

## Epistemology Part 2

How do we know when it comes to theological and spiritual truth?

In Epistemology Part 1 (April 19), I provided what for me are three questions I ask as criteria for measuring the truth of any Christian teaching or doctrine. In this section I offer what may be called 4 sources of how we come to know or experience God and affirm what becomes theological and spiritual truth for us.

**1) Revelation.** As much as we may seek God or want to know about God, we also believe God must reveal God's self in order for such knowing to happen. How has God revealed God's self to you? There is a narrow definition of revelation that says truth about God can only come through the bible or church teaching (especially if you believe the church through its hierarchy all the way to the top is the divinely authorized source of God's truth). But there is a broader understanding of revelation that recognizes God can speak to us and reveal divine truth into our minds and hearts in all kinds of ways. There is what is traditionally called "general revelation" which points to the belief and experience that God speaks to us outside the bible and the church through the natural world, other people, circumstances, our conscience and inner sense of right and wrong, our capacity to care, feel moral outrage, and feel remorse and sorrow too. But there is also "special revelation" which acknowledges certain specific sources that communicate divine truth to us such as the bible for us Protestants and tradition/the church for Roman Catholics and Eastern Orthodox Christians.

**2) Faith.** God may reveal God's self to us in all kinds of ways, but without faith we cannot and do not recognize God. So what is faith? While some may think of faith as "the faith", meaning a repository of beliefs, doctrines and teachings, for us Protestants faith is more primarily relational. Faith is about trust, with openness, humility and imagination. Faith is about waiting for God to reveal ever deeper truth into our hearts and minds, and faith requires some discipline and perseverance in seeking and asking, questioning and doubting in order to better understand what we claim to believe. Faith as trust is based on a relationship with the one we call "God" and we seek to develop a capacity to recognize how and when God speaks to us through general and special revelation.

**3) The Holy Spirit.** This is the name we give to God moving in and through us and in all kinds of places and people too. When we see the courage of compassion and a passion for justice that refuses to hate or be indifferent, it is the Holy Spirit moving. When our hearts convict us or affirm God's presence within us, it is the Holy Spirit moving. When someone offers us a hand of care or a listening ear with sincere compassion, or even speaks truth to us because honesty is more precious than just people-pleasing, it is the Holy Spirit moving. How do you encounter and witness the Holy Spirit moving in and around you speaking truth into your mind and heart?

**4) The Church.** Some believe God's truth comes to us through a hierarchy that has inner access to God's truth. But we Protestants believe God's truth comes through all of God's people gathered to worship, share and care for one another and reach out into the world as well. We hear God speak to us and move within us as we engage each other and listen to one another. No one person has greater access to God, but we can learn from each other as we share our knowledge, our experiences and our wisdom gained through all kinds of ways. Being a Christian alone and being one in community are two very different things. Jesus called us to follow him not simply as the unique individuals we are, but also as part of a movement toward building satellite communities of kingdom love and justice in anticipation of a wider transformation of love in our world.

How does revelation come to you? How does faith rise up in you? How do you recognize the Holy Spirit moving in and around you? How central is the communion called church for your spiritual formation and growth?