

Three Degrees of Knowledge

by A.W. Tozer

A.W. Tozer explains the three degrees of knowledge open to Christians, emphasizing the importance of Scripture and the limitations of direct spiritual experience.

Scripture: Psalm 19:1

Topics: "Authority of Scripture", "Knowledge Of God"

Description

A.W. Tozer discusses the three degrees of knowledge available to Christians, emphasizing the importance of distinguishing between common knowledge, knowledge received by faith, and knowledge gained through direct spiritual experience. He clarifies that while the first two types of knowledge can be understood and reasoned, the third type is unique and should not be confused with doctrinal teachings. Tozer warns against relying solely on personal spiritual experiences, as they can lead to deviations from the truth found in Scripture. He asserts that the Bible remains the ultimate authority for moral and religious understanding, and any direct experience must align with the teachings of the Scriptures.

Transcript

In a recent letter a man from Jamestown, NY, quoted a statement from an editorial, "Three Degrees of Religious Knowledge," . . . and asked for clarification.

The quotation was taken from that part of the editorial dealing with the third degree of knowledge: ". . . it is knowledge by direct spiritual experience . . . Since it was not acquired by reason operating on intellectual data, the possibility of error is eliminated."

The letter comments on this as follows: "This statement seems to me to parallel the Roman Catholic doctrine of papal infallibility. I was always taught that the holy Scriptures are the only rule of faith and life. My observation has been that most of the false cults base their so-called doctrines and revelations on personal spiritual experience. I would appreciate your further clarification on this editorial statement . . . defining the boundaries with which 'direct spiritual experience' can be depended upon without danger of departure from the revealed Word of God as contained in the holy Scriptures and as projected in the earthly life of Christ."

This matter deserves further explanation and I'll be glad to make it.

In my editorial I said that there are three degrees of knowledge open to Christians. The first is the common knowledge shared with all normal persons, namely, the data furnished by the senses and by reason operating upon such data. This embraces all knowledge of natural things from the first scrap of knowledge enjoyed by an hour-old baby to the highest reaches of scientific information acquired by the pooled efforts of the race.

The second is the knowledge received by faith. It consists of data given by divine revelation and received by the believing mind without proof. It is taken on trust and cannot in the very nature of it be demonstrated as being true. Were proof possible then it would belong in the first category and faith would be unnecessary.

The third kind of knowledge is that given by direct spiritual experience. This differs radically from both of the others. It has nothing to do with the senses and so is not physical or natural data. It has nothing to do with ethics or doctrine and so is not moral or theological knowledge. I do not believe that God teaches doctrine by direct unmediated experience. The exact opposite is true. The Scriptures are the source of all rational knowledge about moral and religious things, except those things that are revealed by nature as mentioned in Psalm 19:1-4 and Romans 1:19-20, and they are few and inadequate.

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