

# Revelation Is Not Enough

by A.W. Tozer

---

*A.W. Tozer's sermon argues that mere intellectual understanding of scripture is inadequate without the transformative illumination of the Holy Spirit through obedience to God's will.*

**Scripture:** Psalm 119:105, Isaiah 6:9, Matthew 11:25-27, John 7:17, John 14:21, Romans 10:17, 1 Corinthians 2:4-5, Ephesians 1:17-18, 2 Timothy 3:16-17, 1 John 1:7

**Topics:** "Illumination", "Obedience to God's Will"

---

## Description

A.W. Tozer emphasizes that mere revelation of truth is insufficient without the illumination of the Holy Spirit. He critiques the belief that intellectual understanding of scripture equates to spiritual truth, arguing that true knowledge of God requires a willing heart to obey His will. Tozer highlights the distinction between evangelical rationalists, who rely solely on the text, and evangelical mystics, who seek a deeper spiritual connection. He asserts that only through obedience and a prepared heart can one truly know the soul of truth, which leads to genuine transformation and revival in the believer's life.

---

## Transcript

THE key, the crux of this whole issue, is in verse 17. If any man is willing to do God's will, he shall know.

People marvelled at our Lord as He taught. They asked: "How knoweth this man letters having never learned?" 'How does He know learning', in other words, 'never having studied in the regular schools?' In those days they had no schools as we know them; a rabbi taught little groups of students. Our Lord evidently never attended a rabbinical school so they asked: 'How does He get His wonderful doctrine, since He has never been to the schools of the rabbis?'

Now, this question tells us a good deal about these people. It tells us that they held truth to be intellectual merely, capable of being reduced to a code. To know truth it was necessary only to learn the code.

Most of them had no books of their own -- they learned by memorizing. That was their conception of truth. I gather this not only from verse 17 but from the whole Gospel of John. To these people truth was an intellectual thing -- just as we know that two times two is four.

That is truth, but it is an intellectual truth only. They reduced divine truth to that status. They knew the laws: "Thou shalt have no other gods before me.... Remember the sabbath day, to keep it holy.... Thou shalt not ...". But to them there was no mysterious depth in truth, nothing beneath and nothing beyond the

obvious fact. It was exactly here that they parted company with our Saviour, for our Lord Jesus constantly taught the beyond and the beneath.

These people believed that the words of truth were the truth. And here is a basic misunderstanding of Christian theology with a moral and spiritual consequence that is vastly important. They believed that if you had the words of truth, if you could repeat the code of truth, you had the truth. That if you lived by the word of truth you lived in the truth.

The Saviour tried to correct this inadequate view. He showed them the heavenly quality of His message. He said: 'My doctrine is not Mine -- I am [18/19] not a rabbi teaching doctrine that you can memorize and repeat. What I am giving you is not that kind of doctrine at all.'

He had said previously: 'I say nothing for Myself -- what I see the Father do, that I do, and what the Father speaks, that I speak. What I have seen yonder I tell you about. I am a transparent medium through which the truth is being spoken. You believe that the way to truth is to go to a rabbi and learn it. That's not the truth, that approach to truth is inadequate.'

Here, it seems to me, is the weakness in modern Christianity. The battle line, the warfare today, is not necessarily between the fundamentalist and the liberal. There is a difference between them, of course. The fundamentalist says God made the heaven and the earth. The liberal says: 'Well, that's a poetic way of stating it; actually it came up by evolution.' The fundamentalist says Jesus Christ was the very Son of God. The liberal says: 'Well, He certainly was a wonderful man and He is the Master, but I don't quite know about His deity.' So there is a division, but I don't think the warfare is on these matters any more.

The battle has shifted to another more important field. The warfare, the dividing line today, is between evangelical rationalists and evangelical mystics. I will explain what I mean.

There is today an evangelical rationalism which is the same as these Jews had. They said the truth is in the word, and if you want to know truth, go to the rabbi and learn the word. If you get the word, you have got the truth. That is evangelical rationalism and we have that today in fundamental circles. 'If you learn the text you've got the truth.'

This evangelical rationalism will kill the truth just as quickly as liberalism will, though in more subtle way. The liberal stands over there and says: 'I don't believe your inspired Bible; I don't believe your deified Christ. I believe the Bibles in a way; it is the record of the high points of great men and I believe in a certain mystic communion with the universe and it is all very wonderful, but I don't believe as you do.'

You can easily spot this man -- train your glasses on him and there he stands. You can tell he is on the other side, for he wears the uniform of the other side.

But your evangelical rationalist wears our uniform. He comes in wearing our uniform and says what the Pharisees, the worst enemies Jesus had while He was on earth, said: 'Well, truth is truth, and if you believe the truth you've got it.'

Such see no beyond and no mystic depth, no mysterious heights, nothing supernatural or divine. They see only: "I believe in God the Father Almighty, Maker of heaven and earth: and in Jesus Christ His only Son, our Lord." They have the text and the code and the creed, and to them that is the truth. So they pass it on to others. The result is we are dying spiritually.

Now, what about the evangelical mystic? I don't really like the word 'mystic' because you think of a fellow with long hair and a little goatee who acts dreamy and strange. Maybe it is not a good word at all, but I am talking about the spiritual side of things -- that the truth is more than the text. There is something that you've got to get through to. The truth is more than the code. There is a heart beating in the middle of the code and you've got to get there.

Now the question is simply this: Is the body of Christian truth enough? Or does truth have a soul as well as a body? The evangelical rationalist says that all of that talk about the soul of truth is poetic nonsense. The body of truth is all you need; if you believe the body of truth you are on your way to heaven and you can't backslide and everything will be alright and you will get a crown in the last day.

Now otherwise stated: Is revelation enough or must there be illumination? Is this Bible an inspired book? Is it a revealed book? Of course you and I believe that it is a revelation, that God spoke all these words and holy men spoke as they were moved by the Holy Ghost.

I believe that this Bible is a living book, that God has given it to us and that we dare not add to it or take away from it. It is revelation. But revelation is not enough. There must be illumination before revelation can get to your soul. It isn't enough that I hold an inspired book in my hands. I must have an inspired heart. There is the difference.

You can memorize all the texts of the Bible -- and I believe in memorizing -- but when you are through you've got nothing but the body. There is the soul of truth as well as the body. There is a divine inward illumination the Holy Ghost must give us or we don't know what truth means.

Conversion is a miraculous act of God by the Holy Ghost; it must be wrought in the spirit. The body of truth is not enough; there must be an inward illumination.

Christ's conflict was with the theological rationalist. It revealed itself in the Sermon on the Mount and the whole Book of John. Just as Colossians argues against Manichaeism and Galatians argues against Jewish legalism, so the Book of John is a long, inspired, passionately outpoured book trying to save us from evangelical rationalism, the doctrine [19/20] that says the text is enough. Textualism is as deadly as liberalism.

Now revelation, I repeat, can't save. Revelation is the ground upon which we stand. Revelation tells us what to believe. It is the Book of God and I stand for it with all my heart; but there must be, before I can be saved, illumination, penitence, renewal, inward deliverance.

I have no doubt that many people are eased into the kingdom. They are jockeyed into believing in the text, and they do; but they have never been illuminated by the Holy Ghost. They have never been renewed in their hearts. They never get into the kingdom at all.

Now, there is a secret in divine truth altogether hidden from the unprepared soul. This is where we stand in the terrible day in which we live. Christianity is not something you just reach up and grab. There must be a preparation of the mind, a preparation of the life and a preparation of the inner man before we can savingly believe in Jesus Christ.

Somebody asks: Is it possible to hear the truth and not understand the truth? Listen to Isaiah: "Hear ye indeed, but understand not, and see ye indeed, but perceive not" (6:9). It is possible to see yet not perceive.

Paul says (1 Corinthians 2:4-5): "My speech and my preaching was not with enticing words of man's wisdom, but in demonstration of the Spirit and of power: that your faith should not stand in the wisdom of men, but in the power of God."

Now the theological rationalists say that your faith should stand not in the wisdom of man but in the Word of God. Paul didn't say that at all. He said your faith should stand in the power of God. That's quite a different thing.

Verses 9 through 14 say: "Eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, neither have entered into the heart of man, the things which God hath prepared for them that love him. But God hath revealed them unto us by his Spirit: for the Spirit searcheth all things, yea, the deep things of God. For what man knoweth the things of man, save the spirit of man which is in him? even so the things of God knoweth no man, but the Spirit of God.... But the natural man receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God: for they are foolishness unto him: neither can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned."

Paul, the man of God, is saying: I came preaching and I preached with power that would illuminate and get to the conscience and to the spirit and change the inner man in order that your faith might stand in the power of God.

My brethren, your faith can stand in the text and you can be as dead as the proverbial doornail, but when the power of God moves in on the text and sets the sacrifice on fire, then you have Christianity. We call that revival, but it's not revival at all. It is simply New Testament Christianity. It's what it ought to have been in the first place, but was not.

Now look at Matthew 11: "Jesus answered and said, I thank thee O Father, Lord of heaven and earth, because thou hast hid these things from the wise and prudent, and hast revealed them unto babes. Even so, Father: for so it seemed good in thy sight. All things are delivered unto me of my Father: and no man knoweth the Son, but the Father, neither knoweth any man the Father, save the Son, and he to whomsoever the Son will reveal him."

So there we have the doctrine taught plainly that there is not only a body of truth which we must hold at our peril; there is also a soul in that body which we must get through to, and if we don't get through to the soul of truth we have only a dead body on our hands.

A church can go on holding the creed. and the truth for years and generations and grow old and die, and new people come up and receive that same code and they grow old and die.

Then some revivalist comes in and gets everybody stirred and prayer moves God down on the scene and revival comes to that church. People who thought they were saved get saved. People who have only believed in a code now believe in Christ.

A man will go along in a church and believe texts and quote them and memorize them and teach them and maybe become a deacon and all the rest. Then one day, under the fiery preaching of some visitor or maybe the pastor, he suddenly feels himself terribly in need of God and he forgets all his past history and goes to his knees and like David begins to pour out his soul in confession. Then he leaps to his feet and testifies: 'I've been a deacon in this church twenty-six years and never was born again until tonight.'

What happened? That man had been trusting the dead body of truth until some inspired preacher let him know that truth has a soul. Or maybe God taught him in secret that truth had a soul as well as a body and

he dared to get through and pursue by penitence and obedience until God honoured his faith and flashed the light on. And like lightning out of heaven it touched his spirit and all the texts he had memorized became alive.

Thank God, he did memorize the texts and all the truth he knew suddenly now bloomed in the light. That is why I believe we ought to memorize. [20/21] That is why we ought to get to know the Word, why we ought to fill our minds with the songs and the great hymns of the church. They won't mean anything to us until the Holy Ghost comes. But when He comes He will have fuel to use. Fire without fuel won't burn but fuel without fire is dead. And the Holy Ghost will not come on a church where there is no Biblical fuel. There must be Bible teaching. We must have the body of truth.

Jesus said if any man is willing to do God's will, he shall know -- he shall know the doctrine, he shall know the teaching. Now, this body of truth can be grasped by the average, normal intellect. You can grasp truth, but only the enlightened soul will ever know the truth and only the prepared heart will ever be enlightened.

And just what is the preparation needed? Jesus said: 'If any man is willing to do My will the light will flash in on him. If any man will obey Me, God will enlighten his soul immediately.'

We make Jesus Christ a convenience. We make Him a lifeboat to get us to shore, a guide to find us when we are lost. We reduce Him simply to Big Friend to help us when we are in trouble.

That is not Christianity. Jesus Christ is Lord. But when a man is willing to do His will, he is repenting and the truth flashes in.

No man can know the Son except the Father tell him. No man can know the Father except the Son reveal Him. I can know about God, that's the body of truth. But I can't know God, the soul of truth, unless I am ready to be obedient.

Before the Word of God can mean anything inside of me there must be obedience to the Word. Truth will not give itself to a rebel. Truth will not impart life to a man who will not obey the light! "If we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship one with another, and the blood of Jesus Christ his Son cleanseth us from all sin." If you are disobeying Jesus Christ you can't expect to be enlightened.

But there is illumination. I know what Charles Wesley meant when he wrote: "His spirit answers to the blood, And tells me I am born of God!" Nobody had to come and tell me what he meant. 'He that is willing to do My will,' said Jesus, 'shall have a revelation to his own heart. He shall have an inward illumination that tells him he is a child of God.'

If a sinner goes to the altar and a worker with a marked New Testament argues him into the kingdom, the devil will meet him two blocks down the street and argue him out of it again. But if he has an inward illumination and he has that witness within because the Spirit answers to the blood, you can't argue with that man. He will say: 'But I know.' A man like that is not bigoted or arrogant, he is just sure.

Now that's revival, but yet it is not revival either; it is normal Christianity. It's the way we should be. "If any man will do his will, he shall know."

But you say you're going to take a Bible course. If you are holding out on God, refusing to follow Jesus, you can take a course and learn all about synthesis and analysis and all the rest. But you might just as well read Pogo; all the courses in the world won't illuminate you inside. You can fill your head full of

knowledge, but the day that you decide you are going to obey God it will get down into your heart. You shall know. Only the servants of truth can ever know truth. Only those who obey can ever have the inward change.

You can stand on the outside and can know all about it. I once read a book about the inner spiritual life by a man who was not a Christian at all. He had an amazing penetration. He was a sharp intellectual, a keen Englishman. He stood outside and examined spiritual people from the outside but nothing ever reached him.

You can read your Bible -- read any version you want -- and if you are honest you will admit that it is either obedience or inward blindness. You can repeat the Book of Romans word for word and still be blind inwardly. You can quote the whole Book of Psalms and still be blind inwardly. You can know the doctrine of justification by faith and take your stand with Luther and the Reformation, and be blind inwardly. For it is not the body of truth that enlightens; it is the Spirit of truth that enlightens.

If you are willing to obey the Lord Jesus He will illuminate your spirit, inwardly enlighten you, and the truth you have known will now be known spiritually and power will begin to flow up and out and you will find yourself changed, marvellously changed. In that great day of Christ's coming all that will matter is whether or not I have been inwardly illuminated. Inwardly regenerated. Inwardly purified.

Do I know Jesus?

---

Source: <https://sermonindex.net/speakers/aw-tozer/revelation-is-not-enough/>

# *Grow in Your Walk with Christ*

---

Listen and read messages that will stir your heart for Christ and point you to deeper repentance and devotion.

- 50,000+ Sermons from speakers past and present
- 3,900+ Classic Christian Books freely readable online
- 1,200+ Bible Translations and Commentaries
- Over 450k forum posts — Join our vibrant online Christian forum

**[www.sermonindex.net](http://www.sermonindex.net)**