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THE WAY TO FIND THE TRUTH

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[*The search for Truth has been an age-long quest. Is there any one certain condition which must be fulfilled if truth is to be found?*]

Our Lord reveals a fact of enormous importance to us all. 'If any man willeth to do his (God's) will, he shall know of the doctrine, *whether it be of God*' (John 7:17, R.V.): that is, our will to do God's will uncovers for us all revelation. Many years ago I was deeply impressed by a young man's remark: 'The real question is not, *Is the Bible true?* but, *Do we wish the Bible to be true?*' Long decades of experience deeply confirm the fact that, in all controversy, in all the world-wide differences on doctrine and belief, the battle—to be paradoxical—is lost or won *before it is fought*. Is the Scripture final to us—final in the sense that the moment we *know* it, we will *do* it? Three-fourths of our controversies and divisions would be annihilated if we could all answer that question with truthfulness and with perfect sincerity. The soil on which the Word falls alone determines the harvest. Some seed 'fell on *the rock*; and it withered away' (Luke 8:6). Our attitude to the Word of God, *before we understand it*, makes us *know* it is Divine when we see it.

Now see the momentous principle our Lord has laid down once for all. The statement He makes is this: 'If *any man*'—for it is a universal law, and it covers the whole human race—'*willeth*'—it is not the future tense of 'to do', but a separate verb and the word on which the stress is laid: if any man resolves, makes up his mind, is set on it—'to *do* His will'—to Christ's hearers, that would mean the Old Testament, together with all that they know to be right by conscience and experience—'he *shall*'—it is a rule which never fails—'*know*'—knowledge, not opinion; certitude, not conjecture; fact, not fancy—'*whether it be of God*'—whether the whole Christian Faith is an embodied revelation let down out of Heaven—'or whether I speak from myself'—that Christianity, therefore, is the invention of a peasant Jew, of genius, but unauthorised by God. Jesus says that there is one infallible rule, of universal application, by which a man himself, through the action of his own will, decides whether he will know saving

truth, when he sees it, or not—that is, whether he will be saved. And so of all truth. Observe carefully, it is not that he wills to *admire* the will of God, but wills to *do* it.

Commentators have clearly seen the truth. 'As it now stands in the English Version,' says Dean Alford, and he stresses it by placing his whole sentence in italics, 'a wrong idea is conveyed: that the bare performance of God's outward commands will give a man sufficient guidance in Christian doctrine; whereas what our Lord asserts is that if a man be really anxious to do the will of God, the singleness of purpose and subjection to the will of God will lead him to a just discrimination of the divine teaching.' 'The text explains,' says Bishop Wilberforce, 'why so many miss God, not from lack of any mere powers of intellect, nor from mental perplexities, not from obscurity of texts or Bible difficulties, but from alienation of the soul. These words promise the great benediction to him who wills to do the Father's will; to him who, in the midst of failures and discouragements, still holds on because his will is set.' 'Christ,' says Dr E. Mellor, 'contemplates the man to whom all light is welcome from any quarter. It may disturb old convictions, alter the proportions and relations of truths, but to know the will of God is worth it all.' 'It is the *heart*,' as Robert Govett says, 'that has most to do with a man's religious views.' Or in the words of John Wesley: 'I am sick of opinions. Give me a humble, gentle lover of God and man, a man full of mercy and good fruits; without partiality or hypocrisy. Let my soul be with such Christians, wheresoever they are and whatsoever opinion they are of. Whosoever doeth the will of my Father, the same is my brother.'

But it is exceedingly remarkable that both ancient thinkers and modern men of science have had more than a glimmering of this truth. Aristotle said: 'Things we learn to know, we learn by the *doing* of them.' Sophocles, the Greek poet says:

'A heart of mildness, full of good intent,
Far sooner than acuteness will the truth behold.'

Coming to the middle ages Pascal says: 'The perception of truth is a moral act'; and Fichte—'If the will be steadfastly and

sincerely fixed on what is *good*, the understanding will of itself discover what is true.' But the most remarkable corroborations come from nineteenth century men of science. Prof. Tyndall says of all inductive inquiry: 'The first condition of success is an honest receptivity and a willingness to abandon all preconceived notions, however cherished, if they be found to contradict the truth. Believe me a self-renunciation which has something noble in it, and of which the world never hears, is often enacted in the private experience of the true votary of science.' Still more remarkable is Professor Thomas Huxley's statement of the principle: 'The great deeds of the philosophers have been less the fruit of their intellect than of the direction of that intellect by an eminently religious tone of mind. Truth has yielded itself rather to their patience, and their self-denial, than to their logical acumen.'

Now we further find, as a curiously convincing fact, that all experience reinforces our Lord's statement. There are different kinds of truth, and we reach these different truths differently. Some truths are purely intellectual, like mathematics, and we reach them through intellectual reasoning; some are aesthetic, like music or painting, and we reach these through cultivated senses—all that is needed is a naturally gifted ear or eye, sufficiently trained; but other truths—and these include 'God's will' named by our Lord—are moral, and we reach them only through a moral wish to understand them. Science can never disprove the Decalogue: they move in different spheres. If a man pronounces the Decalogue evil, or the Sermon on the Mount immoral, it is proof positive that he is immoral himself. Thus, experience reinforces our Lord's statement. Good people uniformly believe the truth: wicked people uniformly disbelieve or neglect or hate it. It is a knowledge which is certainty. When Sir Michael Faraday was dying, he was asked by a visiting journalist to voice his speculation as death approached. 'Speculation!' said Faraday in astonishment: 'I know nothing of speculations. I am resting in certainties.' He then quoted: 'I *know* whom I have believed, and am persuaded that He is able to keep that which I have committed unto Him against that day' (2 Tim. 1:12).

Now we apply this truth to our Lord's hearers. Why did *they* not believe Him? They believed Moses' miracles, though they had never seen one of them; they believed very doubtful things, things not even probable—such as wild Rabbinical fables: yet *Christ* they believed not. Why? It was no lack of evidence—our Lord's miracles, wrought before their eyes, have had no parallel in the history of the world; it was no obscurity of Scriptures that spoke of Him—the Old Testament prophecies and the facts fitted exactly; it was no lack of intellectual ability—the Jew has, and had, one of the keenest intellects on the world. *It was what He taught.* Men question the truth because they hate its practise. Their attitude is expressed by Giovanni Papini, who said: 'He who has read the Sermon on the Mount without once experiencing a throb of grateful tenderness, a tightening in his throat, an impulse of love and remorse, a vague but pressing need to do his part that these words may not remain mere words, but become an immediate hope, a source of vitality to all the living, is more deserving of our loving pity than anyone else, for not all the love of mankind can suffice to compensate him for what he has lost.'

Now we see the extraordinary simplicity with which our Lord thus invests salvation. It is not, 'If any will *do* God's will'—a vast obedience before saving knowledge can ever come; but, 'If any man *wills* to do'—simply longs to know the truth in order to live it—'he *shall* know'—in a flash, as he sits—'whether it be of God': he will see God, in the Gospel. The simplest the youngest, the most ignorant, the most wicked, willing, will *know*. It is true of *all* truths, and of *all* stages of truth—therefore it is for us Christians too. The blind man exactly expresses it. Jesus said to him, 'Dost thou believe on the Son of God? He answered and said, Who is he, Lord, *that I may believe on Him?* Jesus said unto him He it is that speaketh with thee. And he said, Lord *I believe*' (John 9:35). He had but to know God's incarnate will to accept it instantly.

—Condensed from 'DAWN'