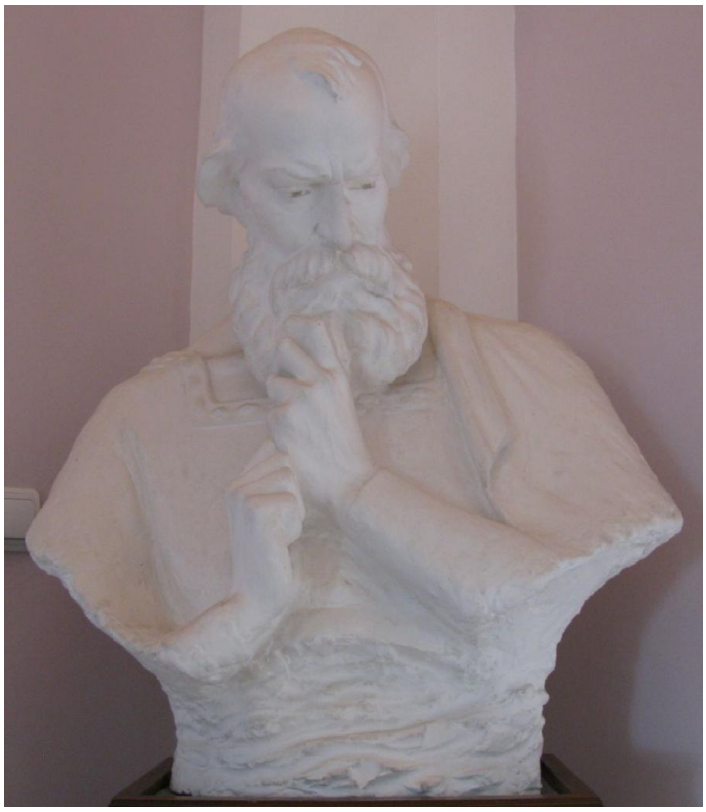
Discussions with My Friend: An Introduction to the Gospel of Jesus Christ By David Stewart

Chapter 04: Finding Truth



Notwithstanding differences of religious tenets, we find broad agreement on key principles of Christ's gospel in the teachings of great scholars and spiritual leaders, including Socrates, Confucius, Gautama Buddha, and Mohandas Gandhi.

As individuals acknowledged by their societies for pure, exemplary lives and for their understanding, these teachers offer more penetrating and relevant insights than armchair philosophers. These luminaries were primarily concerned with achieving a positive, practical, and spiritually harmonious lifestyle rather than acceptance of arbitrary dogma. They recognized the importance of right teaching and the necessity for all people to seek and accept truth. Notwithstanding widely differing backgrounds, these wise teachers arrived at certain shared conclusions through their observations of the natural world, experience, and contemplative analysis. These conclusions transcend culture and upbringing and speak to the soul.

1. Truth exists. Confucius stated: "Absolute truth is indestructible. Being indestructible, it is eternal. Being eternal, it is self-existent. Being self-existent, it is infinite. Being infinite, it is vast and deep. Being vast and deep, it is transcendental and intelligent." Gandhi observed: "All the religions of the world, while they may differ in other respects, unitedly proclaim that nothing lives in this world but Truth." He further declared: "There is an orderliness in the universe, there is an unalterable law governing everything and every being that exists or lives. It is no blind law; for no blind law can govern the conduct of living beings."

2. Truth must be loved and sought. For Socrates, the calling of all virtuous men was to be lovers of wisdom, the original meaning of the word philosopher. Buddha taught: "There are only two mistakes one can make along the road to truth; not going all the way, and not starting." Confucius observed the importance of seeking and treasuring truth: "They who know the truth are not equal to those who love it, and they who love it are not equal to those who delight in it." Christ taught his disciples: "they that worship [God] must worship him in spirit and in truth"[1] ..."ye shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free."[2] Gandhi declared: "God, as Truth, has been for me a treasure beyond price. May He be so to every one of us."

3. The soul is immortal. Socrates observed: "Our souls must have existed before they were in the form of man -- without

bodies, and must have had intelligence ... Are we to suppose that the soul, which is invisible, in passing to the true [world of spirits], which like her is invisible, and pure, and noble, and on her way to the good and wise God ... is blown away and perishes immediately on quitting the body as the many say?" He taught that knowledge acquired before we were born -- the innate knowledge between good and evil which we refer to as the conscience -- attests to the soul's immortality. The immortality of the soul implies accountability and consequences for choice.

4. Only the pure can approach God. Observing that "Heaven is to be one with God," Confucius taught that individuals must purify and perfect themselves: "Think no vice so small that you may commit it, and no virtue so small that you may overlook it... The perfecting of one's self is the fundamental base of all progress and all moral development...The superior man will watch over himself when he is alone. He examines his heart that there may be nothing wrong there, and that he may have no cause of dissatisfaction with himself." Buddha admonished: "Let a man avoid evil deeds as a man who loves life avoids poison...The only real failure in life is not to be true to the best one knows." Socrates declared: "no impure thing is allowed to approach the pure ... But the soul which has been polluted, and is impure at the time of her departure -- do you suppose that such a soul will depart pure and unalloyed? ...But he who is a philosopher [lover of wisdom] or lover of learning, and is entirely pure at departing, is alone permitted to reach the gods." Jesus said, "blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see god...unless except your righteousness shall exceedthe righteousness of the scribes and Pharisees, ye shall in no case enter into the kingdom of heaven."[3] Mother Theresa observed: "The fact of death should not sadden us. The only thing that should sadden us is to know that we are not saints."

5. Purity is found through seeking and applying truth and in serving others. Confucius taught: "Wisdom, compassion and courage -- these are the three universally recognized moral qualities of men." Gandhi stated: "Man becomes great exactly in the degree in which he works for the welfare of his fellow-men." Mother Teresa observed: "God loves the world through us."

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6. Blessings await the good and pure which transcend earthly experience. As cited by his disciples in Phaedo, Socrates observed that after the pure returning home to God, "we shall be pure and converse with other pure souls, and know of ourselves the clear light everywhere; and this is surely the light of truth." He observed:

> And this is the reason ... why the true votaries of [wisdom] abstain from all fleshly lusts, and endure and refuse to give themselves up to them. Those too who have been pre-eminent for holiness of life are released from this earthly prison, and go to their pure home which is above, and dwell in the purer earth; and of these, such as have duly purified themselves with [the love of wisdom] live henceforth ... in mansions fairer still which may not be described, and of which the time would fail me to tell.

Jesus taught: "in my father's house are many mansions."[4] The Apostle Paul wrote: "I reckon that the sufferings of this present time are notworthy to be compared with the glory which shall be revealed in us."[5]

7. Individuals can choose daily between good and evil, service and selfishness. Buddha declared: "There has to be evil so that good can prove its purity above it...It is better to conquer yourself than to win a thousand battles. Then the victory is yours. It cannot be taken from you, not by angels or by demons, heaven or hell." Gandhi stated: "The best way to find yourself is to lose yourself in the service of others...As human beings, our greatness lies not so much in being able to remake the world...as in being able to remake ourselves." The limitations of one's upbringing do not excuse the perpetuation of error: everyone has the power to choose good. Gandhi taught: "I have also seen children successfully surmounting the effects of an evil inheritance. That is due to purity being an inherent attribute of the soul... Everyone who wills can hear the inner voice. It is within everyone."

8. God looks upon thoughts, desires, and intentions. Such a teaching cannot excuse bad actions or omissions of positive ones, as behaviors are more meaningful indicators of thoughts, desires, and priorities than professed intentions. Yet we must do the right things for the right reasons; outward observances alone do not instill inner purity. Confucius stated: "To put the world in order we must first put the nation in order; to put the nation in order, we must put the family in order; to put the family in order, we must cultivate our personal life; and to cultivate our personal life, we must first set our hearts right." Buddha taught: "What we think, we become."

9. Finding and living according to truth is a process requiring ongoing effort. God's will can be found by those who seek him. However, the spiritual feelings and promptings individuals receive as they sincerely seek the right often represent tentative points in a journey rather than a final destination. Even Jesus "increased in wisdom and stature, and in favour with God and man;"[6]he"received not of the fulness at first, but continued from grace to grace, until he received a fulness."[7]

An individual who struggles with serious problems may benefit greatly from changing his life to comply with the tenets of any of a wide range of religious traditions, yet this does not mean that Buddhism, Islam, and Christianity all represent equal paths to truth. Nor can adherence to even a "true faith" compensate for lack of personal effort; a bad believer is undoubtedly worse off than a good pagan. Yet neither of these situations meets God's expectations of man.

Jesus taught that "they that worship [God] must worship him in spirit and truth."[8] As we seek to act rightly, we must also seek for the full truth that belongs to God and not merely for spiritual transit points that may represent something better than we had before but still fall short of being pure and godly. As an individual progresses in his spiritual journey, the difference in faiths becomes more significant because additional truths become increasingly necessary to make further spiritual progress. The seeker of truth who lives not "by bread alone, but by everyword that proceedeth out of the mouthofGod"[9] will soon find himself limited by a faith that does not contain God's full truth. The sincere lover of truth is never done with his efforts to seek and apply truth until his mortal journey is through.

God has not left us alone in the world. If we sincerely want to know truth and are willing to follow it, we can go to the source. God has given us many tools to find His truth.

[1] John 4:24
[2] John 8:32
[3] Matthew 5:8,20
[4] John 14:2
[5] Romans 8:18
[6] Luke 2:52
[7] D&C 93:13
[8] John 4:24
[9] Matthew 4:4