

THE TEACHING OF THE TWELVE APOSTLES

by Leo Tolstoy

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The Teaching of the Twelve Apostles is an ancient manuscript, which was lately found in an old volume of collections. This manuscript was known to the ancient fathers of the church, Athanasius, Eusebius, and others, who knew it and mentioned it in their writings, but the manuscript itself was lost.

In 1883 the Greek Metropolitan Briennios, who was living in Constantinople, discovered this teaching in an ancient manuscript and printed it.

This teaching is the most ancient exposition of the sermons of Jesus Christ. It was written at a time when the men who had heard Jesus Christ were still alive.

This teaching is divided into two parts, – one, ancient, from Chapter I. to VI., and the second, which was added later, from Chapter VI. to the last chapter. The last chapters have reference to the arrangement of the life of Christ's disciples; but in the first five chapters we have a record of Christ's teaching to men, the same which is recorded in Chapters V., VI., and VII. of the Gospel of Matthew, and which Christ had announced on the mount to all simple people, that they might find out this teaching and become saved. This teaching is the same good announcement which Christ enjoined His disciples to preach to the Gentiles, the same of which He said to His disciples (Mark xvi. 15), Go ye into all the world, and preach the Gospel to every creature.

POSTSCRIPT

In this ancient teaching everything is said which every man needs for the recognition of Christ's truth and the salvation of his soul.

This teaching is not long and not intricate, and any man may read it, and any man may understand it, and any man may fulfil it. Christ said (Luke x. 21), I thank thee, O Father, Lord of heaven and earth, that thou hast hid these things from the wise and prudent, and hast revealed them unto babes. It says also (Matt. xi. 28-30), Come unto me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you, and learn of me; for I am meek and lowly in heart; and ye shall find rest unto your souls. For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light.

And again it says (John vii. 37), If any man thirst, let him come unto me, and drink.

And here it is, the teaching which was revealed to babes, that easy yoke and light burden, to which He calls us, that spring of living water, to which any man may come. It is the same teaching which was preached by Christ on the mount, and was recorded in Chapters V., VI., and VII. of Matthew, and which is called the sermon on the mount. Everything which is needed for the salvation of one's soul is contained in this teaching, and millions and millions of Christians have been saved by it and the world is saved by it.

Christ said, I am the way and the truth and the life, and again He said (Matt. vii. 13-14), Enter ye at the strait gate: for wide is the gate, and broad is the way, that leadeth to destruction, and many there be which go in thereat: Because strait is the gate, and narrow is the way, which leadeth unto life, and few there be that find it.

And the teaching begins with Christ's showing, among the many, the broad, ways which lead to destruction, the one narrow way of truth, which leads to life.

The narrow way of truth, which leads to life, consists in loving God and our neighbour.

The broad way, – the way of the lie, which leads to death, this is all the ways on which men walk without love of God and of their neighbours.

The way of life is in the other commandments : in love of God and of our neighbours.

In the first chapter, reference is made to the first commandment about the love of God. The love of God consists in the love of all men, even as it says in another place that God is love. It consists in loving not only our neighbours, but also those whom we do not know, in loving those who love and those who hate us; and so we are not only not to take anything from people, except what we are in need of, but we should give everything we have and our labour to other men, without knowing even for whom we are working. This is the teaching of the first commandment, – of the love of God.

In the second chapter it speaks of the second commandment about the love of our neighbour, of which it says in another place that it resembles the first. The love of our neighbour consists in not doing to our neighbour what we do not wish to have done to us. We should not kill or dishonour children and women, steal, curse, lie, take away from others or retain any property, and so we should admonish the erring, pray for the feeble, and love the good better than our soul. This is the teaching of the second commandment about the love of our neighbour.

In the third chapter it speaks of the offences. The offences consist in those affairs which lead to sins against the love of God and of our neighbour. There are five sins that are enumerated, – murder, debauchery, idolatry, stealing, cursing ; and those offences are pointed out that lead to these sins: anger, quarrels, disputes, lead to murder; the seeking of enjoyments, impure speeches, the contemplation of other people's sins, lead to debauchery ; divination, the calling out of spirits, idle philosophizing, lead to idolatry; lying, envy, greed, vanity, lead to stealing ; self-confidence, dissatisfaction, and pride lead to cursing. This is the teaching of the offences.

In the fourth chapter it speaks of how a man may strengthen himself on the path of life. Five means are enumerated: attention to the word of God, communion with saints, peaceful intercourse with men, renunciation of property, and the recognition over oneself and over others of no other power than the one which is given by the spirit of truth. This is the teaching about the strengthening of the forces on the path of life.

In the fifth chapter it speaks of that world of men who live outside the commandments of God and walk on the path of death. These men suffer, torment others, and all walk toward death. This is the teaching about what awaits man on the path of death.

The remaining eleven chapters speak of the details of the arrangement of the Christian community. But even in these first five chapters there is expounded the whole teaching which is necessary for the salvation of every man. The teaching of these five chapters is simple and comprehensible.

Christ shows us the path of salvation and the path of destruction; He shows us, besides, what we ought not to do, and what we ought, in order that it may be easy for us to walk on the path of salvation. By giving us the direction of the path, Christ points out to us those deceptions which may make us stray from it, and, besides, teaches us what may support us. He treats us as a good father would treat his son, when sending him out on the road. First of all the father would say to his son: " You must travel straight on the road, which leads you where it will be well for you, and if you shall not travel straight on the road, you will perish. And so, that you may not lose it, travel in the daytime with the sun, and in the night with the star which I will point out to you." But the father would not be satisfied with this; he loves his son, and is afraid that he may lose his way, and so he would say to him, " As you walk, you will come to a turn on the right: do not turn into it; then you will come to a cross-road : take the middle road ; then you will come to a turn on the left: do not walk on it; then you will come to a forked road: take the left one." Thus the father would tell his son the road in advance. But more than this: the father would give his son a staff and a wallet, so that he might have something to lean on and something to eat, and only then would he send him off.

It is precisely what Christ has done with us. First of all He showed

us the road which will bring us to our goal, – and showed us as the sun, the love of God, and as the star, the love of our neighbour, and commanded us to go by them ; then He showed us in detail all the turns which might make us stray. He said, " Anger, quarrels, will come, – stop and bethink yourself, – this is one of the turns which may lead you away from the path of life ; do not walk on it, but walk straight on.

"There will come lust, – this is another turn; again bethink yourself, and do not travel on the false path. There will come ambition, selfishness, – know that these, too, are false paths."

But more than this: Christ, besides these indications, gives us also something to strengthen us on our path, – He gives us bread and the staff for our journey. He teaches us what can sustain us on our path, gives us food and support in the divine word, in the communion with saints, in the establishment of peace among men, in the renunciation of property, in the liberation from every domination but that of truth.

Christ knew our weakness and did everything that we might be able with our weakness to walk on His path. This teaching is such that, if we understand it, we cannot excuse ourselves because of our weakness. If we believe that all paths outside of Christ's lead to death, we can no longer say that we should like to walk on the path of life, but are unable to do so; nor can we excuse ourselves on the ground of ignorance of the road ; everything which we need in order not to stray from the road and that we may walk upon it has been given to us. And if we say that we are too weak and cannot follow Christ, Christ will answer us, " It is for your weakness' sake that I have pointed out to you in advance all those turns which may lead you astray or may teach you how to act; for the sake of your weakness have I given you on the road everything which may strengthen you. Why do you not stop where I told you to stop and think of my words ? Why do you not take with you on the road everything that I have told you will fortify you ? "

What will the father say to his son, whom he has sent out on the road, after supplying him with instructions and with food, when he finds his son gone astray in another direction ? He will no doubt be sorry for him and will again lead him out on the road, and will again furnish him with instructions as to how to walk; and again the same instructions, because there are no others; but he will not listen to the excuses of the son that he has gone astray because it was hard for him to remember all the instructions given him for the road, because a man whose only business it is to walk cannot find it hard to remember whither he is going. But if he says that he has forgotten, he is a hypocrite or a madman. And we are hypocrites or madmen when we say that we believe in Christ and do not walk on His path.

Christ has shown us the path of the liberation from death and is waiting for us on this path. And if we believe Him, we shall walk on it. And if we walk on it, we shall find out, as He has told us, that

the yoke is good and the burden light, and we shall come out on the path of life and shall come to Him.