

# You Shall Know the Truth

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Few sayings of Jesus are better known or more widely quoted than this: “*You shall know the truth and the truth shall make you free.*” (John 8:32) These memorable words, prominently incised on the U.S. Supreme Court building in Washington, D.C., hold a cherished place in our Western culture. Unfortunately, they often are misplaced in our Christian thinking. To better apprehend them we need to return to the original Jewish matrix in which our Messiah operated.

The cultural ancestors of Western thought, the Greeks, esteemed truth above all else. The holy grail of their philosophical pursuit was the True, the Good, and the Beautiful. It seldom occurs to us however that Jesus of Nazareth was not a Greek philosopher! He was a Jewish sage. His mission was much closer in spirit to Moses than Socrates. Jesus’ orientation to life and values was fostered not by the Hellenism of Greece and Rome but by the Hebraic worldview of the Bible and venerable Jewish traditions.

In Jesus’ world, the *pursuit* of truth was not the highest good so much as the *doing* of it. Truth was a given—in the Self-disclosure and Divine instruction (*torah*) of the Holy One of Israel. The paramount task of Israel’s sages, therefore, was to rightly interpret the Divine revelation preserved in the Hebrew Scriptures, and to teach their disciples, by word and by example, how to obey the Divine will. The fullness of life intended and blessed by God is found in hearing and obeying His word.

The study of Scripture is supremely important in Jewish tradition because Torah (Teaching) is divinely given. Study that leads to obedience is reckoned as the highest form of worship of the Almighty. An astute Jewish scholar, Abraham Joshua Heschel, puts it this way:

“The Greeks study to comprehend; the Hebrews study to revere.”

*Talmud Torah* (study of the Word of God) formed the basis of religious life in Jesus’ first-century world. Unlike for the ancient Greeks, Jewish learning is not a ‘pastime’ for the few—it is a ‘life-time’ for everyone. More than a leisurely inquiry for the wealthy, study-as-worship is a life-transforming encounter for all who would serve God. It is an act of devotion that passionately engages the whole person—heart, soul, mind and might. More than a holy pursuit, it is a pursuit of the Holy.

### **The Rabbi Jesus**

In the light of this Jewish frame of reference we can see more clearly the significance of the Jesus’ promise in the Fourth Gospel: “*You shall know the truth and the truth shall make you free.*”

First, we should note that this statement is made to believers and preceded by a condition: “*If you continue in my word, you are truly my disciples, and **then**...*” (John 8:31). In other words, Jesus is not proffering an abstract principle or philosophical proposition; he is extending a personal invitation—to walk after him as disciples and study-to-obey his words.

Second, to “*know the truth*” is to be personally and passionately involved with the Lord in an intimate Master-disciple relationship. Hebrew learning is more than an accumulation of information or data. *Da’at El Da’at Elohim* (knowledge of God) is an ever increasing intimacy and reverence toward the One who is Faithful and True.

Salvation is a gift, but discipleship is a walk. We must *grow* in the grace and in the knowledge of our Lord to be wholly free. As we are “covered in the dust” of *Rav Yeshua* (the Rabbi Jesus), we are transformed by the renewing of our minds under his instruction and example.

“Truth” in the Greek sense is important but does not finally set us free. We can be filled with scholarly information and still be terribly bound by the brokenness of our souls and lives. An intimate, obedient and disciplined relationship with God is the “knowledge” that truly sets us free.

### **Raising Up Disciples**

The man Yeshua, Jesus of Nazareth, was on a mission from God during his lifetime: to raise up many disciples. We should take his life and mission just as seriously as we take his death, burial and resurrection. Yes, the commitment to “walk after” or “follow” the Master and learn of God’s ways can be costly, but the rewards are priceless—righteousness, peace and joy in God's redemptive reign.

Before departing from his disciples, Jesus imparted unto them an abiding obligation: his mission was now to become their ‘co-mission’. They were to imitate him. In their going, they were to make disciples too, teaching the nations to keep his commandments. That continuing obligation rests upon Jesus’ followers today. We cannot fulfill the command “to make disciples” however unless we first become students ourselves!

The Master Teacher from Nazareth embodied the best of the Jewish worldview regarding the significance and sanctity of learning. Our lives of holy learning and obedience will bring credit to our Lord and honor to our God, and set us free to be more and more like the One who is ever Faithful and True.



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