Truth is the knowledge of God. (Ps 119:160) It is God's words.

4. Truth must be eaten. (Jer 15:16) It is not enough to merely read the truth or even memorise it, truth must be drawn into the soul and ingested by the inner man so that it becomes part of him. This is more than knowing it, it is assimilating it into the character, into the heart. Judas knew truth from Jesus' own lips for three years but it was never assimilated and did him no good.

5. Truth results in joy. (Jer 15:16) Those who truly receive the truth will rejoice in it and be excited by it in their heart.

6. Truth must be understood as doctrine. (Ps 25:5). The mind must grasp the truth, not as verses to be quoted parrot fashion but as propositions to be trusted in. The truth must be understood as precepts to live by, as a foundation to be built upon, as water for the thirsty and as food for the hungry. This is not merely knowing it as someone may know Shakespeare's works intellectually, but like a doctor who knows the body and is able to perform surgical operations to make people well. Truth is instruction for life.

7. Truth is made practical in suffering. (Acts 14:22) God brings us into difficulties in order to make the truth that we know real to us. Doctrine becomes practical when we apply it in trials. Our afflictions become platforms for the truth to be effective for us in our time of need. Truth as knowledge then becomes truth believed in and a real blessing to our souls. Truth becomes a promise of grace to be prayed for and believed in; thus we grow (Eph 4:15).

Thus in a time of crisis, when some past emotional experience will do us no good, the truth comes to our rescue and sets us free by focusing us upon God and strengthening our faith for grace to help in time of need (Heb 4:16).

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