

About the Book and its Writer

Most people think of great books like War and Peace when they think of Leo Tolstoy. But Tolstoy himself, who lived in Russia in the last century, would say that his greatest books were written after he was 50 years old. That was when, for six years, he stopped writing stories, and just looked for the meaning of life. What he learned at this time is in this book, and it has changed history. He left all that he had, to live with the poor in Russia; and people from all over the world came to learn from him. Ghandi himself was one of Tolstoy's most enthusiastic followers. In 1901, Tolstoy was kicked out of the Orthodox Church for what he was saying. When he was dying, a priest came to see if he would take back what he had said. Tolstoy heard of this, and he said to his son, "When will they ever learn that, even in the face of death, two and two do not equal five?"

Leo Tolstoy in 'Easy English'

'Easy English' books by David and Kevin McKay all use words from the same 900-word list. Each book adds a few more new words to the list of word that you can already read and understand. There is a small dictionary at the back of this book to help you understand many of the words that you will find in this book. Turn to it when you come to a word that you do not understand. This book uses 1100 different words. Each 'Easy English' book has a number on the cover to say how many words you must know to read that book. It is best to read the easier books before starting the more difficult ones. Look for the name "McKay" on Easy English books to know if they are true 'Easy English' books. These books are all easy for people who are learning English as a second language.

Opening Words by David McKay

People in Russia and in many other countries of the world knew of Leo Tolstoy as a great writer in the 19th Century. He was also a very brave Russian soldier, winning awards for his part in the Crimean War. At the best time of his life, when everything was going well for him, he started to think about why he was doing all that he had been doing. He could not stop thinking about death, and how it makes everything that we think is important now seem like a waste of time. He wanted to find something that would bring meaning to both life and death. The effect of all this thinking was that he changed his whole way of living. What he found was not at all difficult to understand; but it seemed to him at times that he was the only person in the world who was saying it.

Between 1877 and 1885, Tolstoy studied the story of Jesus and the teachings of the Christian church. The two works in this book, and the story of Jesus in Tolstoy's own words, are the only important things that he wrote in those years, between the time when he was forty-nine years old and when he was fifty-seven. Some powerful people in Russia tried to stop people from reading what Tolstoy had to say in these works, but more books were secretly printed by hand in Russia, and others were printed outside of Russia and carried secretly across the borders. These were handed from person to person without Tolstoy's enemies knowing about it. The Church and the Government had no answer to the arguments that Tolstoy was making against them; and a few years later both the Russian Church and the Russian government were destroyed.

Today, a hundred years later, it seems that the world cannot remember what Tolstoy said, as they cannot remember what Gandhi said, and what Jesus said. We are living in spiritually dark times, when very few people will think seriously about what God wants them to do with their lives, and when almost everyone is out to get all that they can for themselves. Tolstoy promised when he was alive that, if the leaders of the world did not find a faith in God that was bigger than any church or government, they would end up destroying themselves.

Today we seem much closer to doing just that. I had not read these works of Tolstoy before I started to work on changing his writings into Easy English. But as I started to read them, it was like finding a very special friend that I had been looking for all my life. For I too have been through many of the same things that he went through in trying to understand the difference between Christianity and what I call "churchianity". I have come to understand that the worship of religion (churchianity) is the perfect opposite to the worship of God.

Like Tolstoy, I do not say this as one who does not believe in God. The opposite is true! It is my deep faith in God that makes it so impossible for me to fit in with the teachings of the Church. Church teachings often sound spiritual, but a closer look shows that they talk about God without ever seriously trying to obey him. As Peter and Jude put it, they are like dry wells, like clouds in a desert sky. People look to them in hope, but for all their promises, they don't have any real answers. Christ's teaching about not hitting back was, for Tolstoy, the most important rule to follow in understanding all that Christ taught. But I believe that Tolstoy could have started with any of the teachings of Christ, and he would have found one truth leading to another in much the same way that it happened with him when he followed the rule about not hitting back. What made the difference for him (and for anyone who would want to find real truth) was just that he stopped looking for arguments that would bend the truth to make it fit the way that we live, and he started trying to put the truth into action in his own life.

As G. K. Chesterton has said, "It isn't that people have tried Christianity and found that it does not work; it is that people could see that Christianity would not be easy, so they never tried it." Until we are forced to think deeply about death, most of us will not change the way we live to make it agree with what Christ taught. But the truest of all truths is that we are all going to die one day; and when we do, it will not be important, as Tolstoy said, that we be remembered for our writings, our wealth, or our power. What will be important will be what our Maker thinks of how we used our time here on earth. You can be sure that one of the most important questions he will ask will be what did we do with the teachings of the one so many of us call the Son of God? I should say that in working on this book, I have used more freedom with Tolstoy's words than I have with other writers. For one thing he says the same thing over and over many times, and I have tried to cut down on some of that. But for another thing, I feel so much a part of what Tolstoy was trying to say that I could not hold back from giving him a little "help" at times. So if your reason for studying Tolstoy is to have a perfect understanding of what he said, it may not be smart to put too much faith in every little word in this book. But if you are more interested in hearing the truth that he was trying to get across, then I believe that this book will be a great help in that direction.

A Confession, part 1

I grew up in the Orthodox Christian faith. But by the time I was eighteen I no longer believed any of the things I had learned at school. As far as I can remember, I never seriously believed them, but I had said only what other adults around me wanted me to say. Before I was eleven, a student visited us one Sunday and said that students at his school they were saying that there is no God and that what the church says about God is not true. This was in 1838. I remember how interested my older brothers were in what our visitor was saying. They called me to their meeting and we all talked enthusiastically about what life would be like if this was true. I remember too when my brother Dimitry, who was then at the university, made a strong move to give himself fully to religion. He started to go to all the Church meetings, to fast and to lead a very perfect life. All of us, even our parents, made a joke of him, and for some reason we started to call him Noah. I joined in with these jokes, which left me believing that, even if it is important to go to church, one must not take such things too seriously.

I remember that I read Voltaire when I was very young, and far from making me angry, his arguments against God interested me deeply. It is not strange for people like myself, who have been well educated, to leave their faith in God. Religious teaching is not a part of the life that we live. Faith is looked on as something that some people do on a Sunday; but who can say from the way a person lives his life the other six days of the week if he is a believer or not? I see no difference between an Orthodox believer and one who does not believe in God on those other six days; and, if there is a difference at all, then I think I would choose to follow the one who is not a believer. Most church people I knew then and know now are not very smart, not very honest, are cruel, and think of themselves as being more important than they are. Ability, a friendly spirit, and good actions are easier to find in people who do not believe in religion. Schools teach the students the rules of the church, and the government gives papers to show that you are a church member. But people like myself, who have finished with school may live for ten or twenty years without ever remembering that they are living in a country full of Christians, and without remembering that they themselves are members of the Orthodox Christian Church.

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Before going to bed that night, he went down on his knees to say his prayers beside his rug, as he had done from the time he was a child. His brother, who was lying close by, watched him. When S. had finished, his brother said, "So you still do that?"



"So you still do that?"

That was all that was said; but from that day on, S. stopped saying his prayers and stopped going to church. And that was thirty years ago. He did not stop because there was a change in his beliefs, but only because those few words from his brother were like the push of a finger on a wall that was close to falling from its own weight anyway. The word from his brother only showed that where he had believed there was faith, was an empty space. Saying the prayers, making the sign of the cross, and other religious actions were not really important to him, so it took only those few words to show him how stupid he had been.

And this is how it is with most educated people who are honest with themselves. I do not say it is like this with those educated people who use religion for other selfish reasons. But such people are the worst believers, because their faith, used as it is for selfish reasons, is the most false. Yet, for most honest people, education and the problems of life soon show that religious faith does not have the answers that they need. And so, religious teaching stopped being important to me as it did for most other people; but for me it was something I clearly chose to turn away from at the age of sixteen, after a year of studying the writings of many great men. At that time, I stopped going to church, stopped praying and fasting, and stopped believing what I had learned as a child about God. But I did not choose to stop believing in God as such. It is just that I could not say what God was like. And I did not fight against Christ or his teachings, but then again, I could not say what his teachings were either, for the church had never really told me.

As I look back at that time, I now see clearly that my faith – that is, my only real reason for living – was to make myself perfect. But I could not have said why I believed this was important. I tried to make my mind perfect by studying everything that came my way. I tried to make my will perfect by following many rules that I made for myself. And I tried to make my body perfect by doing many difficult exercises. All of this was part of my "faith". It started with me wanting to be perfect in a

good way. But soon I was not thinking about God or even about my own rules for what is right. What I wanted was to be perfect in the eyes of other people. And this soon changed to a feeling that I must be stronger, more important, and richer than others.

A Confession, part 2

With all my heart I wanted to be good, but I was young, and I was alone, very much alone, in wanting to be good. Anytime I tried to talk about my sincere desire to be the best person I could be, others laughed at me. But when I would do what was wrong, others encouraged me and said only good things about me. Pride, greed, adultery, anger, hate, these were all encouraged, not only by my friends, but by older people. By giving in to these wrong spirits, I became like the older people around me, and I could feel that they were happy with me. I remember a kind aunt that I lived with. She herself was a clean living person; but she told me that she believed I should have sex with a married woman, because it would make a man of me. Another happiness that she wanted for me was that I should become a leader in the army. And her greatest happiness would come from seeing me marry a very rich girl and having as many servants as I liked. I cannot think of those years without feeling very sad. I killed men in war, and in gun fights over arguments. I lost much money at cards, lived off the hard work of the poor, and punished them when they did not do what I wanted. Lying, killing, robbing, and adultery, I did it all. But nothing I did stopped my friends from thinking that I was a very good person. I lived like this for ten years. And it was at this time that I started writing. I did it for the money, and for people to think well of me. But with my writing, as with my life, I learned that I must hide the good and show what is bad if I wanted people to buy my books. If I wanted to say something serious, I was forced to hide it, by making people think that I myself did not have a strong feeling one way or the other. I was very good at doing this, and people loved me for it.

When I was twenty-six or twenty-seven, I returned from the war, to Petersburg. That is where I started meeting other writers. They welcomed me as one of them, and they said nice things about me. I quickly took on their beliefs about life, and this is where I lost all touch with my early plan to be good. The writers had a teaching that made it right for us to be as selfish as we wanted. The teaching that my writer friends had was this: Life gets slowly better and better, and we educated people are the most important ones in making this happen. Of the educated people, we writers and those who work with art have the greatest effect. It is our job to teach the whole world. If any of us should ask ourselves, "What do I know, and what can I teach?" and should find that we do not know the answers to life, that is not a problem. The teaching has an answer for that. The answer is that we do not need to know; we will be teaching best when we do not know what it is that we teach. Because people believed that I was a great writer, it was very easy for me to believe this teaching.

Just by writing, I received money. With this, I could have the best food, the best places to sleep, all the women I wanted, and important friends. It is not important that I had nothing to say; my wealth showed that I must be saying what needed to be said! This faith was a religion for myself and my friends, and I was a priest in this religion.

But by the third year of this life, I started to question it. I could see that we priests ourselves did not agree on much of anything. The priests were always fighting with one another. And there were some that had no interest at all in what was right or wrong, but only in making money. I could see that my writer friends were even worse than my soldier friends when it came to how they lived their lives. For the most part, they were very bad people who had the kind of over confident spirit that only comes when a person is either very good or when a person does not know what being good is all about. Clearly, they were from the second group. I became sick of these men, and I became sick of myself. I could see that the religion of the writers was a lie. But even after seeing the lie behind

it, I did not stop writing. I still believed that I could teach the world without, myself, knowing what I was teaching. I had, by then, far too much pride, and it showed in my writing. When I think of that time, it makes me feel like I was in a hospital for crazy people. We all believed that what we had to say was important, and that we should talk, write, and print as quickly as we could and as much as we could, and that it was all for the good of the world.

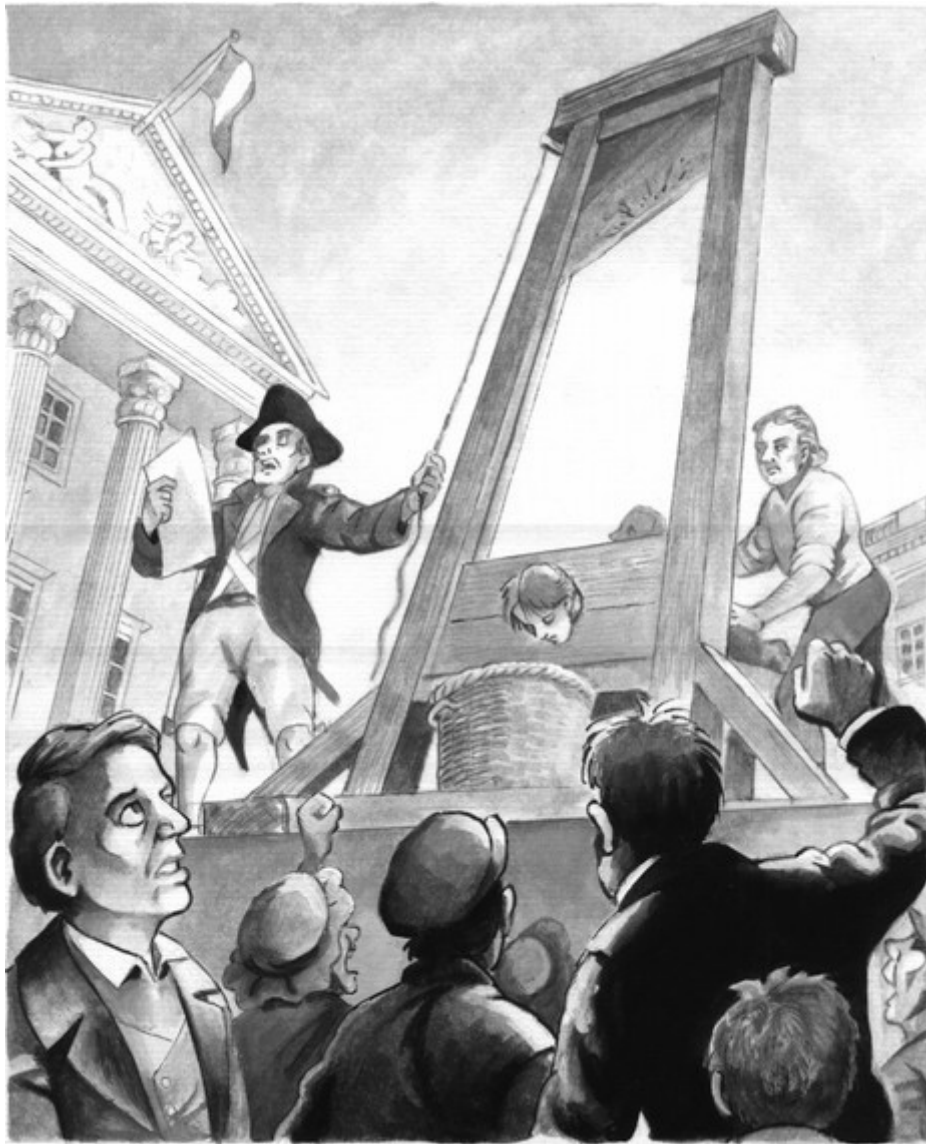
Thousands of us disagreed with each other, but we never saw that as a problem. And we never saw that not one of us had the answer to the easiest question in life: What is good and what is bad? We all talked at the same time, not listening to one another. At times we would say something good about another in return for the other saying something good about us, and at times we would become very angry with one another. We were always angry that the world was not taking us seriously enough. How very much like a hospital full of crazy people we were! It is all very clear to me now, but it was not then. I can see now that all we wanted was to make money and to have people think well of us. Because all we knew to do was to write books and papers, that is what we did. Because our work was of no great use, we were forced to make a teaching between ourselves that said we were the most important people in the world. And because people gave us money for our writing, that was enough to make us confident that our teaching was right.

A Confession, part 3

I lived this crazy life for another six years, up to the time that I married. In those six years, I lived for a time in Europe, where I mixed with many educated and rich people. Many of these people encouraged me in my belief about becoming more and more perfect. They had a word for their religion, and it was called "progress". When I would start to think (as every sincere person must think at times), "What is the best way to live?" the answer would come back from this religion, saying, "Live in agreement with progress." But progress had no clear meaning to anyone, and I did not think to question that at the time.

I could not see that I was like a man in a boat that is being carried along by the wind and the waves. And the wind and waves were what we called progress. Such a man, when asked where he should steer his ship, would say, "To anyplace where the wind carries us." I did not clearly question this teaching, but there was something in my spirit that could see a problem in it at times.

When I was in France, I saw a man killed by the government.



I saw the man's head cut off, and as it dropped into the box, I asked myself if this was progress. I could not help but believe that killing, for any reason, was wrong. And I had the feeling that right and wrong do not come from just looking at what others do and following them, but it comes from inside your own heart.

Right is right even if no one does it; and wrong is wrong, even if everyone is doing it. When my brother died, I again had the feeling that the progress teaching was not enough. He was in much pain for more than a year. He died without understanding why he had lived, or why he had to die. No teaching about progress could give any answer to his death.

But these times when I questioned the progress teaching, and the feelings I received from them, were short lived. For the most part I followed the teaching that all things are getting better and better and, because I am a part of all things, I too am getting better and better. On returning to Russia, I moved to the country, and started working with poor schools. I still believed in progress, but I could see that at times progress has not been good. So I tried to give the children as much freedom as I could, to see what way they would go. The truth is that I was still fighting with my own understanding that I had nothing to teach. I stayed there for a year before returning to Europe where I learned more about how to teach others without knowing anything myself. In 1861, the year of freedom for country workers, I returned to Russia, where I worked as a voice between the poor workers and their owners.

On the outside, it looked like my life was going well, but in my mind I had a feeling that I was going crazy. After one year in this work, I gave it all up and went away to the country to breathe clean air, and to live an easy life. When I returned from this time away, I married. This change in my life stopped me from thinking about the meaning of life for another fifteen years. For the next fifteen years, the one interest I had in life was my wife and my children. My earlier plan to make myself perfect had been dropped so that I could follow progress, and now that plan was being dropped so that I could make as much money as I could for myself and my family. I knew that writing was not important, but I also knew that I could make a lot of money from doing it. So I worked at writing; and the only truth I had to teach through my writings was that one should live so as to have the best, for himself and for his family.

Then, five years ago, something very strange started to happen to me. At first I went through short times when I did not know what to do, or when I had the feeling that I did not know how to live. These times would come and go at first, and then I would go on living. Then they started to happen more and more often. Each time they came with the same questions about anything I was doing at the time: Why are you doing this? What does it lead to? At first, I thought these were easy questions, and if I should ever take the time, I could find the answers with little trouble. But I told myself that I did not have the time to find the answers just then. These questions were like the little pains that a person feels before learning that he or she has a sickness that no doctor or medicine can fix. What starts as a little thing, in time leads to their death. And that was what was happening to me spiritually.

Slowly I was learning that these questions were the most important questions in my whole life. They had to be answered. Before I could do anything more, I must know why I was doing it. If I did not know why, then I could not live. When thinking about the education of my children, I would say to myself, "What for?" Or when thinking of ways that the poor workers might become rich, I would find myself saying, "Why should I be interested in them?" Or when thinking about how many people knew about my work, I would say to myself, "If more people come to know about me than know of Shakespeare, what difference will it make?" My brain could find no answers for these questions. And the questions would not wait for me to find an answer sometime in the future. If they could not be answered, then I could not live. All that I had been standing on had collapsed, and I had nothing left under my feet. All that I had lived for was no longer there.

A Confession, part 4

My life stopped. I would breathe, eat, drink, and sleep, because I could not stop doing those things; but there was no real life in me, because there was nothing I wanted to do strongly enough to do it. If I started to want something, I knew ahead of time that it would not take away the pain in my heavy heart. If an angel had come and told me I could have anything I wanted, I do not know what I would have asked for. At times I found myself wanting to do something that I had done in the past, but then I would start to think about it, and I would know that it too was a waste of time. I did not even want to know the truth, for I believed that the truth was that there is no meaning at all in life. It was like I had walked and walked, and now I was at the top of a cliff. There was no turning back, and there was nothing below but death. There I was, a healthy man not yet fifty. I had a good wife who loved me, and good children. I had much wealth, and it was growing each day without much work on my part. My friends and family looked up to me. Many thousands of people knew of me through my writings. I was not crazy. The opposite was true; I was very smart. And yet I no longer wanted to live. As much as I had wanted to live when I was younger, so much I wanted to stop living now. Part of me wanted to find a way out of this, but that part had to be very smart to stop the other part from taking my life. In the eyes of the world I had every reason to live, and yet I had to hide a rope from myself, so that I would not tie it to the roof and use it to hang myself when I was alone in my room at night. I stopped going out shooting, for fear that I would use the gun to

end my life. I did not know what I wanted. I wanted to run away from life, but I feared death and wanted to find a reason for living too.

I often had the feeling that someone had played a cruel joke on me. This someone had watched me grow for thirty or forty years, learning so many things, and then, when I had it all, he let me see that it was nothing, and he was now laughing at me for having believed that those things were important. With all of my learning, I had missed the clearest truth of all, and that is that one day it will all end in death. I had seen it come already to some people that I loved. And sooner or later it was going to come to me. How do we go through life without seeing this? And how do people go on living after they see it? That is what is surprising. Life is only interesting when we forget about death. But when we wake up to the truth, then we see that there is nothing to live for that will live on after we die.

There is an old story about a traveller who runs from a dangerous wild animal. In running from the animal, he finds a dry well. As he is working his way down the side of the well, he sees an angry dragon at the bottom. He holds on to a branch growing out of the side of the well, knowing that he cannot go up and he cannot go down. Then he sees one black mouse and one white mouse, going around and around the branch, and biting at it as they go. If the traveller does not let go of the branch, the branch itself will break in time.



The traveller knows that he must die one way or the other, but he sees some honey on the leaves of the branch and he reaches out for the honey with his tongue. I could see myself in that story. As the white and black mice of day and night chewed at the branch that was my life, I tried to find happiness in the honey that dropped from the leaves. But for me, the honey was no longer sweet.

The dragon and the mice were too real; I could not take my eyes away from them. This story is the truest story that anyone could ever tell, for it is the truth that each one of us must face.

The honey that had been my reason for living in the past was no longer good enough. My friends said, "You cannot understand the meaning of life, so do not think about it. Just live." But I could no longer do that. I had already done it for too long. Death is the greatest truth, and all else is false. The two drops of honey that had been sweetest for me my love of family and my writing were no longer sweet to me. I could now see that my family was in the same place that I was in. Should I let them live a stupid lie, or should I tell them the truth that would destroy them as it was destroying me?

Loving them, I could not hide the truth from them. But the truth is death. And what about my writing? I had believed that writing could have meaning even when I was dying; but now I could see that this was only true if life had meaning. I wanted to kill myself. I was afraid of what was waiting for me after death, but I could not go through the pain of waiting for death to come either. I wanted it all to be over, and a rope or a bullet was the fastest way to end it.

A Confession, part 5

"But it could be that I have missed something," I said to myself many times. "It could be that there is something I need to understand, and when I see it, all will fit together." I looked for the answer in books, not from a shallow interest as one who has nothing better to do, but I looked as a man who is drowning looks for a life rope. And I found nothing. I turned to science. From my years of education, and from my many smart friends, I was able to hear all that science had to say. I had long believed, because of the serious and confident air of the scientists, that science had the answers to everything. If I had not been able to find the answers there before, I had believed that it was only because I had not worded the questions well, or because I had not listened closely to the answers. But what I learned when I was most hungry for answers, is that science has nothing at all to give to the hunt for the meaning of life. Science only agrees with what I had by this time learned on my own, and that is, that the one thing we know more than anything else, is that we cannot know the meaning of life.

The question I was asking was the easiest of questions. The question is there in the heart of the most foolish child as well as in the heart of the smartest adult. It is the question that must be answered before we can even start to live. The question is: "What will come of what I am doing today or of what I will do tomorrow? What will come of my whole life?" Or to put it another way, "Why should I live? Why want or do anything?" Or it could be asked like this, "Is there any meaning in my life that death will not destroy?"

When I turned to science, I found there are two opposite sides to it, and both of them do not answer the important questions of life. One side has clear answers, but asks the wrong questions; the other side asks the right questions, but does not give clear answers. The side with the clear answers leads to numbers and sums. It is what we call "hard" science. The side with the right questions leads to philosophy. It is what we call "soft" science.

Hard science had told me that everything is getting better and better, and in time we will know everything. It is difficult to believe now that there was a time when I was happy with this answer. But it was at a time when I was becoming stronger and smarter myself, so it was easy to believe such a lie. But now that I am becoming older and weaker, with my teeth and hair falling out, I see that the law of progress is a counterfeit. When you look closer at it, it says nothing about what is better or what is worse, what is forward or what is backward. The hard sciences can tell us things about the laws of light, about the joining of chemicals, about how animals grow, and about numbers

and measures. But when I ask, "Why do I live?" it says, "When you understand all of the atoms in all of space, then you will understand why you live on the earth."

If one turns to the soft sciences, one finds surprisingly little to think about there either. It is filled with arguments between one scientist and another. And most scientists will say things at times that go against what they themselves said at other times. The soft sciences say that all people have important rules to live by. These rules are there in the religion, government, art, and science of the world. They too believe that these rules become better and better with time. It is the job of the soft scientist to study these rules and to teach people to follow the best ones. But the soft scientists each start from their own understanding of what is most important, and they each come to different ends. They study a small group of people in a small measure of time and try to say things from those studies that will be true for all people at all times. They do this without understanding the whole picture, for they have no answer to where life came from or where life is going.

I must say that there was a time when I believed the argument of the soft sciences too; but it was because I had my own rules, and I wanted to believe that, by playing their game, I could tell the world what was right and what was wrong by my rules. But in the face of death, the soft sciences have no answers that bring real meaning to life. When I turn to philosophy, the softest of the soft sciences, and I ask, "Why am I here?" philosophy not only gives no answer, but philosophy itself asks the same question. The best it can do is to ask the question clearly. And its most honest answer is just to say, "I do not know."

A Confession, part 6

In looking for the answer to my question, I had the feeling that I was a man lost in the jungle. I could go up a tree and see clearly the world outside of the jungle, but I knew that my home was not out there. My home was in the jungle. Yet if I came down from the tree, all I could see was darkness. The hard sciences are like what I see from the top of the tree, very clear in what they show, but far from what I am looking for. The soft sciences are like the jungle. The answer I look for is in there, but I do not know where, and the darkness stops me from ever finding it. I was lost, and science had no light to lead me to my home.

When I asked the soft scientists "What is the meaning of life?" the answer was, "There is no meaning." When I asked, "What will come of my life?" the answer was, "Nothing." And when I asked, "Why am I here?" the answer was, "Because you are here." On the other hand, the hard sciences gave me a long list of answers for questions that I had not asked: about the chemicals in the stars, about the movement of the sun toward different groups of stars, about the smallest pieces that make up all material. But when I ask "What is the meaning of life?" the answer is that what I call "life" is only a group of atoms joined together for a measure of time. When these atoms stop working together as they do now, what I call "life" will end. Life, they say, is an accident, and it will always end in death. Even when the two sides of science get together and say things (such as, "The meaning of life is to work together with other people to make life better."), the meanings of the words that they use are themselves not clear. In philosophy I hear the same truth coming from Socrates, Schopenhauer, Solomon, and Buddha.

Socrates said, when he was close to dying, "We are closest to truth when we are closest to death. We who love truth use our lives to free ourselves from our bodies and from all the wrongs that come from the life of the body. If this is what we try to do with our life, then we must be very glad when our life ends in death. A smart man spends his life looking toward death, so that when death comes he has no fear of it."

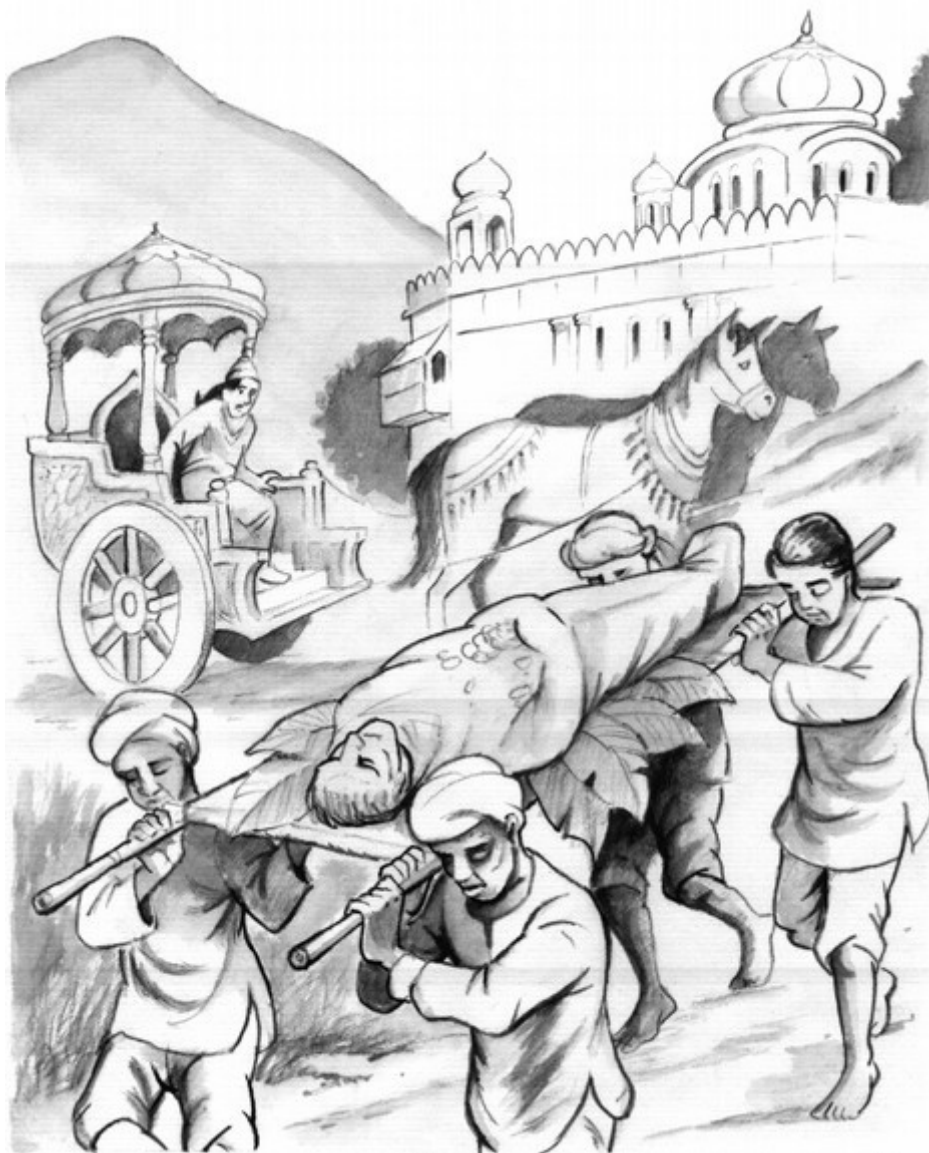
Schopenhauer said, "What makes the world real is our will. When a person chooses to go against his or her own will, all the fighting and trying without rest, that makes up life, stops. When there is no will, there is no world. There is nothing. All that can bring us back to life and the world around us is the 'will to live'. The reason this will is so strong in each of us is because we know that this is all that we have. When this will stops, everything else stops with it. We are nothing without it. And for those who lose the will to live, this 'real' world of ours, with all of its suns, becomes nothing."

"Nothing of nothing," said Solomon. "All is nothing. What good does a man have from all of his work at the end of his life? One world of people dies and a new world of people takes over. Those who die remember nothing. And one day those who are alive will be the same. I was king over Israel and I gave myself to understand the meaning of life. This exercise is one that God gives to all men. I looked and found that all of our works come to nothing but pain and trouble in the end. I looked at myself and saw that I had more understanding than anyone in my country. But what good was it to me? For the more I understand, the more sadness I feel." "I said to myself, I will stop studying and I will do anything that will make me happy. But this too was a waste of time. In the middle of my drinking and laughing I could see that I was no better than a crazy person. I wanted to do more with my life than that." So I did great works. I made houses and planted vines and trees. I made water ways to help them grow. I had many servants, and many animals. I worked hard to get gold and silver and many other expensive things from other countries. I had entertainment, singers and people playing musical instruments. If there was anything that could make me happy, I had it. But then I looked at it all and I could see that it too was a waste of time. What I could see with my understanding was that I was no smarter than a crazy person when it came to death. In death we are equal." So I hated life, and all the pain that it had cost me. For in the end, I would be taken away from my work through death, and it would go to another person. People cannot eat and drink happily, knowing that they are going to die one day. And when that day comes it will make no difference if they have been good or bad, religious or not. For they will be dead; and when that happens, they will remember nothing. It is better to be a living dog than a dead lion. The living know that they will die, but the dead know nothing. For the living there is hope; but for the dead even love and hate have no more meaning." So said Solomon.

And this is what we learn from Buddha and India:

Sakya Muni was the happy young son of a king. His father had protected him from learning about old age, sickness, and death. But one day he went for a ride in his coach. On the way he saw a very old man, with no teeth and no hair. The boy asked his driver what had happened to the man to make him like this. When he learned that what was happening to the old man happens to all people as they grow older, and that it would one day happen to him, he was very sad, and he asked his driver to take him home quickly.

It was a few days before he could forget what he had seen on his first trip, and then he was able to take another ride in the coach. This time he saw a very sick man. The man's whole body was hot and shaking, and he could not see. The boy, who did not know what sickness was, asked what was happening to the man. From this he learned that sickness could happen to anyone at any time. Thinking about this made him lose interest in the ride again; so he returned home a second time. After some time, he was again able to forget what he had seen, and he went out for a third trip in the coach. This time he saw people carrying something. He asked what it was, and learned that it was a dead man. He came closer to look, and to ask what the people were going to do with the man. He was told that they would bury the body, because if they did not, the worms would eat it and the smell would make people sick." And will this happen to me one day too?" he asked. "Will they bury me, and will my body smell as the worms eat it?"



When he learned that this was true, he returned home very discouraged, promising that he would never go out for a ride again. Sakya Muni was never able to be happy after that. He could see that life is the biggest of all lies, and he promised that he would do all that he could to be free from life and to help free others from it. And from this grows the biggest teaching in all of India, that true happiness can only come when we are free from life forever, never to be born again.

So this is what the smartest minds on earth have to say about the question of life. In short, Socrates has said, "Life is a lie, and happiness only comes when life is destroyed."

Schopenhauer has said, "Life should not be, and the only good in life is to leave it and become nothing."

Solomon has said, "All that fills our life is nothing. After death we have nothing to show for it."

And Buddha has said, "We are not able to live each day knowing that we are dying, so we must free ourselves forever from all life."

What these strong minds have said has been said through the years by many others like myself. I had turned to science for the meaning of life, but all that I had been able to find were people who agreed with me that it has no meaning. From this I could see that my mind was not sick; for the most powerful minds in the world agreed with me. So I could only say after listening to these great men that there was no point in trying to trick myself into believing that I had a good reason to live.

All the reasons we can give for living melt away in the face of death itself. Happy is the person who was never born; death is better than life; and we must free ourselves from life.

A Confession, part 7

Because I could not find the answer in science, I turned to life and to the people around me, to see what their answer was to the question I was asking. I should point out that I was looking at people who were, for the most part, like myself, well educated and rich. And in this circle of friends I found four different ways that these people acted.

The first group were those who had never asked themselves the question I was asking. They lived their lives without thinking about the dragon at the bottom of the well. Most of the people in this group were women, children, and some men who were not very smart. These people were happy to spend their lives tasting the drops of honey on the leaves of the branch that they were hanging on, and they did it without seeing what the mice of time were doing to the branch. I could not learn from these people, because I could see the dragon and the mice very clearly, and I could not turn time back to the way I had been before seeing all of this.

The second group were those who could see the problem, but they chose to take as much honey as they could before falling into the mouth of the dragon. They did all that they could to feel good, hoping that it would help them to forget the truth about death. Solomon said that he tried this for a time. He said, "I tried to be happy, because there is no better thing under the sun that a person can do than to eat, drink, and be happy. So, eat your bread and drink your wine with a happy heart, and look for happiness in your wife for as many days as you have left before you die. Do all that you can now, because there will be no more time for it after you are dead."

That was the way that most of the people in my circle of friends lived their lives. They were rich enough that they could do it, and they were stupid enough in spiritual things that they did not think about how their being rich made others poor. They did not think that for every man who has a thousand wives, there must be a thousand men who have no wife, and for every family that lives in a king's house, there are a thousand who must work very hard to have only the humblest house. They did not think that their place in the world as a Solomon might be only an accident of birth, or that another accident could make them Solomon's slave tomorrow. They were smart enough to know that sickness, death, and old age would come to them, but their minds were thick enough that they could forget these things at will. They call this ability to forget "positive thinking", but I could not see this as smart at all, and I could not force myself to follow them. Time and death are too important for a smart person to forget them.

The third way is the one that takes the most strength. It is to destroy your life after you have seen that it is a cruel joke. The people who do this seemed to me to be the strongest and most honest. They know that it is better to be dead than to be alive, and so they act in agreement with what they know, and they end their lives. There are many ways to do it: tying a rope around one's neck, drowning, putting a knife in one's heart, or jumping in front of the trains. And the number of people in our circle who act in this way is growing. It is interesting to learn that, for the most part, they do this at the best time of their life, when their minds are the strongest, and the truth is clearest. I could see that this was the most honest thing to do, but I was not strong enough to do it.

The fourth way out is the one I was taking at that time. It is the weakest way. People in this group hug the branch and wait. We see the dragon and the mice, and we know what is coming, but we do not have the strength to let go and end it all; so we live our lives in fear.

Try as I did, I could not find any other way that the people I knew lived their lives. Only these four patterns could be found. Because I could see by then that death is real, I could not follow the

first group, who know nothing better. Because I could not forget what I had seen, I could not follow the second group, who drown their sadness in alcohol and music. Because I feared death I was not strong enough to take my life, as the third group did. So I was forced into the fourth group, with Solomon and Schopenhauer, where we go on living, but every day is a pain.

I see now that one reason why I did not kill myself may have been that I could feel in my heart that there was something wrong with my reasoning, and that there was an answer that I had missed. It went like this: I could see nothing higher than reason. It seems that reason must have made life. And yet my reason told me that life has no meaning. How could reason make something that has no reason? I felt there must be something wrong in this. I said to myself, Life is stupid and bad, and yet I am still living; and people from all times have lived and many of them are still living. Am I and Schopenhauer the only smart people on the earth today? My argument showing that life has no meaning is not a difficult argument, and yet millions of people with no education live like they have the answer to the meaning of life. How do they do it? All of my education showed me that everything on earth, both living and dead has been made in the smartest way. Only I and my understanding of life and death are stupid.

How is it that millions of people who have not been to school as I have, who do not know how beautifully made plants, animals, and even rocks are... how is it that these uneducated people find that their lives too are beautifully made and that they have meaning? And then it hit me! A stupid person will always say that what he cannot understand is stupid. Most of the world lives their lives like life has meaning; but because I cannot understand them, I say that I am the smart one and that they are stupid. The world does not stop me from killing myself; so, if life is really so bad, why don't I do it? Why should I write about how bad life is when most of the world thinks that it is good? If it is really so bad, I should go away. We who say that life is bad, but then live on to write books about it are the stupidest of all people. All of our learning does not give us what comes so easily for the people that we look down on.

As far back as we can remember there have been people like myself saying that life has no meaning; but it has not stopped most of the people in the world from believing that it does. All that I know of the world and of life today came to me from people who believed that life had meaning. They were the ones who cut down the trees, planted the corn and wheat, learned to get milk from cows and eggs from chickens, gave me language and food and drink, made rules for living together, started schools, and put me in my job as a writer. And here I was telling them that they were stupid and that I – only I – could see the truth that life is ugly and bad."

There is something wrong here," I said to myself. "I have missed something." But it was a long time before I could find what it was that I had missed.

A Confession, part 8

At the time I could not say clearly what was wrong with my thinking, but it seemed that my thinking was both clear and not clear at the same time. I was agreeing with what some great thinkers of the past had said, and to my mind I was right in saying that life had no meaning. But if I was so confident that I was right, then I should have killed myself; but I did not. A part of me could not act in agreement with what my mind had said was the smart way to act. A force was fighting to keep me alive. And it was this force that pushed me into seeing that I and a few hundred other people like me were not the whole world. Looking at the narrow circle of my equals I had found only four ways of handling the question about the meaning of life. But I was acting like that narrow circle of rich, educated people were the whole world, and I was acting like the millions of other people in the world were nothing more than animals. It is strange to think that I could have believed my life and Solomon's and Schopenhauer's were the only real lives, and the lives of everyone else

were not important; but that is what I had been thinking. We rich, educated people will not say it in so many words, but that is how we act toward those who are not as educated or as rich as we are, in most other things too.

Thanks either to the strange love I have for working people or thanks to my knowing that I did not understand life, I turned to these poor people for an answer. I started to see that they were not as stupid as we educated people had believed, and I came to understand that the place to look for the meaning of life is not in people who have lost it (as we have), but in people who show by their lives, day after day, that they have found some good reason for living. These millions of poor working people did not, on the whole, fit into any of the four groups that I had listed from what I knew of my rich, educated friends. Most of them were smart enough to know, and to be able to say very clearly, that death is coming. They did not spend their life doing only what made them feel good; because, for one thing, they were not rich enough to be able to do that even if they had wanted to. And they would not think of taking their own life. So what was their reason for living? It did not come from the reasoning that I and my friends had used. It came from a reasoning that needed no reason. It was faith, the very thing I had turned away from in the past. It was God... the making of the world in six days... devils and angels... and all that I had left behind because I was too smart for it. I now had a new problem. My reason said that I must find a meaning for life; but the only way I could find a meaning for life was to put to one side my reason and take up faith. How could I do that?

A Confession, part 9

I had two ways of understanding my problem. I could say that what I had believed had been good reasoning was not good reasoning after all, or I could say that what I had earlier thought was stupid was not so stupid after all. I went over my first line of argument and at first I could see nothing wrong with it. There was no good reason to believe that life was anything more than a dream. But then I saw it: I had asked one question and answered another one. My question had been: "Why should I live? What real, eternal effect will there be of my short life?" But to find the answer to this question, I had studied life. Life itself could not give the answer to the meaning of life; for the meaning of life must be something bigger than life itself. My question was looking for a meaning that is bigger than time and space. But I looked in time and space for an answer, and the only answer I could come up with was that there was no meaning for life that is not bigger than life. It was something like what happens when you are doing a problem with numbers and you think you have found an answer from all that is on both sides of the equal sign; but then you find that what you have is not an answer, for you are using the same letters or numbers on both sides. Your work with the numbers and letters may be perfect, but the answer that you come up with says nothing, because it says only that x equals x or that thirteen equals thirteen. That is what had been happening with my reasoning about the meaning of life. The only answers that science could give about life are that life is life, or that zero equals zero. True science teaches that we must put to the side all that comes only from faith. Having done this, we then must build from the start only on the laws of reason, and on what we can see and touch in this life. So how can science, starting like this, ever give a clear answer to the meaning of life? When science reported, as Schopenhauer did, that life had no meaning and that it was evil, I believed that it was telling the truth. But I was going on my own feelings. The teachings of the Hindus and of Solomon and of Schopenhauer that life is nothing, in itself says nothing. It gives no answer and it says no more than that x equals x . Take away faith, and life cannot have meaning.

$$Y + 3X + X - 7 = \frac{X(6 + 2X) - 14 + 2Y}{2}$$

multiply each side by two to get:

$$2Y + 6X + 2X - 14 = X(6 + 2X) - 14 + 2Y$$

take 2Y away from each side to get:

$$6x + 2X - 14 = X(6 + 2X) - 14$$

add fourteen to each side to get:

$$6x + 2X = X(6 + 2X)$$

put 2X into each side to get:

$$3 + X = (3 + X)$$

take three away from each side to get:

$$X = X$$

take X away from each side to get:

$$0 = 0$$

You must bring in something that is bigger than "X".

The only way to answer my question is to bring into the answer something that is bigger than life. Even the worst answers that we receive from faith are better than what we receive from science, because faith turns to what the question is really asking in the first place, and that is for something that is bigger than life... something that will give meaning to life. If we do not bring faith into it, then there can be no answer. And any way that we word the question, faith always comes into the answer. How am I to live? – I am to live in keeping with the laws of God. What will come of my life? – Eternal pain or eternal happiness. What meaning does life have that death will not destroy? – Heaven; or being joined together with God for all time.

I was forced to see that, added to what reasoning we may have from science, all people have another measure of understanding (if we will use it), and that is the measure of Faith – without this measure of faith they could not live. People live because they believe that life has some kind of meaning. When they stop believing this, as I had, they stop living. Even I had been happy when I believed that my life had meaning. And that meaning had been my faith, such as it was. Faith may give many different answers, but what makes them all the same is that they give meaning to life, a meaning that is not destroyed by pain, sickness, or death. The faith I am talking about here is a very simple faith. We must have it before we can even talk about God. It is not a religion (as most people think). Faith is knowing that life has meaning, and as an effect of this, wanting to live. Faith is the strength of life. If a person does not believe there is meaning in life, that person will not live.

If a person does not know how short life is, then he or she may believe in life itself, in wealth, or in having many friends. Such is the faith of those who can go through life with a stupid smile on their faces, never thinking of death. But when the time comes that such a person sees how short life itself really is, then that person needs faith in something eternal before he or she can find a real reason to live. I looked back on my life and I saw that I had left all that I had been taught about eternal things as a child, because, at that time, I was one of those stupid people who had believed in life itself. I did not need an eternal answer as long as I could honestly believe in life. But a time came when I stopped believing in life. After this happened, each time I tried to find hope in life

alone, I could not find any reason to live. I was surprised that, with some of the best thinkers in history, all I could come up with was that zero equals zero. But I see now that, without faith, this is the best that anyone can come up with when looking for the meaning of life. What am I? I am a part of all that is eternal. In those few words is the answer to the whole problem.

Am I the first person to ask the question - one so easy that it comes at some time to the mind of every smart child? No. The question has been asked from the time of the first person on earth. And each time, the answer comes only by turning to the eternal and seeing in it the reason for life. But when we try to study that which is eternal with the reasoning of our little minds we cannot understand it. We have no room for it. It does not "work". We are like children who pull a watch to pieces, take the parts out of it, and make a toy of it. Then we are surprised when the watch does not go.

This war between our minds and the mind of God goes on at all times. Our minds badly need an answer, and we find it only when we let go of our thinking and reach out to the mind of God. But when we find the answer, and our lowly reasoning returns to us, it is so easy to use that same reasoning to laugh at and destroy the faith we have just found. And this leaves us back where we started, with the biggest question in the world and no answer to it. Faith in God; the belief that we have an eternal soul; believing that God is interested in what we do each day; and our understanding of what is right and what is wrong, all come from this eternal part of us that science can never see.

But I had destroyed, or maybe just covered, this part of myself and then tried to make it again, using only my reasoning – something that cannot be done. I did not understand it in those same words at the time, but I had come to see that for all of our understanding, Schopenhauer, Solomon, and myself were stupid. We saw that life had no meaning, but we did not kill ourselves. How stupid! If we were people of understanding and if we had truly learned that life has no meaning, then we should have done the right thing, and in the name of reason and our own smartness, destroyed it. A second thing that I had learned was that all of our reasoning will never give a meaning to life. It can only lead us around and around in a circle that always comes up with the same answer... that zero equals zero. Because of this, I could see that there must be something wrong with our reasoning. And the third thing that I was coming to see was that only in the answers that faith gives can we find the truest, deepest understanding of life. Even if these answers had not sat well with my reasoning in the past, I should have heard them out and not made fun of them.

A Confession, part 10

Understanding this, still did not give me peace of mind. I could not honestly throw out reason, for it too is a part of truth, and it is needed to choose between one argument and another, when they are coming from two different teachers. But I was now ready to happily receive any faith that would give me answers that were not wholly opposite to reason. I studied Buddhism, Islam, and most of all I studied Christianity, both from books and from the people around me.

I went first to the educated Orthodox people because they were closest to me. In this group were experts from every part of the Orthodox religion, from those most on the left to those most on the right. I asked them many questions to uncover their understanding of the meaning of life. I tried to overlook differences on little things and to stay away from arguments, but as I listened to each of them, it seemed that what they were calling faith did not really give an answer to the meaning of life. Their answers only confused me.

At many points in my talks with these people my hopes would be lifted that I was close to finding a faith that would bring meaning to life. But then their answers would fall short. I remember a strong feeling of fear that I would be forced back into my earlier spirit and would finish up without

any hope at all. They mixed many things that were not needed in with the most important Christian truths; but I could have overlooked a few things that I did not agree with, just to keep them happy, if they had been able to give me a clear answer to the meaning of life. What I found, instead, was that they were just as confused as me. The only difference was that I was not saying that I had the answer, and they were. The spirit of these rich, educated, religious people was to get all that they could from this life, because it is all that they have. They feared being poor, sick, or dying as much as anyone. I could not believe this would be true of anyone who had a faith that gave meaning to those things. Like myself, they were rich and they still wanted more, and they lived to please themselves. It was a kind of holy love of self, where they played games with God to make them forget what they feared. They lived just as badly as, if not worse than, those who did not have faith. No argument could make me believe that they had the answer to the meaning of life. I was looking for people whose lives showed that they were not afraid of being poor, sick, or dead, and I did not find it in the educated church people.

The truth is that I saw less fear of death in some people who had no faith in God, but who worked for the good of the poor in my country, under the Back-to-the-People movement. Only the rich can play these games with God. For the poor, faith must be real, or it will not be strong enough to carry them through the difficult things that they are forced to go through each day. So because it was in thinking of these poor workers that I had started to think about faith in the first place, I started to go looking for poor believers, so that I could learn from them. In words and actions, the faith of these poor believers was the same as that of my rich friends. I found that the poor people mixed a lot of other teachings in with the most important Christian truths too, but it was easier for me to understand them believing in such things. Faith was a very serious thing to them, and not the game that it was to the rich. The whole life of the rich is opposite to what comes out of their mouths in church on a Sunday. But when the same words come from the mouths of the poor, it goes perfectly with the life that they live.

In the end, I could see that the poor have real faith and it gives real meaning to their lives. In our circles it is difficult to find one true believer in a thousand. But the opposite is true in poor circles: It is difficult to find one person in a thousand who does not believe. For the rich, life is easy and they are not happy. For the poor, life is hard, but they are happy. They take sadness and sickness as part of life, and most of them die in peace. But we rich people almost always die in fear. These poor people, who do not have all that Solomon and I had to make for a "good" life, were (and are) on the whole a very happy people.

After all of my looking for answers in my own circle of friends, I was able to find in the poor of the world not two or three or tens or even hundreds, but thousands and millions of people who live each day knowing deep in their hearts that life and death both have meaning. They live and die knowing that life is good. I learned to love these people. The more I came to know of their life, both the life of those who are living and the lives of those who are dead (who I learned about through books and through listening to others), the more I loved them, and the easier it became for me to live.

This went on for about two years, and I came to hate the life of the rich educated circle of people that I had always moved in. It was more than hate. Such a life had no meaning at all to me. All of our actions, words, science, and art came to me in a new light. I could see by this time that it was all just a game, and that it had no meaning at all. But the life of the working people, who make up most of the world, who give us all that we need in life, theirs is the life that has true meaning. Theirs is the true life. And I received it for myself.

A Confession, part 11

The same beliefs that had made me sick when I heard them coming from people whose lives did not agree with them made me feel good when I saw people living their lives in agreement with them. That is why I felt myself being pulled toward things at that time that I had felt pushed away from before. They had no meaning to one group of people, but they had very much meaning to the other.

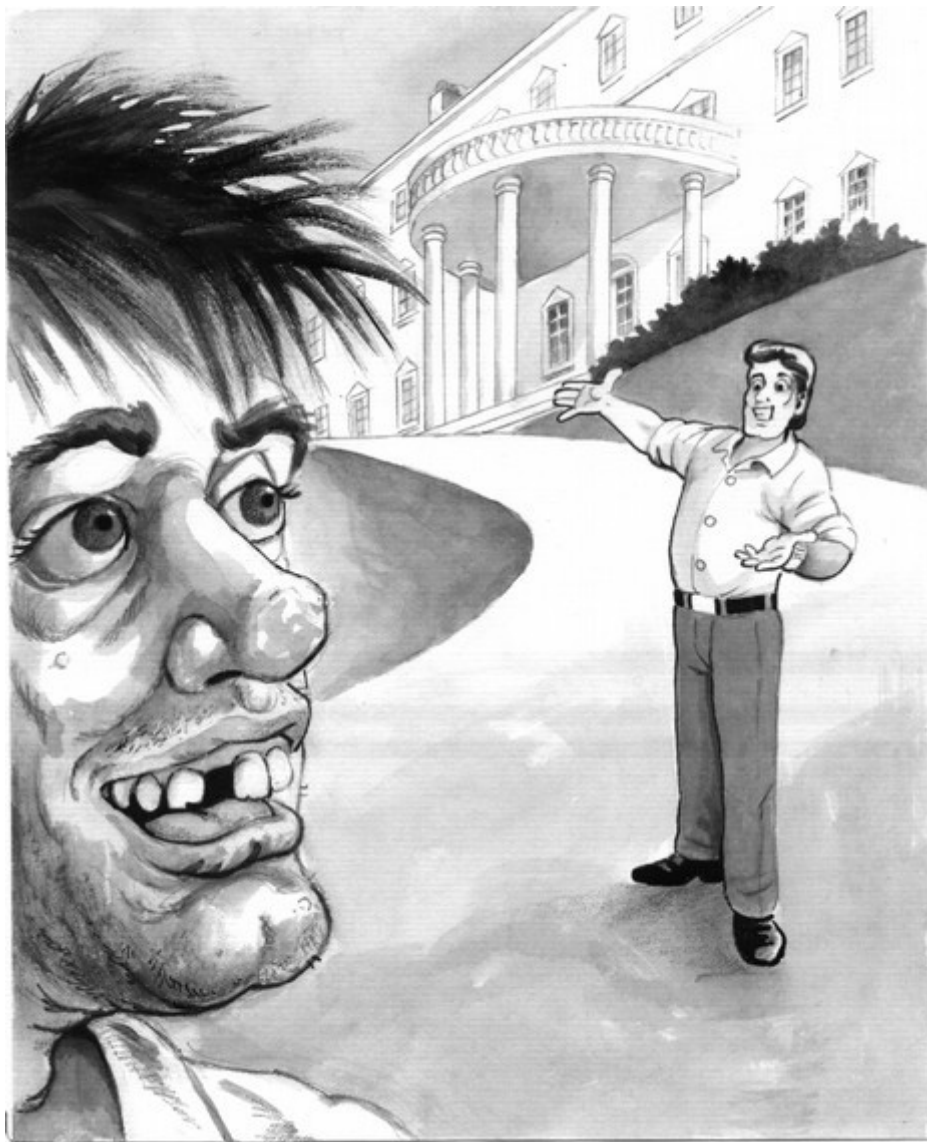
My problem had not been in the way I had thought, but in the way I had lived. I had lived my life for my self; so when I asked myself "What is my life?" the answer I received was that it was very bad... it did not have meaning... it would be better if I had never lived. My answer was true, but it was only true for my life, not for life in general.

I later read this truth in the Gospels, where Jesus says, "People run from the light because they themselves are bad and they do not want to change." I now see that a bad life has no meaning, and if we are to find meaning for life, we must not look to the rich to find an answer, for they are the worst ones to give an answer to the meaning of life. They only become rich by taking from others and keeping it for themselves. This is as true as the truth that two and two are four, but I had been hiding from this because I was one of the rich. I was bad, and I did not want to face this. It was more important for me to feel that I was right than it was for me to see the truth that I needed to change. But when I turned to study the lives of these good poor people, I learned to hate myself and my old ways. I was forced to face the truth about myself, and in so doing, I found meaning to life.

Think about a person whose job it is to cut heads off of people. If he was locked in a room where this was all that he did, and he believed that he would die if he left that room, how would he answer the question, "What is life?" He would have to say that life is very bad, and that it would be better if he were dead. His answer would be perfectly right, but only if he asked it about himself. What if all we rich people are like that man, taking the life out of other people to make life easier for ourselves? I know that my life was like that. Look at the animal world. A bird is made to fly, find food, and build a nest. When I see a bird doing this, I feel it is happy, and I am happy for it. A goat, a rabbit, and a wolf are made to mate and feed themselves and their families. When they do that, I believe they are happy and their lives have meaning. So what should people do? We do what animals do, but with one difference. We must do it for others and not just for ourselves. When we do that, we are happy, and life has meaning.

But what had I been doing for all of my adult life? Far from finding or growing food for others, I had not even been finding or growing food for myself. I had lived off the hard work of other people, telling myself that anything that helped me to take money from them must be good. So when I asked myself what good could come of my life, I had no answer. My life had no meaning.

For thirty years I had been taking from others and destroying others by using what they had worked hard to make, without joining in to help them. How could I have hoped to come up with any other answer but the one I had come up with: My life was without meaning, and it was bad. Life in general is here for a reason. Someone made it, and it was made for a reason. If we want to understand that reason, we must try to work in agreement with the one that made it. We must try to do what he wants us to do. If I will not do what is wanted of me, then I can never hope to understand the meaning for life. If you take a hungry beggar from the side of the road and put him in a beautiful house where he has all that he needs, and you say his job is to move a handle up and down, the first thing he should do is to obey you.



He may want to know why he was taken from the side of the road and why he should move the handle; he may feel he should understand everything about the building that he is in before he will obey. But if he would just move the handle, he would come to see that it pulls water up from under the ground. He would soon learn that he is watering the plants and trees that are growing in the big yard around the house. In time he would be taken from moving the handle to walking in the yard, where his job would be to take cherries, nuts, oranges and lemons from the trees, grapes from the vines, and to pull vegetables from the ground. In doing his job, he would come to learn more and more of the answers to the questions he had in the first place. He would see that all of his actions were helping himself in the end; and he would have no reason to fight against the loving master who first brought him there.

The poor working people who do the will of the master, those that we educated people have come to think of as stupid animals, they do not fight against the master. But we who think we are so smart, we eat the master's food without doing what the master tells us to do. We do worse than that. We sit in a circle and talk about how stupid it is for anyone to move that handle up and down when they don't know why they are doing it. Then we start teaching that the master is stupid or that he is nothing more than a story that the stupid people have made up to give meaning to moving the handle. We tell the world and we tell ourselves that we are very smart when we are really the stupidest of all. For in the end, it is we who feel that there is no meaning in our lives, and it is we who feel that we must kill ourselves!

A Confession, part 12

I had learned that the meaning of life cannot come from reason alone; it must come from faith. And I had learned that faith only works when we are ready to change our lives to make them agree with our faith. I had learned this from studying the poor working people. This was happening at a time when I was asking myself almost every minute if I should not be better off to kill myself. This went on for a whole year, and between my thoughts about killing myself, and my thoughts about the faith of the working people, my heart was filled with a pain that I can only think of now as a hunger for God.

This hunger for God was not reasoning. It was only a feeling. It was a feeling of being alone and afraid in a strange land, and a hope for someone to come and help me. I had learned from Kant that no one can prove that God is real, and my mind agreed with Kant's reasoning. But it did not stop me from hoping that I could find God. I tried praying, as I had when I was a young boy, to a God that I did not know, but that I wanted to know. I said to myself that, if I am here, I am here for a reason. And there must be a first reason for all things. This first reason is what people call "God". When I started to reach out to this force, that I believed controlled me, I started to feel that I had a reason to live. But then I started to ask myself: How am I to think of this force? What does he want from me? The only answers I had were the old answers of the church, and when I started to think of them, this hope started to melt away. I was losing what I needed to stay alive. In my fear I prayed to the one that I wanted to find, that he would help me. But the more I prayed, the more it seemed that he was not there.

Fearing that there was no God at all, I cried out, "Lord, please help me! Please save me! Please teach me!" Nothing happened, and I had the feeling that my life had stopped. But again and again I returned to the truth that there must be a reason for my being here. I felt like a baby bird lying on my back in the tall grass after falling from the nest. I could not be here if I did not have a mother who loved me and gave birth to me. But where could she be now? And that someone who gave birth to me must be God. He must know and see that I am lost and that I need him. "He is real!" I said to myself. And again hope and happiness returned. But again I tried to understand him through the teachings of the church; and when I did, the happiness left me. The river of life in me dried up and again I believed that there was nothing left for me to do but to kill myself. But worse than this was the feeling that I could not kill myself. I must go on living without a reason.

This did not just happen two or three times. It happened tens and hundreds of times. I would start to feel happy and full of life for a short time, and then I would fall back into the same old feeling that I was without hope. Then... I remember that it was just after winter had finished... I was alone in the country, listening to the sound of the wind in the trees. I was doing what I had been doing for three years by that time. I was looking for God.

"Okay," I said to myself, "So there is no God. There is no way that I can prove that he is real. Even miracles prove nothing. For they are all in the mind. "But" I went on, "where did this belief that there should be a God come from?" I answered myself. "It must have come from him." As soon as I said this, happy waves of life moved inside of me. Meaning was returning to me again. But again it was short lived. "Thinking about God is not the same as God himself," I said to myself. "What is happening inside my mind is only real inside my mind. If I were to stop believing, that would not destroy him if he is real; and so my believing in him does not make him real if he is not. If God is real, he must be bigger than what I think." And again I started to die, and again I wanted to kill myself.

But then I turned my thoughts toward the pattern of what had been happening to me again and again over the past year. Hundreds of times I had been through this. Each time that I had started to believe in God I had started to live. And each time I had stopped believing in him I had started to die. I would long ago have killed myself if I had not had a weak hope that one day I would find him. I lived only when I felt him and when I looked for him. A voice in me then said, "What more do you need? This is God. When you believe, you have life. When you have life you have God, who is the Maker of all life. If you do nothing more than live your life looking for God, you will live your life with God, because looking for him is what brings real life to you." And a light filled me that did not leave me from that day to this. I was saved from death. After this, I returned to a faith much like the faith I had when I was a young man. I believed that God wanted me to do my best to be perfect, and I believed that he had worked through history to show his will through what most other people believed to be true about him. The big difference between my faith at this time and my faith as a young man was that I did these things without questioning them when I was young; but now I knew that I could not live without doing these things.

A Confession, part 13

I turned from the life of my circle of friends, to the life of the poor working people in my country – Russia – for answers. I had seen that the life of the rich was not, and is not, true life. Instead, it is a cruel lie that hides the truth from us. So I knew that if I was to learn the meaning of life, I would have to find it with those who make life – the working people. I now live with them, and what I have learned from them is that each one of us comes into the world by the will of God. God gives each of us freedom to destroy our soul or to save it. To save our soul, we must live as he wants us to live. He wants us to be humble, loving, hardworking, and to turn away from wanting a rich life. The poor people have learned this from their church leaders and from what has been handed down to them through history.



This much was clear to me. I agreed with it and I loved it. But there were other things that went with this that turned my stomach. I could not see that they were needed at all. They were things like baptism (and other actions that the poor people believe have magic in them), going to church meetings, not eating some foods on special holy days, and loving little idols. But, because the people could not separate one from the other, I did not try to separate them either. I went to the meetings, praying morning and night, eating as they did, and getting ready to eat the special holy bread with them as they do each Sunday. At first, I did not fight with it at all. I was just glad to be with them and happy to be alive.

When I was younger, I had many things that I wanted to do with my life, and I could see no need for faith. Because I could see no need for it at that time, I thought little about throwing it away. Now I knew strongly that I needed faith, and many of the things that I had earlier believed were not important, were very very important to me by this time. What I had been happy to throw away as foolishness when I was young, I now believed had a meaning that I would, in time, learn to understand. I argued that faith must be different for different people, because each person has different needs. Faith must give answers to a dying king, a tired slave, a foolish child, a smart old man, a stupid old woman, a young happy wife, and a young person with strong emotions.

All these people from many walks of life are asking the same question: "Why do I live, and what will be the end of my life?" The answer will, in some ways, be the same for each of them, but in

other ways it will come to each of them in different ways. So with this argument I was able to understand these poor uneducated people doing things that I did not feel right doing myself. I wanted very badly to be able to join with them in their religion, but I did not want to lie to myself by doing things that I did not believe in.

This is where our new Russian church writers came to help me. They said that the most important rule in our faith is that the Church can do no wrong. From that, we must believe that all that the Church teaches is true. The Church is a group of true believers brought together by love. Working together in this way, they said, the church is able to find truth that is more perfect than anything that one person on his or her own could ever find. It was good for my pride to receive this teaching. I could see from it that, to find perfect truth, I must not separate myself from the Church; and to be part of the church I must go along with some things that I did not agree with.

At the time I could not see the holes in this line of reasoning. I did not see that love and truth are two different things, and working together in love gave us no promise that we would find the truth. And I did not see that true love would not force people to say a thing is true before they were able to see it for themselves. But, as I said, I did not see the lie behind the teaching, and so I was able for some time to go along with many things that I did not understand. I tried with all my strength to stay away from arguments about them, and to see some truth in what the Church was saying. When going through the actions that the Church told me to go through, I was forced to stop thinking and to stop asking myself why I was doing some of the things I did, I did this, believing that I was following the understanding of all the many people who had lived before me. I was one with my parents, and their parents and their parents. I was one with the millions of poor people that I loved. And it wasn't that the Church was asking me to do something that was bad or selfish. When waking up early to go to church, I knew I was doing something good, if only because I was doing something that was difficult so that I could be one with others and so that I could find the meaning of life. I used the same kind of reasoning in the weeks when I was making myself ready for the day when I would first receive the holy bread; and I used this reasoning when I was following all of the rules about prayer and about what not to eat. In the Church meetings I listened closely to every word, trying to give them meaning when I could. And the most important words in the whole meeting were: "Let us love one another by doing the same things!" The words coming after that I tried not to think about, because I could not understand them.

A Confession, part 14

At the time it was so important for me to believe, that I was able to hide from myself the lies behind what the Church was teaching. But there was only so much that I could do to read meaning into what was happening. There was a line that I could not cross, for, if I crossed it, I would no longer be acting in faith, but I would be lying to myself and to God. In so doing, I would be destroying my faith and not building it up. I had a problem with special prayers for the king, as if the king was more important than other people, and with calling Mary the most perfect Mother of God. I had trouble with so much that encouraged war and tried to say our soldiers were more holy than the soldiers that we were sending our young men out to kill. I could not see how it was so important to say Jesus came back from the dead; and I did not know if I believed it. The most important holydays of the church were about miracles, and I could not see that these were the most important truths of the Church. This feeling that we were lying about miracles was strongest when we were doing things that the Church said had some magic in them, like baptism and eating the holy bread.

Was I to lie and say that I believed in the magic, or was I to take no part in it? That was my problem. I will never forget the feeling of pain that I had on the day when I first received the holy bread after many years away from the Church. I was happy with all that we did and said before it

came time to take the bread. I could understand the eating of the bread as a way of remembering Christ and as a way of saying that we believe all that he said. I was happy to humble myself before the priest, who was a very shy country priest with very little education. I was happy to tell him of my sins and to be one with him, with the fathers who had written the prayers that we were saying, and with all the believers of the past. But when the priest asked me to say that I believed what I was eating was really the body and blood of Jesus, all I could feel was pain in my heart.

It was more than a lie; it was a lie that someone had dreamed up to destroy true faith, a test to find out if I had more faith in the Church than in the truth. It was not as clear as that to me at the time, and so, in the spirit of showing that I was humble, I went along with it. I ate the "body and blood" that day without knowing how wrong I was to join in the lie, and I did it because I wanted so badly to believe that what the Church was telling me was true. But the pain and guilt did not go away, and knowing that I must lie again if I was to again eat the bread, and drink the wine, I could not go a second time. I did not stop following the other teachings of the Church, and I still believed that in them was the truth.

But then something happened to me which seemed strange at the time, but which I now understand. I was listening to a poor man one day who had been travelling from place to place for God. He could not read or write, but what he said about God and faith and life was true; I knew it. I listened to people who talked with him and what they said sounded true to me too. I had the same feeling when I read about the lives of holy men from the past. I did not need miracles to feel that I was hearing from God in the lives of these little people. Some of these people were, in the eyes of the Church, stupid men who knew nothing of the teachings of the Church. But in them I saw God. On the other hand, when I tried to read books by the educated leaders of the Church, the fruit in my spirit was not good. My feeling was that the harder I tried to understand what they were saying, the more they were leading me away from truth and the more they were leading me closer to hell.

A Confession, part 15

How often I wanted to be like the poor people, without all of my learning. The teachings of the church which sounded foolish to me were no problem at all for them. They could take the foolishness as easily as they could take the truth that was in the Church. It seemed that only I could see that truth and lies were mixed together, and that I must take one without the other. For about three years I lived in this way.

At first, when I was just starting to learn the truth, I only listened to what was clear and I did not worry about what I could not understand. If I could not understand it, I would say that it was because I was full of sin and that I would understand it in time. But as my understanding of the truth grew, with it came an understanding of the lies for what they were. I could see clearly that there is a difference between things that I cannot understand because I cannot understand them and things that I cannot understand without lying to myself.

I wanted to stay with the Church, but some questions forced me to take a stand against the Church. The first such question was about how the Orthodox Church acts toward other churches – toward Catholics and toward Protestants. Because of my interest in religion, I had made friends in other churches. Some of these were very sincere believers. I wanted to be a brother to each of them. But what happened? The teaching that had brought me to the Church in the first place – the teaching that perfect Truth only comes by working with other believers, even if you do not agree with them – that teaching in the person of its best leaders, told me that these other men of faith were all living a lie; that they were of the devil; that we alone had the truth.

I learned that all who are not part of the Orthodox Church are said by the Church fathers to be following the devil. And I learned that the Catholics and others say the same things about us. Each group tries to hide it, but they secretly see the other groups as enemies.

I can understand how this could happen: (1) If others say that I am bad and they are good, I feel hurt by this and find it easy to say the same thing about them; and (2) if I love my brothers, I cannot help but feel angry if I think that someone is trying to lead my brothers into spiritual danger. But it seems that the more people study the teachings of the Church, the more they feel that others are the enemy.

I had come to the Church in the first place because I believed that we can only know truth by working together in love with other believers, even when we do not agree on everything. But now I was learning that the very Church that had been teaching this to bring me into itself, did not follow the same rule toward believers who were outside of it.

It is very easy for someone like myself, who has travelled and lived in other countries, to see that all religions are doing the same thing; that is, they are each saying that they are right and that all the others are wrong. When we can see that there is good in all of them, then we cannot believe such a teaching from any of them. A perfect understanding of truth must leave room for people who are not in your own group to have faith too. I felt there must be a good reason for what was happening, so I read all I could and asked all I could to find an answer.

Sad to say, the only answer I found was that the church is no different from any other group in the world. People will always think their own group is the best, if for no other reason than that they are in it. All that each church leader could tell me was that they believed themselves to have the truth and the others to be false, and in need of their prayers. Of all the experts that I asked, only one even tried to give an answer to why this happens, and his answer was such that I never tried asking anyone more about it.

This is how it happened: I had told the man that educated people wanting to believe in God would always come to the question of other religions. Anyone who has been to high school would know that Protestants and Catholics both argue as strongly as the Orthodox Church that they are the only true way to God. Each one bends the truth to make it say that they are right and the others are wrong. I asked this man why we could not move up to a higher understanding of truth, where we could overlook the differences, and see the sincere faith in people from all religions, as God himself must see it. I pointed out that in the Orthodox Church we had come to an agreement with the Old Believers, who have a differently shaped cross and a different way of walking around the front of the church, and different words that they use in praying to God. We have agreed that these little differences are not the most important things, and we have said that, as long as they agree with us on the most important things, then we will not argue about the other differences.

Now, if we can see that the differences are not important enough to separate us from these other Orthodox brothers and sisters, why can't we do the same with the Catholics? We could say that we agree with them on the important things, and that they are free to believe what they like about such things as who should be the leader of the church. And if we can do that with the Catholics, why not do the same with the Protestants?

The man I was talking to agreed with what I had been saying, but he said that if the church was to do this, it would bring problems, because it would make the leaders of the past look bad for not having done it earlier. This would lead to arguments between people who agreed with the old way and people who wanted to try this new way. What is most important, he said, is that the church leaders be able to keep the Orthodox believers working together smoothly without such problems.

And from this I could understand it all. I had been looking for faith, but they were looking for the best way to keep peace between their followers.

In trying to find political answers they were forced to use political weapons. For all their talk of love and prayers for believers in other religions, in the end, they would always turn to force. If anyone teaches something that the church believes is wrong, the church has no answer but to burn the teachings and, in one way or another, stop the teacher. If the teacher will not give in, there is no answer but to cut off his or her head, or put him or her in prison. The cruelest way of punishing such a person will always be used by the church, and it will always argue that such cruel action is needed because the man (or woman) is of the devil.

On thinking about what is done in the name of religion, I was filled with anger. I came close to turning strongly against the Orthodox religion for this reason alone. Then there was a second question that troubled me. It had to do with war, and the killing of people by the government. At that time, Russia was at war. In the name of Christian love, Russians were killing other people. How could anyone not see that killing people was evil, and that it went against all that Christ taught? Yet the church was praying that God would help our weapons to kill many people, and they were teaching that this killing grew out of their faith. And even when the wars were over, and there was fighting between people in our own country, I saw church leaders at each step on the ladder agreeing to the killing of young people from our own country who, for one reason or another, took part in these fights. All of this made me deeply angry.

A Confession, part 16

So I have stopped being of two minds about the lies in the church. I have now started to believe strongly that the religion I joined is very wrong in some ways. In the past I would have said that it was all false, but I cannot say so now. Many people in the church have sincere faith. I say this because I have seen that their faith is what gives them a reason to live. I too have felt the strength of this faith, and I have lived by it. But I am no longer afraid to say that there are lies mixed in with the truth in the church. And even the poor people are touched by these lies. Both the lies and the truth have been handed down by the church, and they have both been built on what people say about the holy writings of the church. If I am going to be able to separate the lies from the truth, I am going to have to study the holy writings – a job that I have always been afraid to start before now.

My plan now is to turn to the studies that I have, in the past, argued were not important. What I had believed to be a waste of time and not of interest to anyone with a healthy mind, now seems to be the only way that I can find the truth. I must study the Bible and the early writings of the Church to see if I can find where the problem lies. My plan is not to try to understand everything, because no one can understand everything; and this is most true when trying to understand things that are spiritual and eternal. All I want to do is to find the line between things that I cannot understand because they really are spiritual and eternal, and things that I have been told not to question because they hide the lies in the teachings of the church.

I am confident that there is truth in the teaching of the church but I am equally confident that there are lies, and I must find which is which. I am now starting this job. What I learn from my studies will become the following parts of this book. If I learn things that are important, and if anyone wants to read it, I hope to have this printed after I finish.

1879. Leo Tolstoy

What I Believe, part 1 - A Key to the Gospel Teaching*

(*Tolstoy wrote this part of this book in 1884, five years after he wrote "A Confession").

I have told why I did not at first understand Christ's teachings, and how I now understand them, in two books. In them I looked at all that hides the truth of the Gospels from people, and I went through the four Gospels line by line. I have been doing this for six years now. Each month I find new truths. Some of what I find agrees with what I have said earlier; but some shows where I was wrong, often because I was too enthusiastic or because I worked too quickly, without thinking things through clearly. Those books are about my work on the Gospels. In this book I want to tell of a different work, one that has been going on inside me. It is not a step by step study of writings. Instead, it is about changes in my thinking... changes that forced me to throw away much that had earlier been hiding the light of truth from me and from others.

Trying to understand the Gospels has been like a person trying to put together the broken pieces of a statue using a picture that is not at all like the true statue. Because this person is using the wrong picture, the pieces will not go together in the way that he or she wants them to go together. But if he or she were to turn from the picture and just study the biggest pieces of the statue itself, from these would grow a clearer picture of what the statue should be. The pieces would then go together easily. That is what happened to me when I turned to the Gospels. First I will tell how I found the key to understanding Christ's teachings in the teachings themselves... a key that made the truth so clear to me that I could not help but believe it.



I first read the Gospels when I was almost a child. Even at that time I was touched and moved by Christ's teachings about love, about being humble, about being good to people who are evil, and about giving up all that you have for him and for others.

These teachings have always been, to me, the best part of Christianity. It was because of my love for these teachings that I joined with the poor working people in the Orthodox Church after going through a time of great sadness without faith of any kind. The Christian faith seemed to be the most true and most beautiful. That is why I chose it. It was not long after joining the Church that I started to learn that what I liked most about the Christian faith was not at all important to the Church fathers.

What is most important in Church teaching is the Church itself and how we should act in church meetings. At first I thought, "What of it? The Church is not against love and all that goes with it. I do not like all of the added talk about itself and all of the teaching about how important meetings are, but it does not hurt anyone." Yet the longer I tried to follow the Church, the more I learned that what the Church was teaching really did hurt people very much. The Church did not take a stand against war, killing prisoners, or cruel actions against small groups who were different from most other people in the country. The sad truth is that the Church encouraged all of these things and was at times the leading force behind them.

I could see that something was wrong, but for some time I was confused, because the Church would always say that it agreed with the teachings of Christ. It would, from time to time, talk about showing love and being humble and all the other things that Christ taught; but it did so in such a way that always left me feeling it did not really believe these things were important.

I was not happy with what it was saying. I went from having no faith to joining the Church because I had only a rough understanding of the teachings of Christ. I believed the Church would help me to understand the difference between good and evil. I believed the Church would show me how to put the teachings of Christ into action in today's world. What happened was that the Church, far from helping me to follow Christ, worked at pulling me away from what I had believed was the best part of Christianity. What I needed was a life built on the truths in the teachings of Christ; but I could not find that in the Church. The rules for life that I learned from the Church were very opposite to the rules Christ gave me. What I learned in the Church was a lot of rules about religion, and very little about the Christian life that Christ talked about. On things like war and how to act toward people from other religions, the church always ended up on the side of the very things that Christ was against.

With their lips they talked of being humble, not judging, forgiving and loving others, and giving up everything for Christ; but in their actions it seemed that they were moving in the opposite direction. Was this happening because their understanding of the teachings of Christ was far above my own? I could not believe that. What I could see was that they were strong on Bible sayings that were not clear to me, and not clear at all on teachings from the Gospels, which, to me, were very clear.

The Church would teach us every word and action that we needed to know to make meetings go smoothly; but in the important parts of our life, we were left to find our own way. Is this really what Christ wanted? The answer had to be in the Gospels themselves. So I read them... again and again.

Out of them all, I found that the best part was when Jesus preached to his followers from the top of a hill, in Matthew 5, 6, and 7. I studied these sayings more than any others. What Jesus said there, in his longest talk to so many people, is so clear and straight to the point, so easy to understand, that I believed the answer to my questions must be there.

It is in Matthew 5, 6, and 7 that Jesus talks about us turning the other cheek to those who hurt us, about giving our shirt to those who would take our coat, about living in peace with others, about loving our enemies. I loved these sayings; but I had a problem with them too. I had a feeling that these things would not work in the real world...that only Jesus himself could do them. Was I to believe that Jesus was serious in what he was saying?

I turned to writings from the Church to see what they said. They argued that Jesus never planned for us to take these sayings seriously. They said that he told us to do things that we could never do, so that we would give up trying to follow him and follow what the church leaders were saying about just believing that God loves us and about just believing that it is not important to God that we obey him.

I was not happy with this way of understanding the Gospels. It did not sound like something Christ would do. Why would he make the rules so very clear if he did not plan for us to follow them? In reading these rules, I always had the feeling that God was talking straight to me, and that he was telling me to do something that I could and should do. The Church told me to forget about the rules and just say more prayers. But I believed that God was asking me to do something myself to show that I believed Jesus when he said these things.

After reading all that I could find from the experts, I did what Christ told us to do in another place, and that is to "change and become like little children". I stopped trying to find an "expert" way to make it say what it was not saying, and I started reading it as I would if I was reading it for the first time, through the eyes of a child. The part that became my key in understanding it all was in Matthew 5:38-39: "You have heard that it was said, Take an eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth; but I say to you, Do not fight against the evil person."

On reading this, the truth jumped out at me. Christ did mean for us to do just what he was saying here. But the words I had been blind to before were the words "Do not fight against the evil person." In the past I had only started from the words about turning the other cheek. By themselves, these words and the words that followed them sounded crazy. If I were to follow the words as they were written, I would give up everything and let others destroy me. What was the point of such an action? I was not strong enough to bring such pain on myself without a good reason.

Now, after reading the words about not fighting against the evil person, I could see the reason. Christ was not telling us to go out of our way to bring pain on ourselves. He very clearly did mean for us to turn the other cheek or give up our shirt, but only because that might be the price we would have to pay for not fighting against the evil person. He was saying that when we are doing our best not to fight against evil people, there will be times when they will hit us again and again. There will be times when they will take our coat and our shirt too. There will be times when they will ask us for things and not give them back. But in all of this, we should be clear that we will not hit back. We must not stop loving our enemies, for doing this is the only way to truly change the evil in the world.

Seeing this made me believe that Jesus really did want us to obey this teaching. It is like a father sending his son off on a long trip. He does not tell his son to go without sleep or to stop eating or to be wet or cold, but he does tell him that these things may happen, and if they do, he should not stop or give up. And so God does not choose for us to go through pain; but he knows that this will happen if we try to do what is right. When it happens, he does not want us to stop doing what is right. This was the piece of the statue that made all the other pieces go together for me. In the whole of the Gospels I could see that Christ was calling on us not to fight against the evil person.

Taking up our cross to follow Christ is choosing to pay any price in obeying this rule. Christ himself knew that the price would be death on the cross, and he sent Peter away when Peter argued against such a price. He died without hitting back, and he told his followers that if they chose to live by the sword they would die by it. His first followers all lived their lives without returning evil for evil. So Christ means what he says.

You can say that what he said was difficult. You could say that you do not think people will be happy if they live that way. You can even say that what he said was stupid, and his followers were stupid for following him in doing it. But what you cannot say is that he did not mean it, or that he and his followers did not do it themselves.

What I Believe, part 2 - The Rule about Not Hitting Back

When I understood that the words "Do not fight against the evil person" really mean "Do not fight against the evil person", my picture of the teachings of Christ changed quickly, and I was surprised to look back at the strange way I had understood Christ's teachings before that. I knew – we all know – that Christ taught us to love others. Sayings like "turn the other cheek" or "love your enemies" are at the bottom of all that he taught. From a child I knew this. But why had I not believed them as they were written? Why had I always thought that they were some kind of an impossible rule that no one could ever really obey?

When Jesus said, "Do not fight against the evil person," he was saying that we should never act in anyway that is not loving toward even the worst person. He said it so clearly that it is impossible to make it any more clear. So how was it that I, trying to believe that the One who said it was God, had the confidence to say that it was impossible for me to obey this rule.

If the Master had said to me, "Go and cut timber," would I say, "I cannot do that"? Such an answer would have been saying one of two things: either that I do not believe what the Master says, or that I do not want to obey him. Now here we have him telling us to do something (that is, not to fight against the evil person), and we have him saying that anyone who does this and teaches others to do it will be called great; and we have him saying that only those who obey him will receive life; and we see him living his own life by this rule; and we hear him saying the rule so clearly that we cannot be confused by its meaning. And then I find myself, who has never seriously even tried to obey the rule, saying, "But it is impossible to obey this rule; I need a miracle before I can do it."

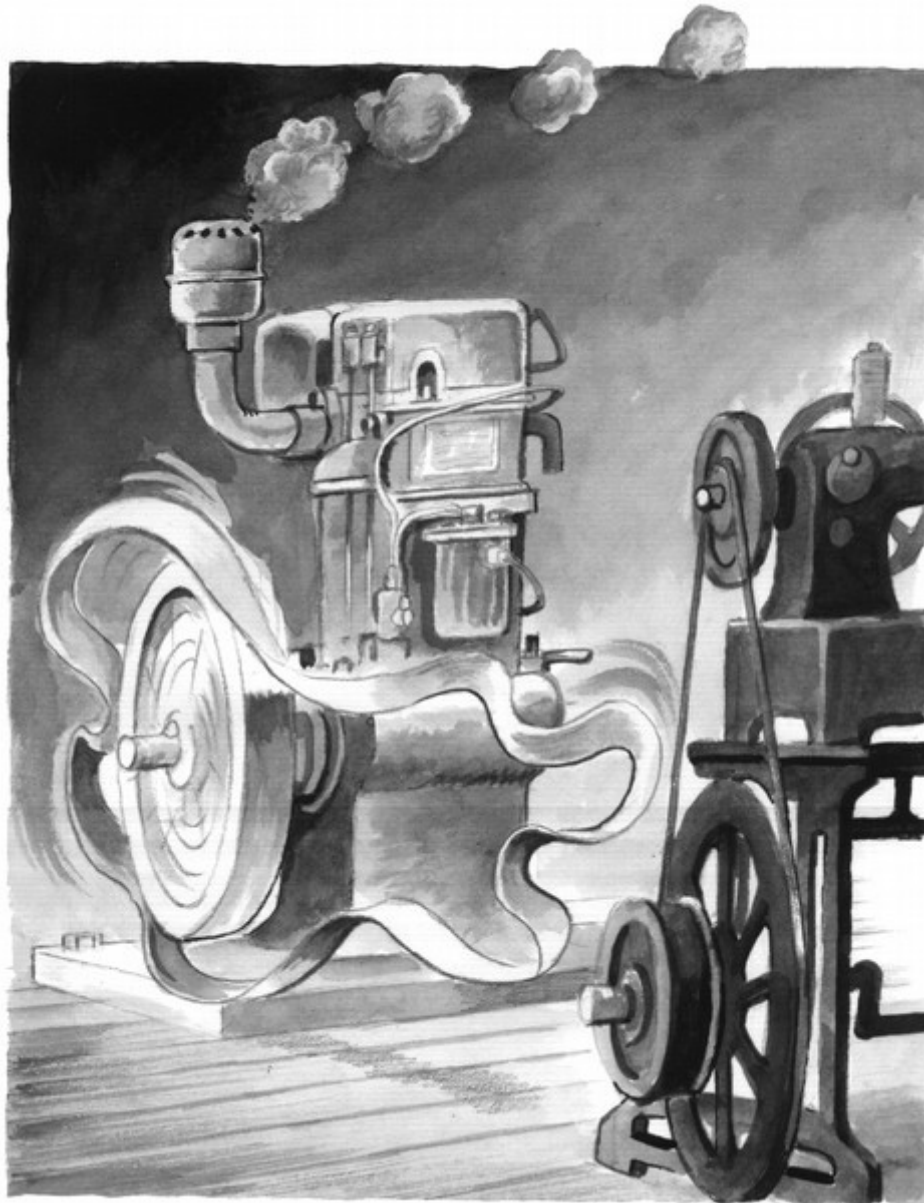
I believe that God came down to earth in the person of Jesus, to save the world. I believe that God the Son died for us all, and by doing this he paid for our sins before his Father. I believe that he gave us the Church, to help us give his love to all who believe. But I believe too that the Son of God gave people a teaching that he wants us to follow if we are to receive his saving strength. How had I come to say that what he asked me to do was not possible? He never said that. He just said, "Do it." And he said that those who will not do it will not go into the kingdom of heaven. He did not say it was impossible. The opposite is true. He said, "Working for me is easy, and what I ask you to carry is light."

One of his followers, John, said, "His rules are not difficult." So how was it that I had said the rule that he and his followers lived by was not only difficult, but that it was impossible? If people wanted to break a rule, what better argument could they find than the argument that the rule is impossible and that the person who made the rule never believed himself that the rule would work. This was just what I had done with the teachings of Christ.

Thinking back over my life I could not remember a time when anyone had put it to me that clearly (for if they had, I would have been very surprised at the truth of it), but I could see that I had been learning to take this stand from the time that I was a child. I had been feeding on this lie as a baby takes milk from its mother's breast. And all through life I had been encouraged to build on it. As a child I was told that Christ was God and his teachings are from God. At the same time I was told by the priests that I should see God in the government, the army, the police, and all who used force to protect me from evil people. I was taught to fight against evil people, and that it was wrong to give in to bad people. I learned to judge and punish, to go to war and kill those that I believed were bad. The army I was a part of even called itself the "Christ-loving Army". Its actions were encouraged by the Church. As a child I learned to hitback, and punish anyone who tried to hurt me, my family, or my country. At no time did the church teach me that this was wrong. The opposite was true. It taught me that all of this was right and good and in keeping with the teachings of Christ! Peace and rest for myself, my family, and all that I owned, came through the law of a tooth for a tooth, the very law that Christ chose to change.

Church leaders said Christ's teachings were from God, but that they were impossible to follow. Teachers outside the church said much the same. This teaching was so much a part of me, and so much in agreement with my selfish desires, that I never thought to question it. I did not see that it is impossible to believe Christ is God and to pray that his law of love should be at work in me when I was using my time and strength to help governments, courts, and armies build a country that goes against his teachings. What I had not seen at that time was that it would be much smarter to use my time and strength to build a country on the law of love, and then pray that God would do miracles to make courts and wars happen if that was what he wanted. So I came to understand how this had all happened. It had happened because I obeyed Christ in my words, but did not obey him in my actions.

The rule not to hit back gives meaning to all that Christ taught; but only if you see it as a rule that we should follow –not just as a beautiful saying. It is the key that opens all, but only if you put it into the lock. Saying that the rule is impossible robs Christ's teachings of their strength. It is like putting a motor in place, starting it up, but not joining it with a belt to the machine that you want to



work.

A short time ago I was reading Matthew 5 with a Jewish teacher. At almost every line, the teacher would say, "That is in the Jewish law too." And he would show me where it was. But when we came to the words about not hitting back, he did not say that they were in the Jewish law. What he did do was to ask me, "Do Christians obey this rule? Do they turn the other cheek?" I had no answer, for I knew that at that very time Christians were the ones who were doing the hitting and Jews were the ones who were turning the other cheek. Instead, I asked him if the teaching was in the Jewish law. He answered, "No, it is not." But then he asked again, "Do Christians obey it?" By this question he was showing me that the Christians had nothing better than the Jews if they were not willing to follow their own rule. And I had no answer to give him.

Having understood the meaning of the teaching, I was able also to understand what had been happening in my own spirit. My lips had been saying that I believed Jesus was God and that his teachings were from God; but I had been living my life in a way that was opposite to his teachings.

To bring meaning from the difference between my actions and my beliefs, I had been forced to say that the teachings, beautiful or not, were impossible in the real world.

All through the Bible we read that God punished the Jews when they believed in false gods and not in the true God. In I Samuel 8 and 12 we read that God was angry because the people wanted a man-king instead of God, who had been their King. Samuel tells the people not to believe in "empty things" (12:21). He says that empty things cannot save them, and that they will die with their king if they do not hold true to the one God.

It was faith in empty idols that had been hiding the truth from me. Those "empty things" had been standing between me and the truth, and I had not been strong enough to destroy them. A short time ago I saw a crippled old beggar sitting near the Kremlin in Moscow. I started to get a few coins to give him when a strong young soldier came running down the footpath from the Kremlin in a sheep skin coat. The beggar jumped up and ran off, as well as he could, into the trees of a park near there. The soldier ran to the border of the park and exploded in anger at the beggar as he was shaking his fist at him. When the soldier returned to where I was standing, I asked him if he could read. "Yes, I can. What of it?" he answered. "Did you ever read the Gospels?" I asked. "Yes." "And did you read where it says, 'I was hungry, but you gave me no food'?" He knew the words and he listened as I said them all. Two other people had stopped to listen too. The soldier was feeling sore because he had been doing his job and now I was telling him that he was wrong for doing it. He wanted to say something to protect himself. Then a light came into his smart brown eyes and he turned his side to me as if he was going to walk away." And did you ever read the Army Rules?" he asked. I said I had not. "Then don't talk," said the soldier, throwing his head back like a winner, and pulling his coat together as he walked confidently back toward the Kremlin.

I never knew anyone in all my life who had so openly and clearly arrived at the answer that most of the world arrives at to the eternal question that faces all of us who call ourselves Christians.

What I Believe, part 3 - The Law of God and the Law of Man

Some people argue that they can separate what they do as Christians from what the government does, and they say that Christ was only telling us how to act as people. They say, "I will not hit back when my neighbour hurts me alone, but if my country needs me to kill its enemies, then I must go and fight." The problem here is that we must find the line between where our work for God stops and where our work for our country (the "empty idol") starts.

The same problem comes up in the courts. We are each asked to spend some time in the courts, saying who is right and who is wrong, and punishing those who are wrong. And when someone robs from us, we think it is okay to take action against such people in the courts. But again we must choose between the law of God and the law of man. We cannot get away from it. The soldier's question – The Gospel, or the Army Rules? The law of God, or the law of man? – is the question that we each must face, as the Jews did in the days of Samuel. Christ himself had to face it, as did his followers. It now stands before each one of us who wants to be a true Christian.

The law of Christ about not hitting back had always touched my heart. But the law of an eye for an eye touched the animal part of me. Something deep inside of me knew that if I lived by the law of Christ I would be alone and I would be used roughly by others, and if I lived by the law of man, I could laugh and have friends. Because I could feel this, I had not even tried to look into the meaning of the law of Christ. It had been easier to say that it was an impossible law and to leave it there.

I will now look at just one part of what Christ said – the part about judging other people.

The law courts, where I worked for a time, were so much a part of protecting my wealth, that I could not make myself see anything wrong with them. I was able to read Christ's teaching about not judging without even thinking of the courts. But when I started to think seriously about the teaching that we should not fight against evil people, it became clear that the courts were a big part of the way we fight against evil people. I started to think about how Christ must feel about courts. In the past I had believed he was only talking about us judging friends or other people through our words. But what if he was talking about all people, and what if he was talking about judging with more than words? What if he was talking about the courts themselves?

In Luke 6:37-49 we read the first words that Christ said after he told us not to fight against evil people (in Luke 6:27-36). He said, "Forgive as your Father in heaven forgives. Judge not, and you will not be judged. Do not send a person to be punished, and you will not be sent to be punished yourself."

Could this mean that we should not have law courts to judge evil people? I only needed to ask the question, and I could hear my heart starting to say that this was true. I know how what I am saying now surprises people at first. It surprised me too, because I never for one minute believed that there was anything wrong with having courts. I was so stupid that after I started to believe in Christ, and after I had started to read the Gospels as a believer, I would joke to my friends who worked as lawyers or judges about how they were judging when Christ had told them not to judge. I was so confident that Christ did not mean for them to obey those words that I believed what I was saying was funny. Now I feel bad to think that I was laughing at the teachings of the Son of God.

To help people understand why I have now changed my belief, I will go through, step by step, the way I came to understand that these words about not fighting against evil people were clearly pointing to the business of courts. After coming to believe that Christ did not want us to fight against evil people, the first thing that came to my mind, as I said above, was the courts, and how we use them to fight against evil people. Christ says to return good for evil, but courts return evil for evil. Christ says to forgive... not one time, not seven times, but to forgive without end. He says to love our enemies and to do good to them that hate us. The courts do not forgive. They punish those that they believe are enemies of good people. And we are told that the courts are God's instrument, carrying out his will. One argument is that Christ was not thinking of courts when he said this. He was just a simple man talking about people working together in small groups. He did not know much about courts. But when I looked at the Gospels, I could see that from the time he was born until his death, courts (both religious and political) had been fighting against him. There were times when he clearly talked about courts, and he talked about them like they were evil. He told his disciples that they would be brought before courts because they were Christians, and he said that he himself would be handed over to a court and judged by it. He told his followers how they should act in court, and he acted in the same way himself. In fighting against evil people, the courts often punished good people too.

In the story of the Jewish court judging a woman who was guilty of adultery, Christ did not agree with the court. Even when he knew the woman was guilty, he went against the rule of the court, and it seemed that his enemies knew ahead of time that he would do that. Many times he said that man's laws and man's courts could not judge, because the people doing the judging were themselves guilty. He said that, with dirt in our own eyes, we will never be able to take dirt out of the eyes of others. And he said that when blind people follow blind leaders they both fall into a hole.

But could there be room to use a court to protect good people from bad people without going against Christ? In Matthew 5, Jesus says, "If anyone takes you to court and takes your coat from you, let them have your shirt too." From this it seems that he does not want his followers to turn to the courts for such help.

Let us return to the saying about not judging. Is it possible he was not thinking about courts at all when he said this? In Matthew 5-6 he started by saying what the Jewish law courts said: "An eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth." And then he went on to say, "Judge not." It seems clear from this that he was talking about law courts. In Luke he not only told us not to judge, but not to send a person to be punished either. This seems to have been added to make it clear that he was talking about the judging that takes place in a court.

But let us say that I am trying to make it mean something that Christ did not mean. How did Christ's first followers understand what he was saying? What did they think about law courts? James writes, "He that says something evil against his brother and judges his brother is saying something evil against the law and judging the law. If you judge the law, you are not a doer of the law, but a judge. There is only one law giver who is able to save or to destroy. Who are you that judges another?"

The word used by James for "says something evil against (his brother)" (katalaleo) should read "says (his brother) did not obey a law." (*Our study of the Greek word used here is not clear enough to say this with confidence. D.M.).

The words following this are easier to understand if we see that the "law" they talk about is the teaching of Christ (the law of God). I would read it as saying that when you take someone to court for breaking a law of the land, you are, at the same time, taking action against the law of God that came through Christ. Instead of doing what Christ has told us to do, we are judging what he has told us to do and by doing this, we are making ourselves smarter than God, the one law giver who is eternally able to save or to destroy us.

All of this is talking about people using their own reasoning to change what Christ has said about not using law courts to punish evil people. Is our faith in the one true God to punish evil, or is it in the king's courts? In James 2:5-13, he writes, "Did not God choose the poor of this world, who are rich in faith, to receive the kingdom that he has promised to them that love him? But you have hated the poor. Do not rich people fight against you and bring you to the courts? Do they not laugh at that holy name by which you are called? If you obey the King's law (Love others as you love yourself), you will do well. But if you try harder to be friends with the rich than with the poor, the law will say that you are guilty. If you keep the whole law, but break one rule, you are guilty of it all. For the One who made a rule against adultery also said, Do not kill. If you are not guilty of adultery, but you kill, you too are a law breaker. So talk and act like people who will be judged by the law of freedom. For the one who does not forgive will be judged without forgiveness, and forgiveness laughs at judging."



The last words ("forgiveness laughs at judging") have often been changed to "Forgiveness is taught in the courts." The reason for doing this is to make us believe that some courts are Christian, and that Christian courts are kinder than other courts. Going back over the words from James, we see that he was saying that rich people bring Christians before the law courts. He said that we do not need the courts if we follow the King's law (that is to say, God's law, which is to love others). He said that there is no one perfect enough to judge others. Maybe he was thinking of the woman brought to Jesus to be killed when he said that the ones who would have killed her were no better than the woman herself, because killing is as bad as (if not worse than) adultery. And a better wording for the last line is that "Forgiveness destroys the courts!"

When writing to the Romans, Paul said, "You who judge others do not have a good reason to do this; for where you judge another person, you judge yourself; because you that judge do the same things yourself. And we know that God will judge truly against people who do such things. So think about this the next time you judge another person and do the same things yourself: Do you think you will be able to run away from God judging you? Or do you hate his Spirit of love and forgiveness, without knowing that it is all that can save you?"

This is what I found in the writings of the first followers of Christ. And we know from their lives that it was not very often that the courts were on their side. If they were not clear enough in talking against the courts, it would only be because they were in enough danger with the courts already. In studying other early Christian writers (Athenagoras and Origen) I learned that they believed the

difference between themselves and others was that they never forced people to do anything; never killed people who were wrong; and never went to court against others, but only turned the other cheek when taken to court themselves. All the early martyrs said much the same thing.

Up to the time of Constantine (*Constantine was the Roman king. When he became a "Christian", he did not stop being king. He just said that the Roman kingdom and God's kingdom were one and the same now. It is from this that problems about drawing the line between the governments and laws of man and the government and law of God has come. D.M.), Christians thought all courts were evil. They would never go to court against anyone. For them, the words of Christ, "Judge not, that you should not be judged" were understood as I now understand them: "Do not take action against people in court if you do not want God to take action against you."

But because there are courts in every Christian country, and because it is now widely believed that Christ was only telling us not to point out things that are wrong in others (outside of courts), I was slow to believe my understanding was the right one. I believed there must be good reasons for the way that these words are now being taught in the church. So I studied the writings of the church experts. And I found that from the time of Constantine* to the present they all argued that Christ was only telling us not to point out things that are wrong in others. But if this is true, then how can any Christian obey him? For it is our job as Christians to teach the truth and to destroy the lies.

Some experts wrote about the need to judge if a thing is right or wrong. Some tried to fix it by listing things Christians could judge and then listing things they could not judge. Others worked around the problem by saying it was a rule only for Jews. But no one said a word against the courts.

If the question of Christ's stand on courts came up at all, it was only to say that it was not worth writing about, because we all know that we must have courts. And this teaching is so widely believed today, that as soon as a Christian sits in the chair of a court judge, he or she is free not only to judge but to have people killed, and no one will question it.

What I must ask these experts is this: If Christ believed that it was evil for a Christian to say something bad about another person, often by accident or without thinking, why did he not believe it was evil for a Christian judge to put in writing something saying that a person is bad, and to add to it a cruel plan to punish the person? Millions of people have been judged and punished by such judges over the years, but the Church experts have fenced the judges off and protected them from ever being questioned for their actions. Why is this so?

Because I was starting to think that the experts were not acting in good faith, I turned for a closer look at the words that the first writers used – something I should have done in the first place. I found that the Greek word for "judge" (krino) has many different meanings. The way it is used most often is in saying that a person is guilty, or in saying how a person must be punished, in a court of law. And I found that it never has the meaning of just saying something bad about another person. In the Bible, too, it is often used when talking about actions in a court. At times it is used to talk about knowing the difference between what is right and what is wrong; but again, it is never used for one person talking against another person. So why do the "experts" say this is what Jesus was talking about when he told us not to judge? In Luke's Gospel, he uses a second word (katadikazo) with the word for "judge", and I found from the dictionary that this second word is never used in any other way than to talk about testing, judging, and punishing a person in a court of law. The same is true of how the word is used in the Bible.

In James 5:6, it says that the rich people killed Christ by taking him to court. And it is not used in any other way in all of the Bible. So what does all this mean? When we think about all of the cruelest actions that people have done to each other through the history of the world, we find that

most of them were carried out with the full blessing of the laws and courts of one country or another.

In the Gospels, each word of which we say is holy, Jesus clearly says, "You have had a law that says 'An eye for an eye', but I give you a new law: 'Do not fight against evil people.' Obey this rule, all of you: do not return evil for evil, but do good always to all people, and forgive everyone." I now understand that Jesus was saying, "Do not go to law against another person, and do not punish people through the courts. "

My heart says clearly: Do not kill other people. Science says that the more you kill, the more evil there will be. Reason says that you cannot stop evil with more evil. The Word of God, which I believe, says the same. Reading the words, "Judge not, so that you will not be judged. Do not send a person to be punished, so that you will not be sent to be punished yourself. Forgive, and God will forgive you", I had been saying that this was the Word of God at the same time that I had been saying that the courts that do not obey this are instruments of God. I had honestly believed that I could be a Christian and a judge at the same time. How could I have ever been so blind!

What I Believe, part 4 - Wrong Understanding of Christ's Teaching

I now understand that when Christ said, "You have heard that it was said, 'An eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth', but I say for you not to fight against evil..." when he said that, he was saying, "You have learned from the time you were babies that it is smart, right and good to fight against evil with force, to hit back, to use courts, policemen, and armies to protect yourselves from your enemies; but I am saying for you not to do this, not even to do it to your 'enemies'."

I now understand that he was not only talking about a change that should happen in each person, and the effect that it would have on them for all time; but he was also talking about the effect it would have on the world around them right now. He wanted to make the whole world free from evil, and he alone knew the way to do it. He was saying, "You think that your laws are stopping evil, but they are only making it worse. There is only one way to end evil, and that is by returning good for evil. For thousands of years you have been doing it your way. Now try my way."

That is how I understand it; but others think differently. I have talked to many different people about this law of Christ – that is, not fighting against evil people. At times people (not many) would agree with me. But there are two groups of people who would never give in to even the smallest piece of what I was saying. They always strongly argued for punishing evil people. And, strange to say, we often think of these two groups of people as being wholly opposite. They are the hard-line Christians and the hard-line Communists! They both argue strongly for the right to kill their enemies. The smartest of them will not agree to the simple truth that if you say it is right for you to kill your enemies, you are no better than your enemies, who say it is right for them to kill you.

Why is it so difficult for people to understand what Christ is saying? It is because we have built our whole lives on the very things that he is against, and we do not want to change. The so-called believers say that Christ is God, and that he came to earth to show us how to live. They plan perfectly even the smallest actions to make their religious meetings run smoothly, to put up buildings, to send out missionaries, to make people priests, to lead their followers, and to make their teachings perfect. But they forget one little thing – and that is to do what he told us to do.

The people who are not believers also plan their lives without listening to the law of Christ, saying only that it will never work. What is most strange about all of this is that both sides, the believers and those who do not believe, have said that it is not possible to do it Christ's way, when no one on either side has even tried to do it his way!

Christ has said it so simply and clearly: The law that punishes evil is false, and will not work. And he gives another law which he says will work, and that is the law of not hitting back. He says, "You have tried it your way for thousands of years and still you have not destroyed evil. It is only getting worse. Do what I do and see if it isn't true."

He did more than teach this for others; for his whole life, and in his death, he himself lived by this law of not fighting against the evil person. Believers hear all this. They read it in their churches. They say the teachings are from God, and that Jesus was God. But they also say, "It will not work in this life. It would force us to change things that we do not want to change; so we will say that it is something we should pray for, but not something that we can do in our own strength."

Others, who do not believe – the free-thinkers – say most seriously that Christ's teaching was good enough for the poor uneducated people of the country that he lived in, but that it is only a sweet dream for today's world. They think that Christ was too stupid to understand things as they understand them. If he had been educated as well as these smart people have been educated then he would (they say) have understood that all his talk about the birds of the air, about turning the other cheek, about not worrying about the future, is just empty talk. But these people are only mirroring the spirit of the so-called believers. Both sides have too much faith in our present way of life, with its prisons, companies, newspapers, prostitutes, and political leaders, to ever question it. So they only take from the teachings of Christ what they can take without changing the way they live. And because all that Christ said was against our way of life, they take nothing but empty words.

The educated people see and hear what the church is saying, and as they are not forced to say that it is what God wants, they (rightly) laugh at the church and argue against it. But the end is that they too finish up believing that there never was anything in Christ's teachings that would work, because they never saw it working in the church. Before judging Christ's teachings, these people should take time to understand what he said. And before saying that his teachings will not work, these same people should first agree that he did tell us what he did tell us. But that is what both the Church and the free-thinkers will not do, and we know why they will not do it too. We know that in all of his teachings, Christ was against the gods of this world, the empty idols that we try to make into something real by giving them names like church, country, science, art, and progress. And Christ was not the only one who was against these things. All of the prophets before him called on people not to put their faith in such empty idols too.

Think of it this way: A builder says to a man, "Your house is bad, and it must be taken down so that we can build a new house in its place." Then the builder gives the man a plan for how the house must be taken apart, and where the new pieces will go. The man does not listen to the words about the house being bad, and the need to take it down, but, in trying to show that he likes the builder, he says many good things about the plan for the new house. Yet in the end, if the man is not willing to take down the old house, the picture of the new house will seem to him and to those who listen to him talking about the picture, only a dream by a stupid builder... a dream that can never be. And this is what has happened with the way people think about Christ's teachings.



Christ said much the same thing to the builders of religion in his day; and because of what he said, they believed that they had heard him say, "I will destroy your temple, and in three days build a new one." And for this they killed him. If people are going to judge a teaching, surely the right thing to do is to judge it in the way that the teacher himself was teaching it. Jesus did not think his teaching was impossible to obey, and he did not think of it as a dream, or as a lie to control people. He understood it as a tool to save the world, if only people would obey him. He was not dreaming when he died for this teaching; and the same can be said for others who died for it after Jesus, and for people who are still dying for it today. It is not right to say that such a teaching is a dream.

Every true teaching is a dream to those who do not receive it. The world says (and I was one with them in the past) that the teaching of Jesus is a dream, because it goes against the way we were made, and the way that people feel.

They say that it is not "natural" for people to turn the other cheek when someone hits them; it is not natural to give what you own to another person; it is not natural to work for others when you could be working for yourself. What is natural, they say, is for a man to fight to keep his family, himself, and his wealth safe.

The most educated lawyers will argue that they can prove that our most holy job is to fight for our freedom to do what we want to do. But I would say that there are equally strong arguments to prove that the way people now act is not "natural" either. Who could say that people just naturally like to

see others go through pain or death? No, the truth is that we just naturally turn away from such evil. (I know of people who live on farms who have stopped eating meat just because they themselves were forced to kill their own animals to do so.)

But we live in a world where pain and death are the price that some must pay for others to grow rich. The whole world works because some people do the hurting and killing so that others can live a comfortable life. Is this "natural"? The truth is that this way of doing things only works if we can hide the truth about all the pain that others are going through, from ourselves and from others. We do this because the truth is so opposite to what we would naturally choose.

How many judges would say that the prisoner must be killed, if the judge himself or herself had to kill the prisoner with his or her own hands? How many judges would themselves pull a poor worker away from his crying wife and children to put him in prison? How many soldiers would themselves choose to kill other people like themselves if there were not a hundred rules and laws squeezing and forcing them into doing what very few of us would choose to do on our own?

All this killing and hurting only happens because we are each a part of a big machine that forces us to go against our natural feelings, in the name of "God" or the "King" or just our "country". We are each told to just do our job, and not to ask questions. And if we each do that, no one person is forced to live with all the guilt we would feel if we ourselves were to chose for it to happen this way.

Some write the laws; others use the laws; a third group teaches people to obey the laws; and the last group has the job of punishing people who do not obey the laws. Even when people feel a natural desire to love and forgive the person who was wrong (as most of us do when we know the prisoner), they are forced by the big machine to act against what comes naturally.

Start to question the law of the land, and it will not take long to see that the law of Christ is the one that most of us would naturally lean toward if we were to hear an evil person asking for forgiveness. And if we could see all the people in the world who must go without so that we can have money in the bank and the best food on our tables, being rich would stop being so "naturally" easy for us too. If we could see how many lives have been destroyed in prisons, and how the souls of the police and soldiers themselves have been destroyed by their line of work, we would start to question such a high price just to protect the few things we own.

There is the animal part of us that will naturally hit back; but there is more to us than that. There is our reason too, which only needs to understand the law of Christ in its full meaning, with all of the effects that would come from following it, to know that Christ was teaching us to stop what is not natural for us, and to put an end to the sad dream that two wrongs will make one right. How can people say that Christ's teaching about not hitting back is an impossible dream, when they see men and women destroying the spirit of love that God put into them, just because their jobs tell them that they must be part of the killings, the wars, and the cruel prisons that we are told are so important to life as we know it today?

If people will not look at the truth about what is happening in the world, then I must say that they are the ones who are living in a dream. And it is a very cruel dream from which we should all awake. God came to earth; and this God, we were taught to think, said things that were so difficult to understand that we needed miracles and the help of the Church to open up the secret truth behind them. But now I see that the Word of God is not so difficult to understand at all. All he says is to stop returning evil for evil and in time there will be no evil. Is it possible that what God wants to tell the world is as easy to understand as that? It is like our hearts have been telling us this all along, but we have just not been listening.

If you see changes for the better in the world, ask yourself if those changes came from the people who hit back, or if they came from the people who turned the other cheek. Did changes that give us kinder prisons, fewer killings through the courts, more honest police, and a desire to hold off on starting wars come from the people who argued for the law of the land, or from those who argued for the law of Christ?

Can all the soldiers in the world equal the good that was done by one Man dying on a cross in love for the world? Fire does not destroy fire, and evil does not destroy evil. Only good can destroy evil, and it does this by meeting evil without being changed by it. No law of science could be more true than that. People may try to hide the truth of it from others, but that will never stop it from working each time a person turns the other cheek. Each step forward in true progress for the world has been on the road where people who choose not to hit back are walking. In the face of the cruelest actions against us, all true followers of Christ can say with more confidence than any scientist has in any of the laws of science: "Evil will only be changed by turning the other cheek and not by hitting back."

If progress is slow, it is only because the simple truth of what Christ taught has been covered by some of the most evil and dangerous teachings... teachings that the church has falsely told people are Christ's teachings.

What I Believe, part 5 - Jesus and the Law of Moses

The more I studied, the more my confidence grew that Christ wanted us to obey him when he said not to hit back. But it was a long time before I could get over the strange feeling that came from being the only person (as far as I knew) who was saying this, in a world where millions of people had been saying for eighteen hundred years that they were following Christ. And I must say, the thought that Christ really wanted us to obey him had never come into my head before that time either. How could this have happened? I must have had some very false understanding of the teachings of Christ before that time. And when I thought back, I could see that I had.

When I first read the teachings of Jesus, it was not like I was hearing them for the first time. I had been growing up in a family, in a church, in a country that had all been telling me how I should understand them. From these people I came to understand that Christ was not a prophet on his own. What I had been told was that Christ was just one part of a bigger picture of God; and so when I first read of Christ, I read of him with a very strong picture in my mind already of how God must act. And this picture came from the law of Moses.

In the Gospels I had found the words, "You have heard that it was said, 'An eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth,' but I say to you, Do not fight against the person who is evil." The words "an eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth" were the law of Moses. The words "Do not fight against the person who is evil" were the new law, which took the place of the old one. If I had read this without the teaching I had earlier received from all those around me, then what Christ said would have been very clear to me from the start. I would have seen that he was simply throwing out the old law and giving us a new one. But I had been told that this was not true, that Christ strongly believed and followed all of the old law, and that the old law was spiritually equal to all that Christ taught. Both the old and the new were the perfect Word of God, and because they were the Word of God, they could never change.

There was a saying from Christ that was used to prove this teaching. It came from Matthew 5:17-18, where Christ says, "Do not think that I have come to destroy the law, or the prophets. I have not come to destroy, but to make the law come true. For truly I tell you, until heaven and earth go away,

not one word or letter of the law will be destroyed, until all of it comes true." These words had always confused me when I had read them before, because so many of the laws of Moses seemed to have little meaning for today,*(The law of Moses has rules telling people what to do for many different physical problems. Here is one of them: If a house became dirty from a sickness or for other reasons, the owner was often forced to destroy the whole house for the good of others living near it. Laws like these may have been good in their day, but surely they must change as our understanding of science changes. Teaching that the law of Moses is the eternal "word of God" as so many churches do today, means that it can never change. D.M) and some of them sounded very cruel. I found it hard to believe that Christ was telling us to keep every last word of the law of Moses, most of which is never taught or followed in the Church today anyway.

At the time I first saw the difference between the law of Moses and the teachings of Christ, I was much younger than I am now. I was not interested enough to find an answer, so I left it to others to show how the law of Moses could agree with the law of Christ, and how the law of Christ could be the natural end of following the law of Moses. But now, as a believer myself, my interest in Christ is much more serious than it was in my younger days. I have seen for myself what Christ was saying, and I know that there can be no talk of it agreeing with what Moses said. You cannot take an eye for an eye and turn the other cheek at the same time. One does not lead to the other. They are opposites.

So I turned again to Matthew 5:17-18, and started to see it in a different light. I did not need to change the words at all to see the meaning. All I needed to do was to believe that Christ was bringing in the law of God to take the place of the law of Moses. The law of God will never be destroyed. Christ made the law of God come true. Read it with that in mind and you will see for yourself what I am saying: "Do not think that I have come to destroy the law [of God], or the prophets. I am not come to destroy, but to make the law come true. For truly I tell you, until heaven and earth are destroyed, not one word or letter of the law will be destroyed, until all of it comes true."

The difference between Christ's teachings and Moses' only becomes a problem if we say the "law" Christ was talking about in Matthew 5:17-18 was the law of Moses. Most of the time when Christ was talking about the law of Moses, he used the words "the law and the prophets", but here we have him talking about the law or the prophets (the first time he uses the word "law") and then just the law by itself without saying anything at all about the prophets the second and third times that he used it. I am saying that in all three places he was talking about the eternal law of God, and not the law of Moses.

In Luke 16:15-17 we find Christ talking very clearly about the law of Moses, and he does it in such a way that he makes it clear that the law of Moses is opposite to his law (or the law of God). He says to those who put their faith in the law of Moses: "You are those who try to make yourselves look right in the eyes of others; but God knows your hearts, for that which is lifted up as good by people is very evil in God's eyes. The law and the prophets were until John. But from that time the Gospel of the Kingdom of God is preached, and everyone pushes into it. And it is easier for heaven and earth to be destroyed than for one word of the law [God's law] to be destroyed."

By saying that "the law and the prophets" were until John, Christ was saying that they are no longer in force. A higher law has been put in their place. And he talked of this higher law when he said "It is easier for heaven and earth to be destroyed than for one word of [this higher] law to be destroyed." To make it even more clear that the eternal law is higher and stronger than the law of Moses, he went on (Luke 16:18) to say something that changed the law of Moses. Moses said that a man could put his wife away from him, but Jesus said that a man could not do this.*(See Matthew

19:8 for a fuller picture of Jesus saying that the law of Moses is not the eternal law of God when it comes to putting away a wife. D.M.)

The history of Matthew 5:17-18 is very interesting. Where we now read Jesus saying, "Do not think that I have come to destroy the law, or the prophets," most of the oldest writings that we get the Bible from did not have the words "or the prophets" in them at all. In them, Jesus simply said, "Do not think I have come to destroy the law." From that it was easier to understand that he was not talking about the law of Moses, but about the eternal law of God.

There are some old writings that had the words "Do not think that I have come to destroy the law and the prophets." When the church was first putting together the books of the Bible, they agreed that these writings were wrong, and they did not use the word "and". They chose to keep the word "prophets" but to use the word "or" with it. It seems that someone along the line believed (or wanted to believe) that Christ was saying that the law of Moses was eternal. To make this clear, they added the words "and the prophets", and changed the meaning.

Other Christians, who could not believe that Jesus was talking about the books of Moses, took out the added words or changed "and" to "or", which is why we now have "or the prophets" in our Bibles. But even with this change, more and more people have over the years leaned toward teaching that Jesus said the law of Moses can never be changed; and so this is the way that we have been taught.*

(*It is interesting that the "Good News" Bible has now returned to using the word "and" and has even added the words "of Moses" to help the people who argue that we are still living under the law of Moses. It says: "Do not think that I have come to do away with the Law of Moses and the teachings of the prophets. I have not come to do away with them, but to make their teachings come true." D.M.)

The argument that the law of Moses is eternal comes from believing that each time the word "law" is used in the Bible it is talking about the written law of Moses. But in every language, the word "law" can mean a force that is true with or without it being put in writing, or it can mean a rule that has been put in writing. The Jewish prophets used the word torah for the eternal truth of God. But later the same word started to be used for the first five books of the Bible, or the "law of Moses". This false worship of their law is what has confused so many people even in the Church today. So when Christ was talking about the law of Moses he would either say "the law of Moses", "the law and the prophets", or something like "your law" or "their law". But when he was talking about the eternal law of God, he would just say "the law".

When he said that the whole of what the law and the prophets teach could be covered with the words "Act toward others as you would want them to act toward you," he was saying that this one teaching could take the place of all that is eternal in the law of Moses. Anything more than that is not the law of God.

When he said (John 7:19) "Did not Moses give you the law?" he was talking about the law of Moses, that he had destroyed by bringing in a higher and better law, and he was talking about the law that had him killed: "The Jews answered Pilate, "We have a law, and by our law he should die." (John 19:7) Clearly the law that was used to kill Christ was not the law that he had been teaching. But when he said "I did not come to destroy the law" and "Nothing can change in the law", he was talking about the eternal law of God. Let us, for a minute, think that the church is right in saying that Christ did not come to destroy the law of Moses.

Let us say that every word in it is still in force. If that is true, then we must ask ourselves what it was that Christ taught? He taught that he was the Son of God and that he was going to die for the

sins of the world. We all agree on that. But that is only a small part of what he taught. What did he teach besides that?

Christians have always had to agree that what Christ taught was how we should live. So, if Christ taught a new way of life, we should think for a minute about the people he was teaching this new way of life to. Even if the people had been from Russia, Britain, China, or India, they would have all had rules about how to live already. So any teacher coming with a new way of life would be saying that there was something wrong with the old way of life. The new would, in time, destroy the old. This would be true in any country. But for us, not being Jews, it would be possible (but not easy) to think that the teacher only wanted to change the rules of our country, and the way that we act. We could think that he did not want to destroy the rules of our religion. This was not possible in Israel. The Jews had only one book of rules. It covered all that they did, and they believed that it was all from God. If a preacher came saying that the Jewish book of rules was the right one, there was nothing more that the preacher could preach. His or her one job would be to teach people to obey the Jewish book of rules.

If this is not enough to prove that Christ was not saying the Jewish book of rules was the right one, but was, in truth, going against the law of Moses by teaching the higher law of God, then ask yourself this question. Who were Christ's enemies? Who hated his teachings? Whose High Priest had him killed? Who were these people that he called "teachers of the law"? If Christ was teaching the law of Moses, and these people were following the law of Moses, why didn't they receive him? And if they were just a few bad Jews who had moved away from the law of Moses, then where are the people who did believe the law of Moses? Can it be that not one Jew believed and tried to follow the law of Moses? Can it be that not one Jew was happy to hear someone teaching the law of Moses?

It was the people who believed in the law of Moses, who studied the law of Moses, who taught the law of Moses, and who protected the law of Moses, that saw Christ as their enemy. And they saw him as their enemy because he was bringing in a new law to take the place of their old one. He wanted people to stop following the old law so they could follow the new one. We are so used to thinking that it was a small group of bad people called Pharisees who killed Jesus, that the thought never comes into our heads as to where the good Jews were through all of this. But the Pharisees were the good Jews. And they understood that Jesus was coming to change, if not destroy, their law and their religion.

Any teacher – good or bad, God or man – coming to a people who say that they have the law of God and that it covers every part of their life, must think very seriously about how his or her teaching is going to fit in with the teachings that people already have in that place. If the teacher wants to give the law of God to the people, and the people already have a law that they believe to be the law of God, then the teacher must talk about their law in two ways. Jesus did this. He agreed in some ways that the law of God could be found in the law of Moses, but he also had to disagree at times with "their law" or "your law" as he called it. It was important for Jesus to use "law" in both ways, and to teach the people to understand the difference if he was to help them to change.

Every smart preacher will use those parts of the people's law that fit in with what he or she is saying, and work from there to turn the people toward the new truth that is not in their law. Christ did this over and over with the Jews, who used the same word, torah, for both the eternal law and for the law of Moses. He did it a little with the law of Moses, and even more with the prophets, like Isaiah, pointing to sayings from Isaiah that agreed with what he was saying.

The Jewish teaching to love God and others was the bottom line in his teaching. He often pointed out that it was part of the eternal law of God. In Luke 10:26 he asked a Jew, "What does the law

say? How do you read it?" He was saying that in the Law of Moses there are eternal truths if you read it in the right way.

In Matthew 13:52, after using many stories to show the meaning of his new teaching, Christ said, "Every person who wants to understand the law [of God] is like a person who owns a house with both old and new things in it."

The Church teachers agree that Christ was talking about truths from the law of Moses being mixed with his new teachings; but, without any good reason for doing so, they also say that everything that is in the old law is the perfect Word of God. Why do they do this, when it is clear that the real meaning is that a smart person will not throw away things just because they are old. Christ did not throw away the eternal truths that were there in the old law; but when it came to the old law as a whole, he said that you could not put new wine into old bottles because the new wine would destroy the old bottles.



Instead of taking it the way Christ said it, a teaching has come into the Church that has been used to make all that Christ said just a "dream" if it does not fit in with the old law. From a short time after the time of Constantine to the present, the Church has been teaching that Christ did not say anything that went against the law of Moses. But how can they say that? How can the law of Christ be joined with the law of Moses? No answer comes to these questions. All that we get are word games. We are told that Christ the Person is the perfect answer to the law of Moses, but when it

comes to Christ the teacher, the law of Moses always wins out and Christ's teachings are turned around.

What has happened is not an honest accident. It is part of a clear plan with a clear end in mind. It was needed, and it is clear why it was needed.

Here is what St. John Chrysostom says about those Christians who would not follow the law of Moses: They argue against the law of Moses because it tells us to take an eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth. They say, "How can we be good and teach this?" But the eye for an eye teaching is the highest law of love. God made this law to put fear into people who hurt others... If he could not control them through good will, fear would keep them from hurting others. If this is cruel, it is also cruel to put a killer in prison or to punish a person for adultery. Only the craziest person would say this is wrong. Where they say he is cruel for telling us to take an eye for an eye, we say that he would be cruel not to give us this law."

This church expert believed that a law opposite to the law of Moses (that is, Christ's teaching not to hit back) would be wrong, crazy, and cruel. He said it was God who told us to hit back. But we are told by His Son not to hit back. We must follow one or the other. The Church in general chooses the "Father" (Moses), and does not believe the Son (Christ). Christ went against the law of Moses; he gave a new law with important changes. Anyone following Christ will simply choose to forget about Moses and follow Christ. And anyone following Moses, as the Jews do, will simply choose to forget about Christ and follow Moses. There is only a problem for those who say they follow Christ, but who choose to live by the law of Moses. They will say that they believe both, but when forced to choose, they will always side with Moses and against Christ.

If people will look at this closely, they will see a serious war going on here between the forces of evil and the forces of good; and we must choose which side to be on. Christ came to the Jews, a people with rules for all that they did. All of the rules came with the words "God said to Moses" on them. For these people, the words "God said to Moses" made the rules perfect; they could never change. They believed that everything God said to Moses was an eternal law for all the world. So what was Christ (or any other teacher) to do if he wanted to teach new truth without making the people too angry? He would take the best rules and mix them with his own rules to show a better way. Because God really was talking to Moses and their prophets, there would be much that he could use; he would not need to destroy everything. But, because the people believed the law was equal and perfect in all parts, the law would still be broken. Because Christ had thought to change the law, he was taken before the courts for breaking what the people believed was the law of God, and for this he was killed. Then the followers of Jesus buried his teachings under other teachings.

Instead of saying "God said to Moses," the church experts made it sound like "God said to us" that Jesus did not mean what he said. Because everyone was afraid to question what "God said", the spirit of what God really was saying was lost again. And what is most surprising is that it was lost through a teaching that took us back to the very law that Christ came to change in the first place. The law of Moses is lifted up again and said to be the perfect Word of God for all time. And the end effect is that the teachings of Christ have been brought down to being nothing.

This is why, after eighteen hundred years, finding what Christ said came to me and to all those around me as such a new thing. I had to do what anyone must do to find the eternal law of God now; I had to cut away all the other vines that had been growing over it... vines that everyone was trying to say were also the eternal law of God.

What I Believe, part 6 - The Five Rules

And so when I understood Christ's law not to be the law of Moses and Christ, and when I understood that what Christ said went clearly against what Moses said, the Gospels as a whole stopped being confusing to me. I found in Matthew 5:21-48, five simple rules from Christ for all people and all times.

It is interesting that the Gospels talk over and over about the rules of Christ. And the church talks about the rules of Christ. But before this time I could not have told you what the rules were. We all know that he said to love God and others. But it stops there. And yet even this rule is not Christ's rule. The rule to love God and others comes from the writings of Moses. (*In John 13:34 Jesus says, "A new rule I give you: That you love one another as I have loved you. That you also love one another." What made the rule new was the words "as I have loved you". The special rules of Christ that Tolstoy talks about teach us how to love one another. Jesus put a whole new meaning into the old rule, and he showed by his life that it was possible to love in this way. D.M.)

In Matthew 5:19, before listing his new rules, Christ says, "Anyone who breaks one of these smallest rules, and teaches others to break them, will be called the lowest in the kingdom of heaven." In the past I had thought he was talking about the rules that Moses gave. It never came into my head that he followed that up (in Matthew 5:21-48) with five or six new rules. He starts each of these new rules by saying, "You have heard the old rule says such and such, but my new rule is this."

The first rule goes like this: "You have heard the old rule says you should not kill, and that anyone who kills will be judged for it. But I say that anyone who is angry with his brother without a good reason will be judged for it." Because I had come to understand the rule about not hitting back it should have been easy to understand this one about not being angry. But there were still words in this rule that made it difficult to understand. The words were "without a good reason".

I could not understand why they were there. It seemed that they changed the whole meaning of the rule. If it is wrong to be angry, it is wrong to be angry. Christ tells us to forgive over and over without ever stopping. He tells us not to fight against evil people. He stopped Peter from fighting to protect his Master when Jesus was being taken away to be killed. Could anyone have a better reason to be angry than what Peter had then? Yet here we find Jesus saying, "Do not be angry without a good reason." By putting those other words in, he is saying that anger is okay if you have a good reason. But I have never seen an angry person who did not believe that he or she had a good reason for being angry. Those few words destroy the whole meaning of the rule. It is like changing "love others" to "love people that you like". Yet the words were there in the Bible, and I could not take them out.

A rule that would be very clear without them had for me been destroyed by those added words. In all of the Church writings on this rule it says that people should try to be at peace with others, but that if it is impossible, then it should not stop them from praying for others at the same time that you are angry with them. I had the feeling that if I let myself be angry toward one person I had an open door to be angry with any person. The words did not seem right. I tried to find some other meaning for the words "without a good reason".

I looked up the Greek words that had been used and could see that the meaning was clearly "without a good reason". I looked for other places where the word was used in the Bible, to see if it could be used in a different way, and I found that it was still used to mean "without a good reason". I was forced to agree that Christ said only that we should not be angry when we did not have a good reason to be angry. I must say that, for me to agree to this, was like throwing out the whole Gospel as I understood it. There was one last hope. I looked up the oldest Bibles and I was filled with happiness. Most of the oldest Bibles did not have these words at all. The words that destroy the

meaning of this first rule were added a short time after Constantine became a Christian! Someone put the words in, and others agreed with it, and writings from then on encouraged the use of such reasoning. Christ could not and did not say those words, and the simple clear meaning of the rule returned.

After the first rule, the second one was easier to understand.(I have put two rules together here, because they are both about much the same thing, and because Jesus joins them with the word "also".) They are in Matthew 5:27-32. "You have heard that the old rule says adultery is wrong. But I say that it is wrong to want to do this, even if you do not go through with it ... You have also heard that the old rule says that if you put your wife away from you, you must say so in writing first. But I say that anyone who puts his wife away, apart from the sin of adultery, is encouraging her toward adultery; and anyone who marries her is guilty of adultery."

As in the first rule, where Jesus looked at anger as the root from which killing grows, so here he looks at the thoughts that lead to adultery. One thought is wanting a woman who is not your wife, and the other thought is not wanting the woman who is your wife.

But this rule, too, had words in it that had been used to make it of no effect. They were the words "apart from the sin of adultery". I had always been told that the meaning of these words was that a man was free to leave his wife if she was guilty of adultery. But from my understanding of the other rules, these words again seemed to be out of place. They were much like the earlier words "without a good reason". The whole thought of the rule was that husbands should not be looking for reasons to leave their wives, so why does Jesus give a reason along with the rule?

I turned to the Church experts and they all said that adultery on the part of the wife is a good reason for a husband to leave his wife. But I did not feel right about this. So I studied all the places where Jesus said words to this effect. In Luke 16:18 he gives the rule as I would think it should be, without a word about adultery being a reason for breaking it. In Mark 10:5-12 he does the same thing, and adds that it is wrong for the wife to leave the husband as well. But in Matthew 19:4-9 he again uses the words "apart from adultery".

Christ's whole teaching was that we should forgive all; so how is it that we can break this rule when a wife is guilty of adultery? Everyone teaches that this is what he was saying, and a look at the oldest Bibles showed that these words were in them. I had no answer, but I did have the feeling that something was wrong. For one thing, if putting a wife away forces her into adultery, and if adultery is a good reason to put her away, then you have a circle; all a husband must do who wants to leave his wife is encourage her toward adultery. Putting away a wife who is guilty of adultery will clearly not stop her from sinning; it will only push her more in that direction. Surely this is all opposite to the whole spirit of what Christ was trying to say. It is no better than the old law, where a man can leave his wife for any reason, so long as he puts it in writing first. I had a problem, too, with the wording of the rule. If you cut the rule down to who is doing what, you have "anyone""encouraging" his wife toward adultery. "Anyone" is the person doing the action, and "encouraging" is the action.(The words "who puts his wife away" are only telling us which"anyone" we are talking about.) So "apart from adultery" is telling us something about the action of the husband, and not something about the wife.

Let us change the wording a little to make a new rule with the same word pattern, to help us understand what is being said here. Let us say: "Anyone who does not give food to his son, apart from being cruel, encourages his son to be cruel." If we had this rule, we would not say that "apart from being cruel" is telling us that a father is free to stop feeding a son who is cruel. It can only be saying that on top of encouraging his son to be cruel, the father is also being cruel himself. And what happens if we put the same meaning on the rule as Christ said it? We would understand that

any husband who puts away his wife not only encourages her toward adultery, but also becomes guilty of adultery himself.

But what of the husband who is not planning at the time to marry another woman when he puts his wife away? Can it be said that he is guilty of adultery? I looked at the Greek word for "adultery" that is used in this rule (porneia) and learned that it was a general word for one being in a wrong spirit about sex. It does not mean adultery as such, but just a spirit that can lead to adultery or any number of other sex sins. Now look at what was happening when Christ was giving this rule, to see if my understanding fits. He was talking to people who believed that it was okay for a man to leave one wife and marry another, that such a man was not guilty of doing anything wrong. And Christ said that, not only does such an action lead to sin on the part of the wife who has been left on her own, but it also leads to sin on the part of the husband, because even marrying another woman is, in the eyes of God, a sin after he has left his first wife.

The meaning is clear. And it fits with a good understanding of English, a good understanding of the spirit of Christ's teachings, a good understanding of the beliefs of the Jewish people, and a good understanding of the laws of reason. Again I was left believing that what Christ had said was very clear and simple, but that it has been made confusing by people who do not want to change their lives to live them in the way that he wants us to live. The rule about not leaving wives (or husbands) for any reason is not one that the world wants to hear, and because the Church does not want to lose people, it makes the rules say what the people want it to say.

I then came to the third rule: "You have heard that the old rule says your promises should be made before God. But I say that you should not make promises at all. ... When you say yes, that should be enough. And when you say no, that should be enough. Anything more than that comes from the evil one." At first look, the most surprising thing about this rule was how easy it is to obey. I don't make many promises anyway, and when I do, I do not call on God as my judge or do any other such thing. So what little change I needed to make in my life was very easy to make. But to be safe, I read what the Church experts had to say about this rule, and I found some interesting things. First, they tried to make it say the same thing as the third of Moses' Ten Rules – a rule against saying God's name when we are angry, or when we are not serious about what we are saying. And then they argued that it should not be used to stop a person from making a promise to follow a king or queen or to obey the laws of a country.

Here we were again, with Christ saying something that seemed very easy to understand, and, for this rule, very easy to do, and the Church fathers were arguing against it, saying that we should not obey it. And the reason for the arguments was because they believed that what Jesus had said could lead people to act in a way that would show that their love for God was greater than their love for the government.

The rule had only seemed easy to me because I had not been thinking about the promises that people make to the leaders of their country when they take jobs as soldiers, police, judges, or law makers. Here in Russia we even call our soldiers "the promisers" because of the promise they must make. The promise is most often made on a Bible. Such a promise is so important for the running of government that even in France, where Christianity is no longer said to be the country's religion, they still make a holy promise to the government and country. That soldier who had told me that he obeyed the Army Rules more than the rules of Christ, could see nothing wrong in it because he had made a holy promise that he would obey the Army Rules. In this one simple act, the empty idol takes on the blessing of God in the eyes of people making the promise. I could now see that this rule that had, at first, not looked so important, was in truth very important. It is these holy promises in the name of God that confuse people about the difference between the kingdoms of man and the kingdom of God. The rule from Christ is to "not make promises at all". Like "do not judge at all",

the rule is very clear. And to make it even more clear, he says that any teaching that encourages us to make promises is coming from the evil one.

Really, if Christ teaches that we should always obey God, how can we promise that we will always obey the leader of our country? What do we do if the will of God is not the same as the will of the leader of our country? James, in his letter in the Bible, said near the end of it, "Above all things, do not make a promise, but let your yes be yes and your no be no, so that you will not be judged."



James tells us why we should not make the promise that our country asks for from us. The promise by itself does not seem to hurt anyone. But from it, people are judged. So he says, "Do not make any promise at all." Nothing could be clearer. So how is it that in a so-called Christian country we still make promises, and that we even put our hand on a Bible when doing it? By now the answer should be very clear. The church leaders did with this rule what they have done with all of the rules. They have taught people to act in a way that is perfectly opposite to what Christ clearly taught.

People do not want to change; and Christ asks them to change. So the Church tells them in one way or another that they do not need to change. Where it says not to be angry, they say that it is okay if you have a good reason. Where it says not to put away your wife, they say it is okay if you can get her to have sex with another person. And where it says not to judge or not to make a

promise, they simply say the opposite and tell people that they are teaching what Christ taught. And they do it with such confidence that no one thinks to question them!

I was becoming less and less surprised by the stand that the Church took on each of the rules of Christ. It was becoming clearer to me as time went on where they were coming from and where they would stand on almost anything that Christ said. The teaching was right there in with the rule. Christ said that any teaching that encourages us to make promises is coming from the evil one. The fourth rule is one that I have already talked about. It goes like this: "You have heard that the old rules say 'An eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth', but I say that you should not fight against the evil person. If anyone hits you on the right cheek, you should turn and let him hit you on the other cheek also."

This was the first rule of Christ that I had understood, and it was the one that had helped me to understand all of the others. It simply says that the way to destroy evil is not to hit back, but to return good for evil instead. When I had started to believe that Christ was serious about asking us to obey this rule, it had changed my understanding of everything else that Christ said.* (*It is our belief that Tolstoy could have started with seriously believing any of the teachings of Christ and the effect would have been the same. D.M.)

The last of these five rules of Christ says: "You have heard that the old rules say you should love your neighbours and hate your enemies, but I say that you should love your enemies, bless them that say evil things against you, do good to them that hate you, and pray for them that use you wrongly and try to hurt you, that you may be the children of your Father in heaven. For he makes his sun to come up on the evil and the good, and sends rain down on the good and the bad."

These words seem to follow on nicely from the rule about not hitting back. But I found one problem with this last rule. Before each of the other rules, Christ had told us rightly what the law of Moses taught. But here he said that the old rules taught us to "hate our enemies". Anyone who knows the Jewish law would agree that this was not true. The law of Moses said to love your neighbour; but it did not say to hate your enemies. Why would Jesus say something that was not true? I believed that the reason for the rule being worded in this way might be found by understanding the difference between "neighbours" and "enemies" in the Jewish way of thinking, so I studied these words. I came to understand that "neighbour" when used by a Jew always and only means another Jew. That understanding of neighbour is what Jesus was questioning in his story of the Good Samaritan. When the Jewish lawyer asked Jesus, "Who is my neighbour?" he understood that a Samaritan could not be a "neighbour". But in the story, Jesus gave him a new understanding of the word.

So if Jesus knew the Jewish people understood the word "neighbour" from the Law of Moses to mean a person from their own country, how was he using the word "enemy"? I had a strong feeling that I knew what I would find when I went looking, and I was right. The word "enemy" is almost always used in the Gospels, not about a person who is fighting against me, but about a person who is against my country, or a danger to the people in general. (Luke 1:71-74; Matthew 22:44) With this in mind, I understood why Christ used words ("hate your enemies") that were not written in the law of Moses. He was talking about how, in the law of Moses, they were told to act toward enemies of their country.

All of the stories about how they killed men, women, children, and even the animals of their political enemies were covered by Christ with the word "hate". Under the old rules they had been taught to "hate" their "enemies" (by killing them), but now Christ was teaching them not to draw lines between "neighbours" and "enemies".

Even in times of war, it is not right to say that the difference between the good people and the bad people rests in which country they come from. God does not look at the borders between one country and another when he sends the rain, and we should not think of people as part of one country or another either. Love for, and pride in, one's country is the spirit behind war, that makes it all sound so good and holy. But from start to finish Christ was teaching against this kind of reasoning in all of his rules.



It was clear to the first Christians that they were not to be a part of the world's wars. These words from Origen, one of the first Christians, to Celsus, show the spirit of the first Christians: "Celsus asks us to help the King by fighting for him and, if needed, fighting under him or even leading an army with him. Our answer is that, as we are able, we will help kings with the strength of God, and we will do it because we have been told to pray for kings and other leaders. We believe that the more we follow God, the more we will be helping the king. Our help will be even better than the help of soldiers who go out to kill the enemy. But to those enemies of the faith who ask us to take weapons and kill people, we say: Don't the priests of your religion stay home from war so that they can keep their hands free from blood? So why shouldn't we also?" Origen finished his argument, that Christians are of more good to the country by living in peace than by fighting in wars, with these words: "No one fights better for the king than we do. But we will not fight under him, even if he tells us to."

This was the spirit of the first Christians, and their teachers had the confidence to say it to the leaders of the world at a time when hundreds and thousands of them were dying because of their faith. How different it was then to what it is now!

I had in past years believed that if everyone in the world were to be Christians it would make little difference to the way that people lived their lives here on earth. The churches would be much fuller, but life for the most part would go on the same. But now, after reading the law of Christ, and understanding that a Christian is one who obeys Christ, I could see that if we were to all obey Christ we would have nothing less than the kingdom of heaven here on earth.

All that Christ said in his teachings was trying to get people to understand this. He called on people to "Turn around! For the kingdom of heaven is here!" Over and over he would say "The kingdom of heaven is like..." and he would give a story or a teaching to help them understand. But we will never see it if we are not willing to obey him.

What I Believe, part 7 - Christ's Teaching

Why do people not act in the way that Christ told them to act, even after they see that living in this way would bring the kingdom of heaven to earth? From all sides I hear the same answer: "The teaching of Christ is beautiful, and the world would be like heaven if everyone would follow it; but it is difficult, and because of that it will not work."

Christ's teaching is from God. Following it will make everyone happy; yet we do not do it because it is difficult to obey. We hear this so often and say it so often ourselves that we cannot see the lie that is behind it. It is the way of all people to want what is best. People have always been looking for better and better ways to do things. Every teaching that we have in life is about what is better or best. When we know what is needed to have what is best, how can we say that we want it, but we cannot have it? In every part of our life we do not give up because a thing is difficult. People fight with each other over land and wealth, but when we find that we can stop the fighting and protect our wealth by making rules, we make the rules. It is not easy to write them up, but we still do it, because it is better to have them than not to have them. Men are in competition with each other for wives, and they leave their children; but when we see it is better for each man to have his own family, we make changes and teach people to follow the new rules. It is difficult to feed and lead a family; and it goes against the natural animal desires to stay with one wife; but we still do it because we know that it is better this way. When people see there is a better way to do things, they do it, even if it is difficult.

So how can we say that Jesus taught a better way, but then argue that it is too difficult to even try to live it? If we understand difficult to mean that it is difficult to put off a desire for something now to get something better in the future, then why do we not say it is too difficult to dig up the ground and plant seeds when we must wait for apples or for grain from which to make our bread? Anyone with the ability to reason knows that people are always doing difficult things now for what they believe will be a greater good in the future.

Yes, it is difficult to follow Christ, because we must give up things that make us comfortable now; but we do it for something much better in the future. No one can argue with anyone who says that we are animals, and that it is easy for us to act like animals; but who can argue with the truth that we all want to be something more than animals too? Even arguing itself makes us more than the animals, because we have the ability to think, and to see that some actions have good reasons and some do not.

If I hit my foot walking into a wall in the dark, and then a person comes with a lantern that shows me where the door is, anyone would say I was stupid if I returned to hitting my foot against the wall because it was too difficult to move over to where the door was. And so the argument is stupid that says Christian teaching is right and good for the whole world, but that people are weak, people are bad, and because of this there is no point in them trying to do better. I cannot believe that people are this stupid. They must be blinded by some other belief that makes them say this. And that belief is the Church's teaching about Adam.

The Church says that, because Adam sinned, we cannot help but do the same; there is no point in trying to change. Christ, on the other hand, obeyed God, and all that we need do is to put our "faith" in him and we will be perfect in the eyes of God. We can (and must) go on sinning because we are children of Adam. And any time we try to change that which is so natural to us, we are going against God and being tricked by the devil into trying to "work our way to heaven". But if we will not give in to this desire to make ourselves better, and if we will keep saying that our "faith" is in Jesus alone (and not in anything that we do), we will one day find ourselves in that perfect dream world that we call heaven, and we will get there without any action on our part.

That is what the Church teaches. The Church says that life in the kingdom of heaven just "happens". In the kingdom of heaven there is no work, no pain, no sickness, no death, no wrong choices. It is not at all like life as we know it here in the real world. Life in the kingdom of heaven is impossible in this world. The best that we can do here is to have faith in such a life... in the sky when we die. With this teaching, there is no reason to try to live the Christian life here on earth. Religious faith says it is impossible, and that the best we can do here is to hold strongly to religion and religious works in the belief that they will one day bring us into that world where good just "happens" without any trying on our part.

The war between what is right and what is wrong is put to one side by this teaching. It is not important, so long as you have "faith"; and a most important part of this faith is that you must not worry yourself over what is right and what is wrong. Just do what the Church tells you to do. Anything more than that does not come from faith. But people who do not believe in Christ or in the Church argue the same crazy line: that the teachings of Christ are too difficult, and because of that, they will not work in today's world. What teaching could have so blinded them?

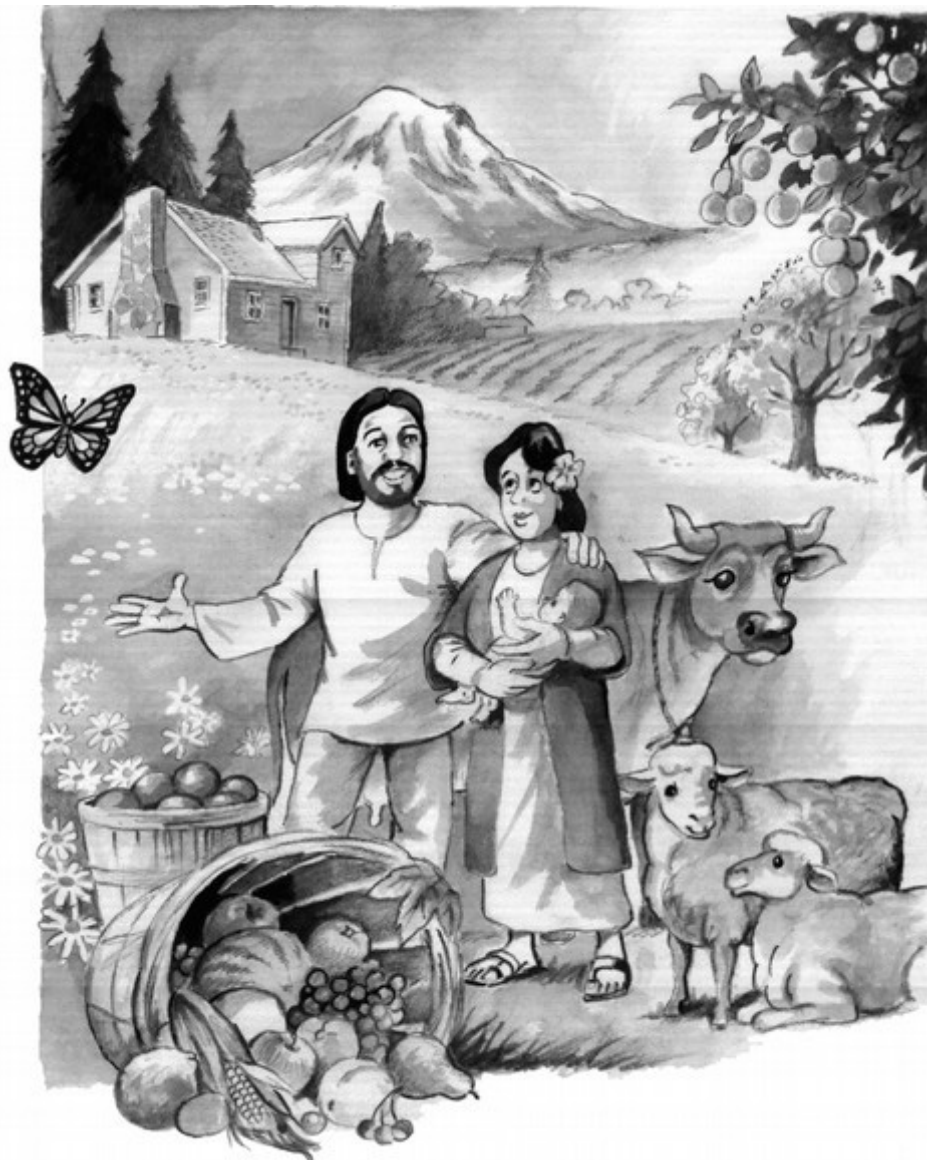
The answer is that the very same teaching has blinded them that has blinded the believers. Educated people will not talk of Adam or Jesus, but they too believe that the perfect life will just "happen" without any work on our part. It is part of the "progress" teaching, and it comes from the same reasoning that the Church preaches. The scientists have breathed it in from the world around them without even knowing it. Science says that it is not its job to say what is right and what is wrong. But without thinking about it, science has taken the answers that the church gave about good and evil and made them a part of science. Both sides have agreed that it is no longer important for most people to talk about or think about what is right and what is wrong, for what is right will win in its own strength in the end, without any help from us.

All the other religions of the world talk about people trying to live a better life. And they teach that people must work at it, and use their will if they are going to make the world a better place. Only the Christian Church teaches that this is wrong. It teaches that we do not have a free will, that what we choose in spiritual things will make no difference, and that what will be will be, with or without help from us. But not one word of this comes from the teachings of Jesus Christ. Christ taught us to think about what he was saying, to choose what is best, and to work at putting it into action.

Christ used the words "son of man" over and over for himself, as a way of showing that what he was doing was no more than what each of us can do, for each of us is a "son of man". And as we believe what Christ taught, and try to obey him, we too become "sons [or children] of God".

I believe that at some time in the future people will look back at this time in history and laugh at the crazy people who, for some centuries, believed that they could find a perfect life. They will talk of how we made every kind of study that we could of this life that we looked for, trying to learn how it was going to come. But then they will laugh at how we never thought to do anything about changing ourselves so that this beautiful dream could come true. What will sound most crazy in the future will be when they tell how we had a Teacher who showed us clearly and simply what we needed to do to have a better life, and we all said that his rules were too difficult.

The Church says Christ's teaching will not work because we live in an evil world; the best we can do is to pray for a new world one day. Science says Christ's teaching will not work because change does not come by reason; it comes by forces and laws that are above the control of people like you and me. The world is like a beautiful farm with everything on it that people need for life. There are cabins full of nice furniture. Corn, potatoes, peas, carrots, onions, beans, cabbage, lettuce, and other vegetables grow there, along with berry bushes and fruit trees. Bee hives, ducks, cows, sheep, pigs, donkeys, and other animals are there too. There are water tanks, wagons, wheel barrows, shovels, lanterns... all that is needed to work the farm.



Farmers come to use the farm, but they each use it only for themselves, without thinking about others who are living there at the time, or about others who will come later. Each wants to have everything for themselves, and in a short time they are fighting over it all. They kill and eat a good milk cow. They do the same to a sheep which was there for them to use in making cloth. They burn furniture and wagons to cook food and to keep themselves warm. They fight over the food, and much of it is lost or destroyed in the fighting. The strongest get most of the wealth, but it is not long before someone stronger comes and takes it from them too. In time the whole farm is destroyed and no one wants to live there any more.

The owner of the farm fixes it up again and new people come and do the same thing. This happens many times. And then the owner's Son comes and says, "Brothers, we are not acting as we should. There is enough here for all of us, and there will be enough for those who come after us if we will live by these rules: "We will not take from each other, but we will help one another instead. We will dig the ground, plant seeds, and feed the animals. If we do this, we will all be happy." A few people follow the rules and it goes well for them. But most of the people do not change. Over the years new people come, and in time they all hear about the Son and the rules that he gave. There is much interest in the rules, and soon they all agree that the rules are beautiful rules and they say that God himself talked through the Son when he gave the rules. But, to our surprise, the people are living worse now than ever, fighting and robbing and wasting all that is on the farm. And how has it happened? It has happened because teachers came to the farm telling the people that the Son talked of a better farm in a different place, where his rules would work; and they said that the Son never believed his rules would work on this farm. How they live on this farm is not important. All that is important is that they look for or wait for the new farm to come. And that is what has happened in the world. People destroy themselves at the same time that they wait for Jesus to come and fix it all up for them; or if they do not believe in Jesus, they wait for some law or force to make it all right. But no one will help themselves. Instead of waiting for an answer from heaven, all they need to do is to start obeying the answer they have already received from heaven, and stop destroying themselves.



What I Believe, part 8 - The Way of Life

We can all agree that the teachings of Christ would work in the world today if everyone obeyed them. But what can one person do in a world where others do not act on Christ's law? One person cannot go against the whole world. This argument says, "If I alone try to obey Christ, if I give away what I have, turn the other cheek, say that I will not go to war and will not make promises to obey my country, and if I do not stop others from taking things from me, I will end up being killed, put in prison, or dead from hunger. I will have lost my life for nothing."

I myself agreed with this line of reasoning until I started to understand the full meaning of Christ's teaching about life. He came with a teaching to save us from a life without meaning, a life that goes to no place. And then we tell him that we would be happy to follow his teaching if it were not that it will destroy our life without meaning! Christ teaches us how to bring meaning to our life and we argue that we cannot let go of our empty lives to find his meaning. By doing this, we are saying that we think the life we have without him is worth holding to. We are saying that we think we own this life and that we can keep it for ourselves. How wrong can we be!

Christ could see that people had this wrong understanding about life, and he used many stories and teachings to point out to them that they do not, in truth, have a life without him. We can, as Pascal put it, try to protect ourselves from death by running toward it with a shield in front of us,

but it will do no good. We are all dying, day by day. Without faith and without God, life has no meaning that will live on after death. All that we do with our time becomes a joke when we breathe our last. That is the word that John the Coverer said as he prepared people for Christ, and that is what Christ started his preaching with. Turn around and stop running from the truth that you are going to die one day, and from the truth that all that you are doing now will be only a cruel joke without faith and God.

In Luke 8:1-5, Christ talked about some people who had been killed by Pilate, and he said, "Do you think these men were worse sinners than anyone else because they were killed by Pilate? No, if you do not turn around, you will all die as they have died. Or those eighteen people that a building fell on and were killed... Do you think they were worse than anyone else who lived in Jerusalem? No, if you do not turn around, you will all die as they have." We oooh and ahhh over the deaths of people in very big accidents, but what happens to them is what happens to us all in the end. We all die. And if we do not find something that lives on after death, then we are no better off than all of the others who have died before us.

Christ says, in Luke 12:54-57, "When you see a cloud in the west, you know that rain is coming, and when you feel a south wind blowing, you know it will be hot. How is it that you can understand the weather, but you do not understand time?" We have learned how to look ahead in every part of our lives; but we do not look ahead to where life itself is leading us. You may do all that you can to protect yourself from danger and sickness, but in the end a building will fall on you, or a king will have you killed, or you will simply die in your bed with few people taking any interest in it. Plan ahead, as anyone does who is going to put up a building or go to war or do anything that is important.

Luke 14:28-31: "Which of you, wanting to put up a building does not first sit down and count the cost, to see if you have enough to finish it? If you do not do this, you will have started something that you cannot finish, and everyone who sees you will laugh at you, saying, 'This person started to build and was not able to finish!' Or what king, when faced with another king in a war, does not sit down first and think about it, to see if he can find a way with ten thousand soldiers to stop the king who is coming against him with twenty thousand soldiers?"

Can you see how stupid it is to work at something that you know you cannot finish? Death will always come before your house of happiness here on earth is finished. And if you know before time that all your strength will not be enough to win the war against death, wouldn't it be better to change now and use your life for something that will not be destroyed by death? Luke 12:22-27: He said to his disciples, "Do not worry about your life, what you will eat; and do not worry about your body, what you will wear. Life is more than food and the body is more than clothes. Look at the birds! They do not plant seeds, or make buildings to hold their food; yet God feeds them. And aren't you much more important to God than birds? Which of you, through worrying, can add an hour to your life? If you cannot do this little thing, why do you worry at all? Look at the flowers, how they grow. They have no jobs, and they do not make cloth, but even King Solomon with all his wealth was not dressed as beautifully as one of these." All the time and worry that we put into having good food and good clothes is a waste if we are going to die in the end anyway. Isn't it better to put our time into something that will go on living after this body dies? Can you see how stupid it is to think that wealth will protect you from death?

The meaning of life, Christ says, does not come from the things we can buy. It must come from something else. He says (Luke 12:15-21) "A person's life is not measured by the size of his wealth. A rich man grew so much grain that he had to take down his buildings and make bigger ones to hold it all. The man said to himself, 'I have enough wealth to live for many years now.' But God

said, 'How foolish! Tonight you will die, and then what will become of all the grain that you wasted your time on?' And that is how it is for people who make wealth for themselves and not for God."

Death is always there, standing over you. And because of that (Luke 7:35-40): "Keep your pants on and your candles burning, and act like people who are looking for their lord to return from the wedding; so that when he comes and knocks, you can quickly open the door for him. If he comes at nine at night or at midnight or at three in the morning or at six in the morning, and finds you waiting, he will be very pleased with you. Remember this, if the owner of a house could know when a robber was going to come, he would be there waiting for him to protect his house. You too should be ready, because you do not know when the Son of man will come."

The story of the women waiting for their husband, and about the end of time, and about the day when God judges the earth – all of these are talking about death, as well as talking about the end of the world. The experts agree on this. Death... death... death... It's out there waiting for you every second. You go through your whole life with death all around you. At the same time that you work and plan for your future, you know that the only thing you can be sure of for the future is – death. And that death will destroy all that you work for. Because of this, life for yourself can have no meaning. If there is a meaning to life it will not come in a life that is lived without faith and without God.

To live a life with meaning, you must live a life that is not destroyed by death.

Luke 10:41: "Martha, you are worried and go quickly about doing many things, but you have not remembered the most important thing." All the many things that we do for our own future are not the important things. It is all a lie that we trick ourselves with. Only one thing is important. From the day you are born, death is out there waiting. Your life will have no meaning and your death will have no meaning if you do not find the one thing that you need for true life. And it is the very thing that Christ came to give. He says that life for yourself is a lie, but there is a life that is not a lie, and it is the only life with meaning.

In the story of the men who were left by the owner to run his vineyard for him (Matthew 21:33-42) Christ shows what hides the truth from people, and what leads to them thinking that the false life (the one they live for themselves) is the real life. In the story, men living in a house on a beautiful vineyard started to believe that they owned the house and the vineyard. From this false belief came a long list of stupid and cruel actions that ended in them being forced out of the life that they had. In the same way, we have each been tricked into believing we own our lives and we can do with them as we please. Another long list of stupid and cruel actions has been the effect of this false belief, leading to our death.

The men in the vineyard believed that the more cruel their actions were (that is, killing the people the owner sent to them, and in the end even killing the owner's son), the stronger would be their hold on the life that they were living. And we too have been tricked into doing very cruel things to make our life better and safer. The men in the vineyard would not give up their wealth to the owner. Because of this, they were forced out of the vineyard. So too will be the end of those who think that living life for themselves is what real life is all about.

Death destroys life only because we do not understand life, and because we hold to the false life when we could have the real thing. The men in the vineyard did not remember that the vineyard itself had come to them from God, that others had worked so that they could have it, and that it was their job to think of others who would come after them, and to work for both God and others in the time that they had in this life. In doing this, they could have found true life... a life that would not be destroyed by death.

This change in our understanding of life, this turning around (metanoia) is the corner stone of Christ's teaching, as he said at the end of that story. The workers in the vineyard should have understood that they owed more to the owner than they could ever pay. And we should remember, from the day we are born to the day that we die, that we owe all that we have to God and to others. If we do not remember this, and if we try to keep our lives for ourselves, we destroy our lives, as Christ so often said.

True life only comes by turning loose of the false life. To be a part of the true life, we must turn loose of our will, and do the will of the Father of life, for he is the one who gives this life to the Son of man. In John 8:34-35, Christ says the slave of sin, who does his own will and not the will of the master will not live in the house for ever. Only the son, who does the will of the Father lives there for ever. The will of the Father of life is not the life of one person doing what he or she wants. The Father's will is that we use our lives to help others.

In Matthew 25:31-46, Christ says that we will be rewarded for helping others, because when we do that we are helping him. The Son of man will say, like a king, "Come, you who have been blessed by my Father. Come and receive the kingdom; because you gave me food and drink, clothes, and a place to sleep, and you showed kindness to me. For when you helped others you helped me. Now you can have eternal life."

Far from having nothing to do with eternal life, our physical life, and what we do with it, is where eternal life starts. Christ did not talk of going to heaven after we die. He said the kingdom of heaven starts right here on earth. There is a big difference between the so-called Christian understanding of life and that of the Jews (who did not have a clear teaching about life after death). The (false) Christian teaching about physical life on earth is that it has been destroyed so much by Adam's sin that it can never be fixed; God has stopped trying to fix it. But the Jewish understanding was that physical life comes to us from God. What we do with it is all important. Our physical life must be lived in line with the will of God. Christ built on the Jewish understanding of life when he taught about true or eternal life. "You look through the holy writings," he said to the Jews (John 5:39), "because you think that in them you have eternal life."

A young Jew asked Christ (Matthew 19:16) how to find eternal life, and Christ answered, "If you want to find life, obey the rules." He says the same to the lawyer who wants to find eternal life (Luke 10:28): "Do this and you will live." He was saying to the Jews what had so often been said in their law, and that is that obeying God is eternal life. The only difference is that now we follow the higher understanding of God's will that has come to us through Christ, and not the understanding of God that came through the law of Moses. In obeying Christ we find eternal life. People may not agree about what happens after death, but we must agree that the only way we can be saved is by following the will of the Father and Maker of life. And we cannot give any better meaning to life and death than the meaning which Christ gave. Any meaning to life that does not have us loving God and others will simply not work. We must agree that our physical life will end, but that the life of the Father will not. Only by becoming one with the Father can we have eternal life.

So, knowing this, what am I to do? Should I live like everyone around me, or should I obey the teachings of Christ? I have understood that his law is the will of God. I have understood that I will be lost if I do not do the will of God. So how can I turn away from the only hope I have of being saved? If I follow those around me, I will not be helping others and I will not be doing the will of the Father of life. But if I do what Christ teaches, I will be helping others, and I will be doing the will of the one who made me. I will be doing what alone can save me.

There is a fire in a room full of people. They all run to get out, pushing against the door that opens in. Someone says, "You must move back from the door. You must turn around. If you push you will

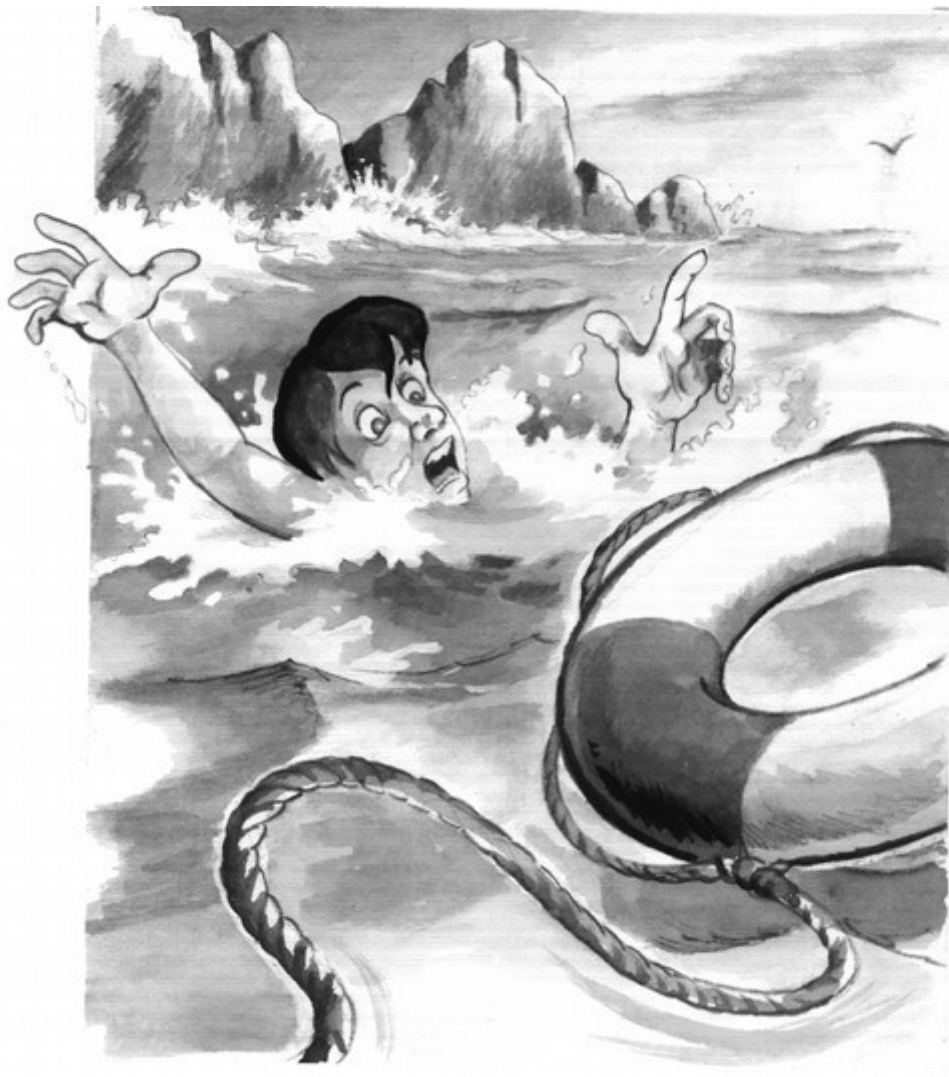
never be saved." Even if the others do not hear; even if the others hear but do not obey, what is important is that I have heard and there is only one thing for me to do now, and that is to move back and call on others to do the same. They may not move back, and they may kill me, but I cannot join with them in doing what I know can only destroy us all in the end. I know that there is no hope of being saved without obeying the law of Christ. I am not afraid of this bringing me pain or death, because I know that pain and death are in front of me even if I do not try to obey Christ.

Death without meaning is the stupidest choice. So I choose death with meaning. It may come sooner or it may come later. I will die as all do; but my life and my death will have meaning now, and that is what is most important. That is the way to life that Christ taught.

What I Believe, part 9 - Faith and Works

It should be clear by now that if we will obey the teachings of Christ, we will be doing the best that we can do for ourselves and for those around us. And if we do not obey the teachings of Christ after hearing them, what hope can we have? But what of those who argue that they do not have the "faith" to obey Christ? People in general say that it is difficult to have faith. But is it? A man is drowning, and he asks to be saved. Someone throws him a rope – his only hope of being saved – and what does he do? Does he say, "I do not have enough faith to take hold of the rope"? If he does not use all his ability and strength to catch the rope, it can only mean that he does not know that he is drowning.

How can a Christian, believing that Jesus is God and that all of his teachings are from God (and it is not important here that they be understood just as I have understood them)... How can a Christian believe all this and then say that he or she does not have the faith to obey Christ's teachings. Can you have faith in God without having faith in the rope he throws to you that you may be saved? We hear God himself saying through Christ, "You have before you eternal pain, fire, darkness, and death, and you have my teachings, that alone will lead to life." It is impossible for a Christian to say that he or she believes Jesus is God and not take hold of the rope that Jesus gives. The only way you can say that you do not have faith to even try to obey Christ is if you do not believe that you are lost.



Children jump from a ship into the water. They have fun playing there. They do not understand that the ship is leaving and that they will soon be alone in the middle of the ocean. Someone throws a rope from the ship, and people shout loudly to them that they will die if they do not take hold of the rope. But the children do not believe. It is not that they do not have enough faith in the rope. It is that they do not believe they are in danger. They do not believe the words of those who are shouting to them. Instead, they believe the children around them, who say that they will be free to swim as they like after the ship has left. They do not believe that there will come a time when their arms will be too tired to hold them up, and that they will go to the bottom. It is only because they do not believe this that they do not take the rope. This I can understand. But taking the rope is easy for people who are old enough to understand the danger that is in front of them. As the children do not take the rope because they do not believe they are in danger, so the world today does not obey Christ because it does not know the danger that it is in.

Every place we look, both in and out of the Church, people act like they are going to live forever (or that they will if they can only get enough money). They believe what it is impossible to believe, and it is because of this that they turn away from the only thing that can save them. They say that they must first have "faith" before they can obey Jesus. But that faith would come if they would stop doing the things that destroy them and start doing the things that will save them. The reason they do not take hold of the rope is because they do not want to take hold of the rope. It is as simple as that. Even when they see their friends die, they choose not to believe that they themselves are in danger. They put their faith in false teachings and then say that they do not have faith to obey Christ.

And the worst of the false teachings is the one that they can have saving faith in Christ and still not obey him. But, as James said in his letter, this is the kind of faith that the devil has. The devil believes in God in word only, but never tries to obey him. James 2:14-26: "What good is it, my brothers and sisters, if a person says he or she has faith, but does not do good works? Can that kind of faith save anyone? If a brother or sister needs food or clothes, and one of you says, 'Go in peace, be warmed and filled,' but you do not give what is needed, what good is that? In the same way, faith in words alone, but not in actions, is dead faith. One could rightly argue, 'You say you have faith, but I am the one obeying God. I cannot see your faith when there are no works joined to it; but I can show you my faith by my actions.' You believe that there is one God? Okay. But then the devils also believe that, and they live in fear of God's anger.

Don't you know, you stupid person, that faith without actions is like a tree without fruit? Didn't Abraham our father show that he had faith by giving his son to God? You see, what he believed worked together with what he did, and it was through his works that his faith was made real. From this we can see that we become right with God not just by what we believe, but by what we do as well. Just as the body without the spirit is dead, so faith without works is dead also." James was saying that faith which does not lead to actions is not faith at all. It will not save anyone, for it is only saying in words what the person saying it does not really believe. Actions are what faith leads to.

The Jews said to Christ (John 6:30) "What miracle can you give us so that we will believe?" Much the same was said to him on the cross (Mark 15:32): "Let the King of Israel come down from the cross now, so that we can see and believe." But Jesus knew that they were going to believe only what they wanted to believe, and no miracle would make any difference. He said that only his sheep (those who followed his teachings) would believe him. (John 10:25-27) In John 5:44 Jesus told them why they (and the world today) had so little faith. "How can you believe," he asked, "when you receive teaching* (*Most Bibles have "good thoughts and words" here, but Tolstoy argues that "teaching" is the right word for the Greek word doxa. He says that the word that doxa comes from (dokeo) means teaching. We cannot find this in our Greek dictionaries, but we can see how people would be happy to receive the teachings of those who say good things about them. D.M.) from one another, but the teaching* that comes from the one who alone is God you do not look for?"

To believe, says Christ, you must look for the teaching that comes only from God. Christ says that the person who teaches what he himself wants to say will not say what God wants. God's truth will only come from the one who is perfectly in the will of God. There will be nothing false in what he teaches. (John 7:18) So whose teaching have we put our faith in? The teaching of Jesus Christ, or the teaching of some Church "expert"?

There are really only two teachings: the teaching that your life is your own and that you can be happy by doing with it what you choose, and the teaching that you will only find meaning in life by doing the will of God. If a person's faith is in the selfish teaching, it will show through that person's actions. All that he or she does will be toward getting wealth, power, and those things that will make him or her feel good. If a person has seen that the meaning to life can only be found in doing the will of God, then all of the actions of that person will show this kind of faith.

That is why people who are happy with their life as it is will never be able to believe in the teachings of Christ, even if they try. To change their faith such people would have to change their feeling about life as it is. Until that happens, their actions will always be in line with their understanding of life (which is their true faith), and saying that they believe in the teachings of Christ or even wanting to believe in the teachings of Christ will not make them believe. If they are

happy swimming in the ocean, they will not be able to think of the rope as they must think of it before they can be saved.

Saying prayers, going to meetings, building churches, preaching to others, and doing small actions to help the poor will not be enough, if they do not come from people who, like Abraham, would give God their only son if God asked them. That is the kind of faith that Christ and his followers had, and it is the only kind of faith that will save you. It is because people do not have this kind of faith (because they do not really think that they are headed for eternal death without God) that they can say that they would like to live by the teachings of Christ, at the same time that they give all their strength to living in a way that is perfectly opposite to the teachings of Christ.

In Matthew 19:23-24 and Luke 14:25-33, Jesus says things that are just too much for people who have faith in this life. He tells us to give up everything – our wealth, our families, and even our lives – to follow him. Only those who have lost faith in this life, who know that they are drowning, who can see nothing but eternal darkness in front of them, will take hold of this rope. Christ told a story (Luke 17:7-10) about a worker who returned from working on the farm only to spend more time fixing a meal for his master; and he did it just because it was his job and not because he thought he was doing something special. By this, Christ was saying that anything God asks of the person who has real faith is not surprising to that person, because the person with real faith knows that he or she has nothing to start with. They do not argue with the rope that has come to save them. They do not say, "I do not have enough faith." The faith that moves mountains comes from knowing that death is out there waiting, and there is only one way to be saved. This faith takes hold of the rope and never lets go.

What I Believe, part 10 - "My Yoke is Easy"

We say it is difficult to follow the teachings of Christ. But it is only difficult because we plan our lives in such a way as to hide the truth from ourselves. We tell ourselves that we have faith in Christ; and that this "faith" must never be questioned. Anything that tries to make us question the way we live is seen as an enemy of our faith. I have even heard "Christians" say that faith and reason are opposites. So if I should be able to show someone that Jesus is very clear about wanting his followers to obey him, my argument could be destroyed with the argument that it is built on the weak reasoning of a mind that is less than God's. There is no answer to the blind faith of one who follows the way of the world and calls it the way of God.

A short time ago, I had a talk with a very smart man who told me he was a Christian. He said that if we use the teachings of Christ as a pattern for what is right and what is wrong, we will be no better than all the other religions of the world, which are all trying to say what is right and what is wrong. He said that what makes Christianity special is our blind faith in what the church says. So, in trying to be "special" we throw out that which is important to God and to every person on earth (that is, our understanding of what is right and what is wrong) and we put in its place teachings that no one understands... teachings that have been the reason for many wars. It is not important that the effect of these teachings is that we end up living as bad as, if not worse than, people who have no faith in God at all.

It is like the devil has taken his way of life and covered it with a religious blanket that has the name "Christianity" written on it, and people believe it really is Christianity even when a close look shows that it is very much the opposite. If it had not been for the "Christian" name on the way we live (and all the religious talk and actions that go with it), it would have been clear to everyone centuries ago that what we are living is not Christian at all. And it would have been very easy for anyone to understand what it was that Jesus Christ really taught.

It sounds very bad of me to say it, but at times I think that, if Christ had not come, and the Church had not been started, the world might have been much better by now. In all the religions of the world people were reaching out for little pieces of light. But when the true Light came, it was so strong, that evil people felt forced to make up lies to cover it, and to take over the Church. From this, many many people have lost their faith. Today we have Christ telling us the truth, and all of Europe asks him, with Pilate (the man who had Jesus killed), "What is truth?" We have whole countries full of people who not only live without the truth and without a desire for the truth, but with a very strong belief that looking for the truth is one of the most stupid things you could do with your life. The hunt for truth and for meaning in life, which Christ said was the most needed thing in the world, and which had always been thought of as the most important thing to do with one's life before the start of the Church in Europe, has now been laughed out of our lives as not being important.

When I ask the Church what I should do with my life, what I get as an answer is, "Obey the laws of the land, and the laws of the Church." When I ask, "Why is there evil?" and "Is there anything I can do to stop the evil in the world?" they tell me that there is nothing I can do about it.



"Trying to be good only comes from pride," they tell me. "Just follow our directions on how you can save your soul, and then wait for a future life to come when there will be no evil." If anyone finds it too difficult to agree with this evil world, the Church tells them that they can go and live in a cave or in some other building far away from the real world, where they will not shake the boat. Such people are encouraged to punish themselves for the sins of the world, but to do very little about changing the serious false beliefs of the world that Christ asked us to change. So the church

gives only two choices: Fit in with the way the world is going; or leave the world and live alone in the hills. Most important in both choices is that either way, we must not obey or teach the teachings of Christ; that choice is not open to us.

But we see in the Bible that Christ lived his life in the middle of all the action. He went into the world and he gave them the truth. If truth is truth, it must work in the real world. If it does not, how can we believe it? And what Christ calls us to is not more pain and more sadness. It is not bad news, but good news. He came to bring us something better than what the world now has. True, he tells us that people will hate us and hurt us because of what we believe. But he does not say that life for us will be harder than it is for people in the world. The opposite is true. He says that life for us will be "blessed", and that those who follow the ways of the world will be sad.

Christ did not teach blind faith in rules that have no meaning, and he did not teach a life of guilt and pain and sadness, by doing all we can to make our lives difficult. What he taught was a life of happiness that starts right here, and right now... in this life. Peter said to him, "We have left all and followed you. What will we receive for this?" Jesus answered, "In the life to come you will have eternal life; and there will be people who fight against you in this life too. But seriously, I'm telling you that there is not one person who has left house and land and family for me and for my teachings who will not receive now, in this life, a hundred times more in houses, land, and family too." (Matthew 19:27-29; Mark 10:28-30; Luke 18:28-30)

Christ is honest about the cost of following him; but he does not say that we lose by paying it. He taught instead that the price is cheap when we put it beside what we get in return; and he did not even have to talk about rewards in heaven to prove his point. Reason tells me that the disciples of Christ should be better off than the disciples of the world. Because the disciples of Christ are doing good to everyone, they should only be hated by the most evil people. But for the disciples of the world, where fighting for your self is a way of life, hate will be all around them. When it comes to things like accidents and sickness, I would think that both the disciples of Christ and the disciples of the world would have about equal measures of these things, but with one difference: The disciples of Christ would be prepared for difficult times, and they would see them all as having a reason; but disciples of the world, who do all that they can to run away from hard times, would not be able to see any meaning in them.

This is how I feel it would be. But is that how it is in real life? Let everyone think of all the worst times in their lives, all of the saddest, lowest points, all of the times of great physical and spiritual pain that you have been through and are going through. Then ask yourself if you went through all of this because you were a Christian, or because you were trying to get the things that the world wants. Be honest and think over your whole life, and I think you will see that you never – not one time – went through pain because you were a Christian, but that most of the sadness in your life came because you were trying to live by the laws of the world. In my own life, which has been a very easy one in the eyes of most people, I can remember going through things in the name of the world's teachings that would have made me a martyr if I had been willing to go through them for Christ.

All the saddest times of my life, from drinking too much and playing with sex in my student days, to the fights, the war, and so on, to the sickness and sadness that I found in my later life... all came with being a martyr to the world's teachings. And, as I said, I have had a very easy life. How many real martyrs are there for the world, who have been through much worse times than myself! We do not think much about what we go through to be like the world, simply because we believe there is no way around it. It never crosses our minds that we could be free from this life that we now live, just by following Christ. We must open our minds to that choice if we want to think clearly about which way of life would be happier. Look at the sad faces on people in the city, and think about all

the people who have killed themselves in this world. These people did not die for Christ or for his law of love. Most people who die such deaths do so as martyrs for the world's teachings.

One wet Sunday I took a tram through the open shops in a part of Moscow called Sukharev. For nearly half a mile the car pushed through the people – thousands of them. Most of these people spend their whole day there. Many of them were hungry and dirty, and almost all of them were arguing with each other over the prices of the things that they were buying and selling. The same thing happens in all of the shopping places in Moscow. At night these people will turn to drink, or return to the corner of a room where they must sleep with many other people. And remember, this is how they spend their rest day! On Monday they will return to the work that they hate. But they are not slaves. They willingly choose to live this life as martyrs for the way of the world – to get all that they can for themselves.

They have left their families out on the farms, to move to the city, where they can get more money – the one thing the greedy world loves more than anything else. All of them, from the lowest workers, taxi drivers, and prostitutes, to rich business men and leaders of government – they all go through the most trying and difficult way of life in the city without ever finding what it is that they really need. Ask them, from the poorest to the richest, if they have enough money to be happy, and you will not find one in a thousand who has enough. They use all their strength to get what will never make them happy. As soon as they get what they think will make them happy, they feel that they need a little more. Today I buy a coat and shoes; tomorrow a watch and chain; the next day a couch, desk, and cabinets; then rugs and a piano, better clothes, race horses, expensive art, and so on until I become sick from all of my working for these things, and then I die. And this is more or less how we all live. Our hopes all turn sour in the end.

How can we say that it is hard to obey Christ? It is true that Christ asks his followers to leave their families and farms. But he promises that they will become part of a bigger family, and that they will have more houses open to them in return... and that they will have eternal life on top of it all. Yet almost no one follows him. Christ asks us to take up our cross and follow him; that is to say that he asks us to face what we all must face sooner or later anyway – death – knowing that we are following God.

But no one follows him. Instead they follow the first person who comes along with an army uniform on, asking them to spend their lives killing other people until they themselves are killed. They are forced to walk long distances, through freezing ice and snow, often going hungry and knowing on the way that they are being carried to their death like so many stupid cows on their way to the killing houses. But people are not stupid cows; so how can we agree to such a way of life without asking why? How can people go off to kill other people like themselves without knowing why they do it?

There are armies that cook their enemies on a fire, pull off their skin, and cut out their intestines just to be cruel. But tomorrow another uniform will whistle for them to come and the length of the line of their followers will quickly grow. Fathers and mothers will encourage their children to go. They will see it as a beautiful Christian thing to do. They are the martyrs, and not we. But for what are they martyrs?

I could think of following Christ as being difficult if it were not so much more difficult to follow the world. It is so dangerous to follow the world that Christ's "yoke" is easy when you put it beside the world's "yoke". We don't hear much about real Christian martyrs these days, but it has been said that in eighteen hundred years three hundred and eighty thousand Christians have died for their faith. Yet for every Christian martyr there must be a thousand martyrs for the world. In this century

alone thirty million people have died in wars. And this does not count all of the other ways that people die for the teachings of the world.

If you did nothing more than choose not to go to war, you would be making a big step closer to the better, happier quality of life that Christ taught. Yes, they would punish you for it, sending you off to dig up the ground; but you would not have the blood of another soldier on your hands. By doing it you could be saving your own life as well. Then, if you stopped believing that you needed a gold watch or a sitting room or new clothes every month, you could save yourself many hours of worry and work too. You would have more time for your family and for others. This is how it goes with each step you take in following Christ; your life becomes fuller and happier.



Christ's teachings have some beautiful eternal and spiritual meaning; but at the bottom of it all they have one very simple meaning that the simplest person on earth can understand. It could be said in this way: Christ teaches us not to be stupid. Christ says that it is stupid to be angry with others and to look down on them. If you act like that toward others, how do you think they will feel (and one day act) toward you? Christ says that it is stupid to run after women when you can live with one woman for your whole life. If you destroy what you have with that woman, you only hurt yourself in the end. He says it is stupid to promise you will obey a person who may ask you to do things that are, in themselves, stupid or evil. He says it is stupid to hit an evil person, who will only

become more angry with you and more evil because of it. And he says that it is stupid to think of people from other countries as enemies, because, if we do, that is how they will act toward us.

People argue that it is too hard to stand against a world that will not change. "We could be killed for not fighting in a war," they say. "A man and his family could die of hunger if he does not try to get money, and try to protect his wealth." But the people who say this do not believe it themselves. They have never tried to do it, and they have never seen people killed for following Christ. Thirty million people have died in wars in the time that we have been alive. Many more have lived a sad life for the world's teachings. But where is the person who has died for Christ, or who has lived this life of pain and hunger and sadness that they say will come to all who obey Christ?

This teaching that you will live a sad life if you follow Christ is a foolish teaching; the teaching itself shows how little they know of Christ's teaching. Christ calls us to drink his cool, clear water, but we eat dirt and drink each other's blood because our teachers tell us that we will die if we drink Christ's water. Christ said, "If you want to know that my teachings work, all you need do is to try them." (John 7:17) But people die of thirst two steps away from the water, because they are afraid to drink it. It only takes one drink of the water that Christ gives for us to see clearly that it is the fears and lies of the world that are destroying people, and not the teachings of Christ.

We have been thinking for centuries that happiness comes from getting more and more wealth. We have been thinking this for so long that when Christ tells us that wealth will not bring happiness, we think he is trying to take something good from us, and that he must want to hurt us. But he doesn't want to hurt us at all. He wants to help us and to give us true happiness. Just as loving parents will teach their children that fighting will not make them happy, so Christ tells us that we would be happier if we would just stop working for money. He says that we could be killed at any time for living a life of love, and he helps us to understand that the future is never ours to own. But this is not the same as a call to a life of pain and sadness. He is only saying what is true of everyone –with or without his teachings. Death is out there waiting for us all, but those who open their eyes to this truth will be happier in the end than those who hide the truth from themselves.

We so easily forget that the man who made bigger buildings for his grain still died in the middle of it all. We do as he did, and we throw away what we have – the present – working for that which can never make the future safe anyway. What we should be doing is living the present for the only one who can make our future eternally safe. If we would step outside of ourselves for just one minute, we would see that all we do to make our future "safe" really is not done to make the future safe at all. It is done to make us forget what our real future is. And this very action not only destroys our future, but our present as well.

In 1870, in France, people took up weapons to protect themselves, and this action to make themselves "safe" ended in hundreds of thousands of them bleeding and dying. That is what happens in the end each time a country makes weapons. In much the same way, a rich man thinks money will make him safe, and yet that same money is what makes a robber come and kill him in the first place.

Christ's teaching to live each day as if it were your last is much smarter than the world's teaching to get more and more money for the future. Both sides will die, but only one will die prepared and happy.

Disciples of Christ will be poor, but that does not mean they will be sad. It may mean that they will live out on the land or sleep under the stars, that they will be hungry three times a day (just before each meal), that they will be so tired at night that they will fall asleep easily and sleep right through the night, that they will use their time to listen to and help others, and that when they die,

their death will have meaning. Not one of these is a bad thing in itself. The truth is that a simple life teaches us to find happiness in little things that others never see.

Christ said that being poor is the way of true happiness. Those who think they will go hungry or die of thirst if they do not work for money should think of the words of Jesus that priests use to say their way of life is right: "The worker does not need to feel guilty when people feed him. So stay in a house eating and drinking what they give you." A worker can and should have all that he needs. It is a very short, simple teaching, but for anyone who understands it as Christ did, it tells you that just being poor does not mean you will go hungry or thirsty. Living by faith does not mean that a person does not work. Life is boring without work. It is only work done in fear that is evil. Work done in love is not tiring. It is interesting, fun, and very spiritually rewarding.

The worst masters still feed their workers. They do not want the workers to become weak or sick. If they will do that for workers who hate them, how much more would they do it for generous workers who do their jobs with hearts of love and an enthusiastic spirit!

"The son of man did not come to be served, but to serve and to give his life for others." As we take up our cross and follow Christ, we too will work for others in love. You make your physical future most safe when you spend the present helping others, and not when you spend your time taking from others. You don't need money in the bank to eat well. As long as the rich have bread, they will give some to their workers. In Russia alone there are millions of people who do not own land or have money in the bank; but if they work, they all eat. The evil world will even feed its dogs. How much more will they feed a Christian who uses his or her life to help others! But you may ask, What if the workers become sick or for some other reason cannot work? It would be harder, but here, too, we see that in one way or another, the evil world feeds and nurses its sick animals and its crippled, sick, or old people as well. Why shouldn't the same happen for Christians? If there are not other Christians around to help us when we cannot work, I believe that God will use the people of the world to help us. And they will not let our children go hungry, for our children are the Christian workers of tomorrow.

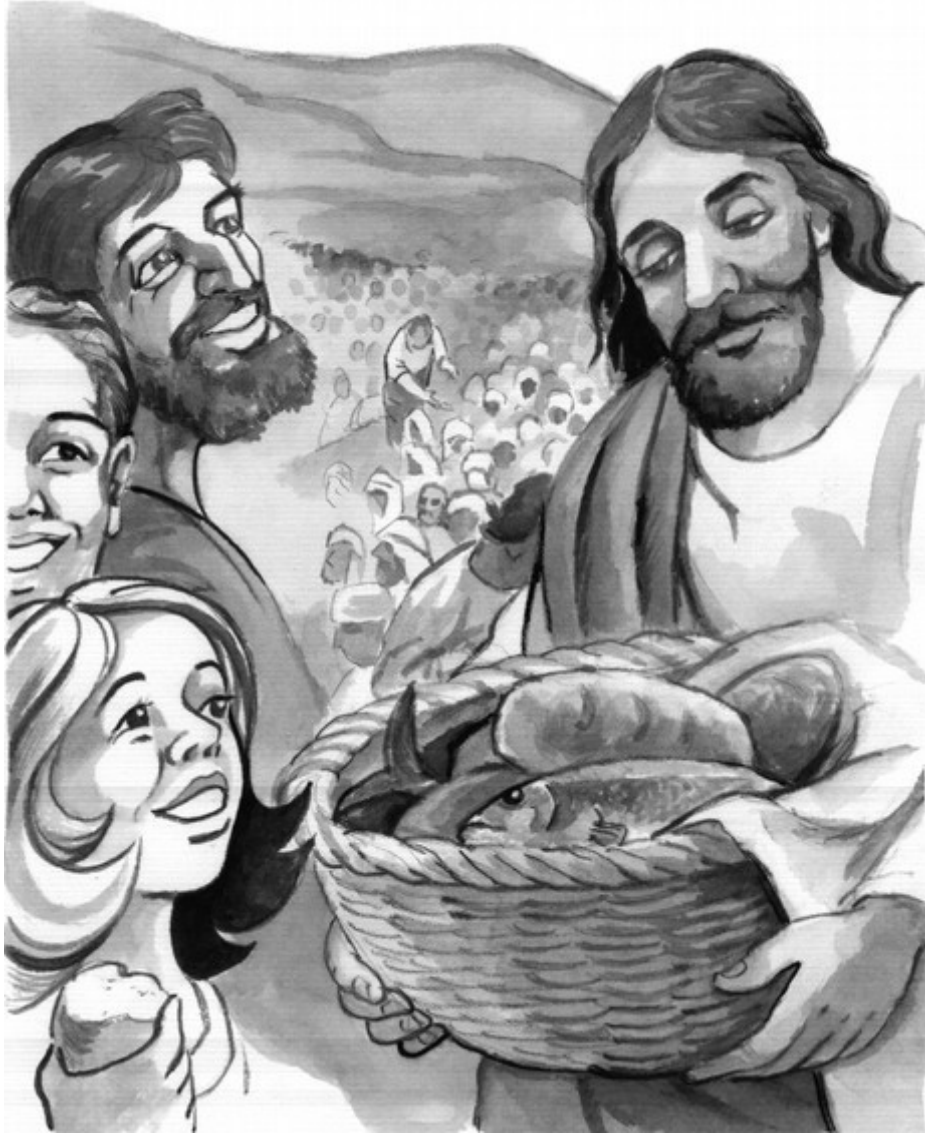
It is true that most people are not happy to feed lazy people. But those who give their time to working for others will never go hungry. That is a truth that works any place in the world. And those who work as hard as they can, and who try to take as little as they can get by with, will be the ones that the masters will most want to have working for them.

This understanding about how there is enough for everyone comes to us from the stories of the feeding of four thousand people, and then the feeding of five thousand, with just five loaves of bread and two fish:

Jesus had been preaching to thousands of people for most of the day. It was time for the people to eat, but they were far from towns or shops. A disciple told Jesus that he had seen a boy with two fish, and that they themselves had five loaves. Jesus knew that some of the people would have remembered to bring food, but others would not have remembered. (We know this because all four of the gospels tell us that there were twelve baskets used to hold the food that was left after everyone finished eating. The baskets must have been used by different people to hold food at the start of the meal.) If Jesus did not do something, some would have food and others would go without. So Jesus started things going by telling his followers to give of all that they had. It could be argued that the whole thing was a miracle. If it was, then Christ was teaching us that he can use a miracle to feed us when others are not there to help. But it could also be argued that this one action on the part of Christ and his disciples started a miracle of love. It encouraged others to put in what they had too, and when each person had finished eating their fill, there were twelve baskets of food left over. In the old way of doing things, those with too much would have carried home with them what they had left. And those who had nothing would have been left hungry, watching the eaters

with anger. It easily could have turned into arguments and fights. It would have been the way it is all the time in the world. But Jesus was showing them how it should be in the kingdom of heaven.

Christ taught that, when you give all that you have for God, far from going hungry, you will have full baskets when you finish. So tell me which way is the smartest, safest, and happiest way to live: following the world's teachings, or following Christ's?



What I Believe, part 11 - The Dead Church

When I first started to understand the meaning of Christ's teachings, I did not think for a minute that it would lead to me taking a stand against the teachings of the Church. At first I believed that I had just found something that the Church had lost, or that it had not yet found. I did not think it would end up separating me from the Church. I wanted badly to keep peace with the Church; and in my studies I tried very hard not to question those teachings that had always confused me. Instead, I tried to tell myself that one could believe them and still follow the teachings of Christ. But as I went on with my studies, I started to see that there was a clear choice between the truth of Christ's teachings, which alone could save me, and the perfectly opposite teachings of the Church. I was forced to disagree with the Church; but I tried to be as soft as possible about it at first, because I did not want to lose what was very important to me, and that was my life with other believers. But by

the time I had finished with my work, I saw that, try as I might to keep something of the Church's teachings, nothing was left.

Near the end of my work on the teachings of Christ, two uneducated workers who had been working for me had an argument about something they had read in a prayer book for children. It said that the law of Moses about not killing should not stop a person from killing enemies in a war, or stop a country from killing bad people. I could not believe that the Church would say this so clearly for everyone to read. The workers asked me if what the book said was true, and I had to say that it was not. The one who had been saying that he believed the book asked me why the Church would say it was okay to kill people if it was not. I had no answer for him. I asked for the book and found that all of the Ten Rules that Moses gave were in it, but that most of them were followed by words that argued against the rules. I looked at the longer prayer book that this one came from, and I found that the Ten Rules of Moses came in the part called "On Love". The rules of Christ, by the way, were not there.

The first rule of Moses says that we should only worship one God, but the Church book says that we can pray to angels and other Christians from the past, and, most important, to "God's mother". The second rule says not to make idols, but the Church book teaches children to pray to statues of Mary and Jesus. The third rule says not to use God's name when you are not serious about what you are saying, but the Church book says this should not stop people from making a promise in the name of God if the government tells them to do this. The fourth rule says to make Saturday a special rest day, but the Church books says not to keep Saturday holy. It says that we should keep Sunday holy instead. Rule number five says to obey your parents, but the Church book teaches that you should do the same for the king, the country, church leaders, "and other leaders".

There are three pages listing all the different leaders that children are taught to obey – at school, in the courts, in the army, on the job. As I have already said, rule number six says not to kill, but the Church book says it is okay to kill for your country. And this is what we are teaching all of our children in the name of "Christian teaching". We are teaching it to those children that Christ did not want people to stop from coming to him. He said that serious trouble would come to any who would stop even one of these children from coming to him. And yet, in the face of that, the Church today is openly teaching many thousands of children to go against the teachings of Christ. And the Church teaching is so strong that I could be sent to prison for what I am saying here right now in disagreeing with it.

It has happened as Christ said: "If the light in you goes out, how great will be the darkness." (Luke 11:35-36) The light in the Church is out, and the darkness in the world is now very great. To the religious leaders of his day, Christ said, "You false believers! You have closed the door to the kingdom of heaven. You won't go in yourselves, and you stop others from going in... You take all that the widows own, and you say long prayers that you do not mean. You will be punished more than others because of this... You make statues of the prophets and other people of God from the past, and say, 'If we had been there at the time we would not have helped to fight against them and kill them as the religious leaders of their day did.' But you have said perfectly what you do today, as the sons of those who killed the prophets." (Matthew 23:13-31)

All of this reads like it was written yesterday about those who, in the name of Christ, force people to believe all that is opposite to the teachings of Christ, and who do all that they can to stop anyone who tries to uncover the lies. I came to understand with the strongest confidence that the church's teachings, apart from using the name of Christ, are the very same darkness that Christ told his followers to fight against. Constantine made the way for the devil to put a Christian coat over the whole Roman world, without really changing the world at all, and then to teach the believers that it was God's will for them to follow the Roman government. Constantine was a very evil man, but for

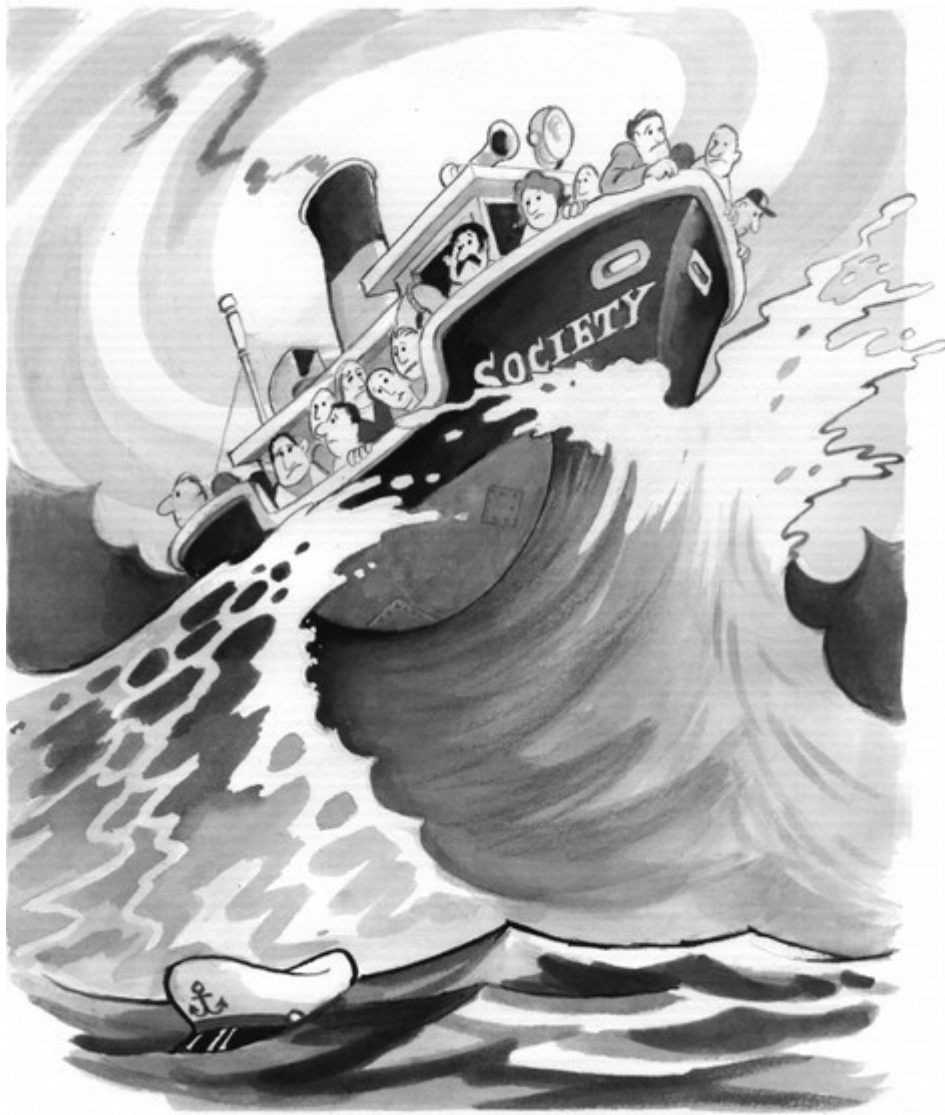
all his sins, the Church says he was one of the best Christians of all time. And because of him we now have a Church that does not ask its believers to do anything at all about obeying Christ to be saved. Instead, believers are told to obey the government, obey the Church, and to obey almost anyone but Christ. Where the Church should be leading the world toward the truth, the world is now leading the Church, and people now believe that it is the Church's job to teach that all that the world says and does is in agreement with the teachings of Christ.

There are two sides to any religious teaching. One side tells people how to live, and the other side tells why it is important to live that way. One side is more physical, and the other side is more spiritual. It is easier to understand the problems in the church when we understand that it stopped teaching the laws of Christ. Without the laws of Christ (which teach us how to live), the second part of the Church's teaching changed only to a teaching about going to heaven when we die, and obeying a few church rules. Because the Church says that how people live has nothing to do with them going or not going to heaven, even the second half of its teaching (about why we must live as we do) loses much of its meaning. When the Church teaches some action that a person must do to receive Christ's forgiveness it does not do so because Christ taught that the action would bring forgiveness. So faith in Christ, who taught us how to live, has been changed to faith in the Church, which teaches us to do what the government says.

In the past, the Church tried to hide the Bible from the people, but some free thinkers helped to bring the Bible to the little people. Movements to end things like owning slaves did not come from the Church (which always taught that owning slaves was in agreement with the will of God), but these movements came from people who had been touched by the truth of Christ's teachings. The same must happen with movements against war and against killings used to punish people. The Church will never take the lead on these things, because the Church has for too long argued that these things are part of the will of God. If change is to come, it must come from people outside the Church. The Church has no teaching about life – only teachings about heaven and hell and about what happens after we die. In the real world here and now the Church has nothing but buildings, statues, beautiful robes, and empty words.

For eighteen centuries the Church carried the light of Christ's teachings under its robes where people could not see it, and in so doing, it has itself been burned up by the flame. The world now lives without the Church. There is no way to hide that truth. Even the government no longer needs the Church. Science not only does not turn to the Church for help, but it is strongly against it. Art, which in the past was almost wholly under the Church, has now very much left it. Because the Church has no rules for how to live life here and now, life has no more interest in the Church. What we call the Church now is only a container where, at one time, Truth lived. All of the churches stand like soldiers who are watching a prisoner. But the prisoner has been free for a long time and they do not even know it. All the real changes in the world are coming from people outside the Church now. Movements to help the poor, help women, bring about changes in art and science – these all are started by people who have more understanding of the law of God than they could ever find in a Church that did all it could to hide those truths. The Church is so far behind what is happening in the world that no one hears the voices of its teachers now. And it is just as well, because they have nothing to say anyway.

People went on a trip in a boat. The boat had an owner who steered it well, and the people put their faith in him. But a time came when another man took the job of steering the boat, and he had no interest in steering. The boat moved on quickly and easily without anyone steering it, and no one could see any difference for some time. But when it became clear that the new leader did not know where he was going, the people kicked him off the boat.



The problem is that just kicking the bad leader out will not save the people on the boat. And that is what is happening in the world today. We forget that we still need a leader. The Church has no clear direction, but the world too is lost and does not know where to go. We live and get through life, but we clearly do not know why. And it is no good going through life without knowing why.

If we had just found ourselves in a place, we could say that we did not know how we happened to be here. But after finding ourselves on this planet, we have been making choices for some time that have put us in one place or another, and the effects of our choices can be serious for ourselves and for our children.

So we must answer questions like: Why do we still choose to have armies to kill and hurt millions of people? And why do we build big cities, with the problems that come from them? Why do we have law courts, and send prisoners far away from us to live out their lives? Why do we leave our farms, to do work that we hate in the cities? And why do we teach our children to do all of these things too? We must ask ourselves if these are the best ways to live our lives. Even if we believe they are, we must be able to say why they are the best ways. But if these are things that we really do not want to do, then it is even more important to answer the questions about why we still do them. We need to give answers, or stop doing such things. People who do things without knowing why they do them are not really alive.

Jews, Hindus, Buddhists, Muslims – all of these people do the things I have listed above. But they have rules and arguments in their religion that tell them that it is God's will for them to live in this way. Some uneducated Christians also believe the Church when it says that God wants us to fight wars, punish bad people, work for more and more money, and so on. Right or wrong, all of these people have a reason for doing these things. But now a time has come when only the most uneducated people can believe that we do these things because it is the will of God. People know now that the Church is not God, and that the church is not following God. More and more people are seeing this every day. But these educated people are the ones who need an answer now – a reason for their actions that does not come from the Church.

What these new world leaders do today will change the whole world. Yet they do not know why they are doing what they do. I have asked hundreds, and they give an answer that does not answer the question as I put it to them. When I ask a church-goer why he or she lives in a way that is not in agreement with the teachings of Christ, the answer is always about bad people in the world, and about how there should be more faith in the true Church. But as to why they themselves do not obey Christ, there is no answer.

A philosopher will talk about the law of progress and how the world is slowly getting better, but here too, there is no answer as to why they themselves do not right now follow good reason and do what is clearly right even if others do not. Most people – that is, the half believing half not believing people who always talk about how bad things are – when asked why they themselves do not change and make the world a better place, will talk of the law, their business, the government, or people in general. These people do the same as the philosophers and the church-goers. They all change a question about themselves to a general question about the world as a whole, or progress, or the Church. And the reason is because all of these people have no rules for themselves. They all leave that to someone else.

In the past people always had rules for themselves, but only in today's world have we lost that. And it is because the Church left out the teachings of Christ and taught only about life after death. The Church talks of a dream world where all will be as God planned; but it says nothing about how we should live now. Such teaching is of no use to the real world.

But science, without knowing it, is following in the steps of the false Church. We see smart people thinking they are free of religion just because they have not believed the church's teaching about life after death. But they still must have a way of life for here and now. Their reason for living the way they do will be their faith, and their faith will be their religion. When we look closely, we see that their faith is the same as the faith of the Church. They all do what they do because a big invisible machine tells them to.

In both groups we see that the religion of our time is a religion of force – doing anything that the strongest powers around us say we must do. This does not answer the question of how to know the difference between right and wrong. A thinking person needs to have such rules... needs a better reason to follow a leader or a teaching than just the argument that the leader or teacher can put you in prison if you do not obey. Sad to say, most of the smartest scientists in the world today not only have no such rules for telling right from wrong, but they cannot even see a need for them.

Ask anyone today – in the Church or out of it – what teachings they follow, and they will be forced to say that they follow only the laws of the country. They know that the laws of our country did not come down to us from heaven, or from prophets, or from others with a deep understanding of what is right and what is wrong. They will, themselves, talk against many of the laws, but in the end they will follow them because they have no higher law to follow. If the government says that all young men must be ready to kill and to be killed, all of the parents with sons will follow it and

teach their sons to do the same. We have lost any thought of a law that stands on its own, without a policeman or a gun to back it up. We cannot hear, or even think of, a voice in our own heart telling us what is right and what is wrong.

This voice – the voice of God – has been locked up by the teaching that a good person just does what the police say he or she should do. I have looked through all of the so-called Christian (Western) world for some clear rules about what is right and wrong, but I have not found them. There is a strange feeling that such rules are not needed, that religion is about God, about life after death, and about magic actions in a church building that can save people's souls; but it is not about knowing right from wrong. In such things as how to live, or what to teach our children, we give full power to others (who, themselves, do not know what is right) to say what we should do.

Most of the West now has no higher understanding of the will of God than the will of the police. But there are a few people, the best people of our time, who are not happy with such a faith, and who have a belief of their own about how people should live. Often these people know nothing of Christ's teaching, or they know, but only take a part of it. Because they have a belief at all, and because they will not give in to the powers that be, they are the only true believers left in our country.

God used the Church to hold the teachings of Christ for some time. But now those teachings are moving out into the world, where people can see them more clearly. The church has done its job. It was the organ that God used to give birth to what is happening now in the world. But, like the organ that comes out with the baby at birth, it has finished its job. It is no longer alive. Its use is finished.

This does not mean that those people in the world who are trying to follow what they believe is right now have all the answers. Like new born babies, they kick and hit and cry in anger. They do not have the food that came through the old organ, so they need a new way to find the milk of God's truth. These people must see how weak they are without God, and they must cry out to him for more truth. If they do not do that, they too will die.

A new born sheep moves its eyes and ears, shakes its tail, jumps, and kicks and dances about. To look at it, it seems to know everything. But the poor little thing knows nothing. All its confidence and strength came from the mother's blood. But her blood no longer comes to it. The animal is happy and strong; but it will soon be dead if it does not find the mother's breast. The world today is like that. It is full of change and enthusiasm. Art, science, business, and government – all are changing quickly and all are full of life. But this is only because of the strength they received from their Mother's blood in the past. The Church has finished feeding the world through her blood, and the babies are free to move about on their own now. But if they do not find a new way to receive Truth from the Mother, all this action will be wasted.

The world today is looking for answers in every place but one. They don't understand that they must choose from the Mother now only that which will help them to grow. What the world needs to take hold of now is the teachings of Christ. They can throw away the Church, but they must not throw away the teachings of Christ, or they will be throwing away their only hope.

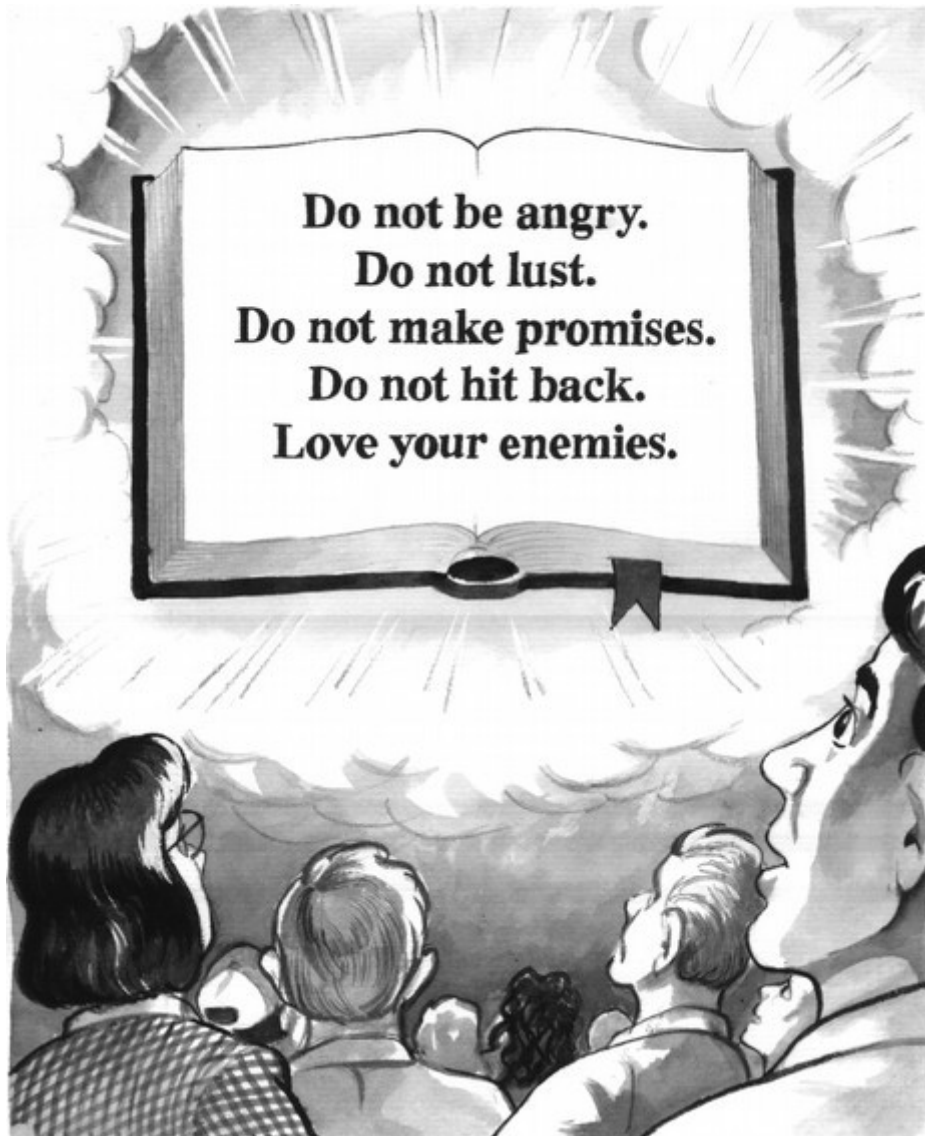
One can argue with Christ's teaching about what happens after death; but you cannot argue with what he said about life here and now. What he said gives us reason to live, because what he said is life. What Christ said about why we should live a good life is not new; but what he said about how to live a good life is. Jews, Buddhists, and Muslims who feel something has been left out of their law, will find it in Christ's teaching about not hitting back. And those in the Christian world who have no rules at all about right and wrong should find the teachings of Christ even easier to receive.

If you are a believing Christian, it should be very easy to receive Christ's teachings. He does not argue with your beliefs about God or the future. But he adds to what you have now. He gives you simple rules for life that will free you and others from evil. Believe in life after death, in heaven and hell, in the Church, in baptism and the holy bread, in forgiveness of sins; and go on praying, fasting, and singing your songs. This does not stop you from doing what Christ taught to make your life full and happy.

He said, Do not be angry; do not think thoughts that could lead you to be guilty of adultery; do not make promises; do not hit back; and do not go to war. At times you will break some of these rules, as you break some of the rules that you now follow. But in your quiet times, choose not to give up trying to follow these rules. And do it because it is God who tells you to do it.

If you are a philosopher who does not believe in God, and you believe there are rules about how things act in the world, do not feel that you must argue with the teachings of Christ. Go on believing as you do now that in thousands of years the world will be much better. But add to that law some rules for your own life. Christ's teachings give you rules that will surely make the world better at the same time that they make your own life better. Live by them and you will see how progress itself is only another way of saying what Christ said.

If you are one of the many other people in the world, half believing and half not believing, who has no time for things like the meaning of life, and who does only what everyone else does, then do not try to argue over which teaching is best. Go on and do what everyone else does; but as you do it, listen to that voice inside of yourself. At times that voice will agree with what you do, and at times it will not. Listen to that voice. And at those times, I am confident that the laws of Christ will come to you in their full strength.



If you are closer to believing in God than to not believing in him, then acting in this way will be acting in agreement with God. If you are closer to not believing in God, then acting in line with the voice inside of you and the teachings of Christ will be acting in agreement with the best reasoning, and the best rules in the world today. Don't just take my word for it. Try the rules yourself and you'll see that it is true.

What I Believe, part 12 - What is Faith?

I believe the teachings of Christ. I believe that the only way for the world to be happy is for all people to obey him. I believe that it is easy to obey Christ. Even if I am the only person who believes him I should still do it, to save my own life, if for no other reason. His teachings are the only door out of a burning house. The life I lived following the world's teaching did not make me happy. So I have no choice but to follow Christ. Christ has listed in his rules all the things that would take me away from loving others and being happy, and I believe those rules. Christ has shown me that the first thing that destroys a good life is anger. I cannot, as I used to do, argue that I have good reasons to be angry. I cannot look down on others who are uneducated or that I think are lower than me in any other way. I can see that when I think of others as being better than me, I am kinder to them, and it is only when I think of myself as being better than them that I get angry. Now I understand why Christ blesses the poor and humble, but says that God is angry with the rich and powerful. If, at times, I give in to anger, I must, in my quieter times, see that my spirit was wrong,

and make plans to change my actions. I cannot use names for myself or others (like Master, Father, or Teacher) that make some people more important than others. I cannot hold to the wealth, food, clothes, or actions that I used in the past to mark myself as being better than others.

Christ has shown me that another thing that will destroy my happiness is wanting to have sex with women other than my wife. I cannot give in to such thoughts, or argue that they are okay if the woman is beautiful, if I think I love her, or if my wife is not perfect. I should do all that I can to stop these thoughts. I now know that what most leads to thoughts about adultery is when people leave their husband or wife if living together becomes difficult, or if they come to see the worst side in the person they are married to. Christ tells me that I must not do this. My desire for sex is not a problem if I stick with my wife. But it is a problem for both of us if I send her away or if I leave her. So I will not leave her for any reason, and I will be happier because of it.

The third thing that Christ says will destroy my happiness is making holy promises. The future is not mine; it is God's. I cannot promise to obey anyone but God. I can see that a holy promise to obey the leader of any country is what leads to wars and prisons and other killings in the name of that country. This happens because people forget their need to obey God after they have made a promise in the name of God to follow someone else. Making a promise changes our understanding of what is right and what is wrong, because we think it is wrong to break the promise even when keeping it forces us to do something that is wrong.

Christ has shown me that the fourth thing that keeps me from being happy is trying to fight against evil people. I can no longer argue that it is right to hit back, for that is the same as fighting evil with evil. If I find myself guilty of doing this, I must stop it as soon as I see it. I can see now that in the past I hit back because I believed that such action would protect me from evil people and make my life and my wealth safe. I no longer believe this. I now see that many of the problems in the world come from us trying to force others to serve us when we should be trying to serve others. We do not change the world through force. We change it through lovingly serving others. If we will work for anyone who needs our help, we will not go hungry, and we will be happier as well. I will not use physical force to change others (but at times I may use it to save a child from serious danger). I cannot be a judge, or do any work in a court, because the courts try to hit back at evil people by putting them in prison or killing them.

And one other thing that Christ has shown me that keeps me from being happy. It is pride in my country. If I start to think of a person as an enemy because that person lives under a different flag, I should stop this way of thinking as soon as I see it, and not argue that my country is better than another country. I cannot believe in borders between countries now, for true happiness must be for all people. I now see that love for one's country is an evil lie that leads to war. If I live as Christ has taught me to live, my life will have a meaning that death cannot destroy.

The understanding that I have received from Christ is a light that must burn free if it is to be a light at all. I must hold it out for others to see, and not hide it under a basket. Before, I was afraid that others would hurt me if I followed Christ. But now, when others fight against what I am doing and saying, it only makes me more confident that what I have found is the truth. Christ said that if we would follow him, we would know the truth and the truth would make us free; and that is how I feel – free in every part of me. I know the truth so that I can show it to others. But I can only show it by living it.

As I turn the other cheek I show evil people how they should live. And I can see that my new way of life is changing other people. They stop fighting me when I stop fighting them, and the more I serve others, the less they want to hurt me. Each time a person or a government comes to me with some kind of evil, I see it as an opening to show them the truth of Christ's teaching. Even being put

in prison or being killed would be an opening for me to show the truth. Handing on the truth that we have is the whole job of a Christian, and it is what gives meaning to our lives... and to our deaths.

False teachings become the paste that holds people who believe them together. Over time, the lie in the teaching and the number of people believing it can grow into a very big ball. When people try to break the ball apart through war and hate, they only add to the lie and make the ball bigger and stronger. The only thing that can free even one person from that big ball of evil is truth.

As we live truth ourselves, it works on the people in the ball, melting away the lies little by little. Truth in action is the one thing that can free people – one at a time – from the lie. This work of freeing people from the lie has been going on for more than eighteen hundred years now. From the time Christ gave us his laws, that work has been going on. And it will not end until it has finished destroying all the lies. (Matthew 5:18)

The old Church has died. But a Church of people joined, not by holy promises and buildings and leaders, but by truth in action, lives on. This Church has always lived and always will. This Church is not made of people who say of Christ, "Lord, Lord!" but then live lives of sin. (Matthew 7:21-23) This Church is made of people who hear Christ's words and do them. They have found true happiness in following Christ, and they want to teach those truths to others as well. If there are many people in this invisible Church, or if there are only a few, it will not change the truth about it: that nothing can stop it, and that one day all people in every country will be part of it.

So "Do not be afraid, little group, for your Father will be pleased to give you his kingdom." (Luke 12:32)

Leo Tolstoy Moscow 22 January, 1884