

# Learning the Truth

by T. Austin-Sparks

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*The School of Christ is where the Holy Spirit teaches us to know Christ as the truth and to conform to His image, requiring faith throughout life.*

**Scripture:** John 8:31-36, John 8:44, John 8:55, John 14:6, John 14:17, John 15:26, Romans 1:18, Romans 1:25, Ephesians 4:21, Ephesians 4:24

**Topics:** "Discipleship", "Truth"

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## Description

T. Austin-Sparks emphasizes the necessity of knowing the truth as embodied in Jesus Christ, who is the ultimate source of freedom and life. He explains that true discipleship involves abiding in Christ's word, which leads to genuine understanding and liberation from sin. Sparks warns against the falsehoods of the world and the deceptive nature of human conviction, urging believers to rely solely on Christ for their identity and salvation. He highlights the role of the Holy Spirit in guiding believers into all truth, ensuring that they are not misled by their own flawed perceptions. Ultimately, the sermon calls for a deep, abiding faith in Christ as the foundation for spiritual growth and freedom.

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## Transcript

"Jesus therefore said to those Jews that had believed him, If ye abide in my word, then are ye truly my disciples, and ye shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free. They answered unto him, We are Abraham's seed, and have never yet been in bondage to any man: how sayest thou, Ye shall be made free? Jesus answered them, Verily, verily, I say unto you, Every one that committeth sin is the bondservant of sin. And the bondservant abideth not in the house for ever: the son abideth for ever. If therefore the Son shall make you free, ye shall be free indeed" (John 8:31-36).

"Ye are of your father the devil, and the lusts of your father it is your will to do. He was a murderer from the beginning, and standeth not in the truth, because there is no truth in him. When he speaketh a lie, he speaketh of his own: for he is a liar, and the father thereof" (John 8: 44).

"Ye have not known him: but I know him; and if I should say, I know him not, I shall be like unto you, a liar: but I know him, and keep his word" (John 8: 55).

"Jesus saith unto him, I am the way, and the truth, and the life" (John 14:6).

"The Spirit of truth: whom the world cannot receive; for it beholdeth him not, neither knoweth him: ye know him; for he abideth with you, and shall be in you" (John 14:17).

"But when the Comforter is come, whom I will send unto you from the Father, even the Spirit of truth, which proceedeth from the Father, he shall bear witness of me" (John 15:26).

"For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who hold down the truth in unrighteousness" (Rom 1:18).

"For that they exchanged the truth of God for a lie" (Rom 1:25).

"If so be that ye heard him, and were taught in him, even as truth is in Jesus" (Eph 4:21).

"Put on the new man, which after God hath been created in righteousness and holiness of truth" (Eph 4:24).

"These things saith he that is holy, he that is true" (Rev 3:7).

"These things saith the Amen (=Verily), the faithful and true witness" (Rev 3:14).

In our previous meditation, we were speaking together about the School of Christ, and we were saying that every true child of God is brought into the School of Christ under the hand of the Holy Spirit, the Spirit of the anointing, and that there the first great work of the Holy Spirit is to present Christ to the heart as God's object for all the Holy Spirit's dealings with us. Thus Christ is first of all presented and attested by God as the object of His pleasure, and then the Holy Spirit makes known the Divine purpose in connection with that inward revelation of the Lord Jesus, namely, that we should be conformed to the image of God's Son. Then we were speaking about two or three basic lessons in the school, things which underlie our education. Firstly, the Holy Spirit takes pains to make all who are under this discipline (for that is the meaning of a disciple) to know in experience, in an inward way in their own hearts, the altogether 'other-ness' of Christ from themselves. Then He also works to bring us to the place where we realize how impossible the situation is apart from miracles of God, that of ourselves we can never be like Christ. The one upshot of it all is that this must be something outside ourselves which is God's own doing.

Well, this is all preliminary in the School of Christ, although it seems to me that this preliminary education goes on to the end of our days. At any rate, it seems to be spread over a great deal of our life, though there should be a point reached which represents a definite crisis in the matter, at which a foundation is laid wherein these three things are recognized and accepted, and we shall not get very far until it is so. The person who really does begin to move is the person who has had his final despair over himself, and has come to see quite clearly by the Holy Spirit's illumination that it is "no longer I, but Christ"--'Not what I am, O Lord, but what Thou art, that, that alone, can be my soul's true rest': Thy love, not mine; Thy peace, not mine; Thy rest, not mine; Thy everything, nothing of mine; Thyself! That is the essential foundation of spiritual growth, spiritual knowledge, spiritual education.

"I AM THE TRUTH"

Now, in this meditation, we come to look at the Lord Jesus more closely as God's object and standard for the Holy Spirit's work in us, this 'other-ness' which He represents, and we have read a number of passages, all of which, as you noted, bear upon truth. Surely those passages in the Gospels must have played a part in the disciples' education. In the first place there was the statement or declaration made to

the Jews--a tremendous thing to be said in the hearing of those disciples. There were Jews who made a profession of believing. The Lord Jesus raises the question of discipleship with them. He said to those Jews who had believed Him (it does not say they had believed on Him), "If ye abide in my word, then are ye truly my disciples; and ye shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free." They answered back at once with the counter claim, "We are Abraham's seed, and have never yet been in bondage to any man." He presses this matter of the truth, truth in relation to Himself. "If therefore the Son shall make you free, ye shall be free indeed." "Ye shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free." The question of whose seed they were arose, and associated with that the statement "if therefore the Son shall make you free, ye shall be free indeed". Do you follow that? Knowing the truth is knowing the Son. Freedom by the truth is by the knowledge of Him.

Then to the Jews--I presume of the more violent type-- He said these words of unparalleled strength: "Ye are of your father the devil, and the lusts of your father it is your will to do. He was a murderer from the beginning, and standeth not in the truth . . . he is a liar, and the father thereof . . . when he speaketh a lie, he speaketh of his own." Tremendously strong language, and all on this question of the truth, the truth as bound up with Himself.

Then, when you come to chapter 14, He is with His disciples alone; and Philip says to Him, "Lord, show us the Father, and it sufficeth us." His reply is, "Have I been so long time with you, and dost thou not know me, Philip? he that hath seen me hath seen the Father." Another question in the school: "Lord, we know not whither thou goest; how know we the way?" "I am the way, and the truth . . ." I am the truth. The truth is not some thing; the truth is a Person. Well, all this is in the School of Christ, bearing upon Christ as the Truth.

I do not know how strongly you feel about the matter, but our object surely is that we should come to feel very strongly about these things. How do you feel about the importance of having a true foundation? and after all, the supreme feature in a foundation is truth, that the thing should be well and truly laid. This foundation has to take a fairly heavy responsibility, no less a responsibility than our eternal well-being and destiny, nay, the very vindication of God Himself. Therefore it must be absolutely true and the truth, and it surely behoves us to make very sure of where we are; in other words, to have done with all our unreality, to finish for ever with anything that is not genuine and utterly true in our position. It is just this that we are going to press and analyze for a little while now. So great are the consequences that we cannot afford to have anything doubtful in our position.

It is like this. You and I are going to face God sometime. We are going to come face to face with God literally in eternity and then the question is going to arise, Has God at any point failed us? Shall we be able, on any detail, to say, Lord, You failed me, You were not true to Your word? Such a position is unthinkable, that ever any being should be able to lay a charge like that at God's door, to have any question as to God's truth, reality, faithfulness. The Holy Spirit has been sent as the Spirit of truth to guide us into all the truth, so that there shall be no shadow whatever between God and ourselves as to His absolute faithfulness, His truth to Himself, and to all His word. The Holy Spirit has come for that. If that is true, then the Holy Spirit will deal with all disciples in the School of Christ to undercut everything that is not true, that is not genuine, to make every such disciple to stand upon a foundation which can abide before God in the day of His absolute and utter vindication.

THE NEED FOR A TRUE FOUNDATION

But in order that this may be so, you and I, under the Holy Spirit's teaching, have to be dealt with very faithfully, and have to come to the place where we are perfectly adjustable before God, where there is all responsiveness to the Holy Spirit, and nothing in us that resists or refuses the Holy Spirit, but where we are perfectly open and ready for the biggest consequence of the Holy Spirit putting His finger upon anything in our lives needing to be dealt with and adjusted. He is here for that.

The alternative to such a work of the Holy Spirit being allowed to be done in us is that we shall find ourselves in a false position, and it is far, far too costly to find ourselves in a false position, even though it only be on certain points. This is a false world we are living in, a world that is carried on upon lies. The whole constitution of this world is a lie, and it is in the very nature of man, though multitudes do not know it, but think they are true. They are trying to build the world on a false foundation. The Kingdom of God is altogether other. It is built upon Jesus Christ, the Truth.

Well now, my emphasis at the moment is upon the need for a true position where we are concerned. Oh for men and women in whom the truth of Christ has been wrought and who will go on with God, no matter what it costs. "Who shall ascend into the hill of the Lord?" "He that speaketh truth in his heart . . . he that sweareth to his own hurt"--that is, who takes the position of verity though it cost him dear. We are influenced by all sorts of false considerations, influenced by what others will think and say, especially those in our religious circles, of our tradition; and they are false considerations and false influences. They bind and keep many men and women from going right on with God in the way of light. The issue is a false position at last.

Will you accept it when I say that there is no truth in us? This is one of the things we are going to find out under the Holy Spirit's dealings with us, that there is no truth in our minds naturally. We may be the most strongly convinced, and we may be prepared to lay down our lives for our convictions and to put everything into the crucible for what we believe with all our beings is right, is true, and in that very thing we may be utterly wrong. Such was the case with Saul of Tarsus--"I verily thought with myself, that I ought to do many things contrary to the name of Jesus of Nazareth" (Acts 26:9). Again, "The hour cometh, that whosoever killeth you shall think he offereth God service" (John 16:2); so zealous for their conviction--That is God's will! God's will! --convinced it is God's will; some to give their own lives on the strength of their conviction, and some to take other people's lives on the strength of their conviction. How far we will go on the strength of conviction and be wrong, utterly wrong, as utterly wrong as we are in earnest. A false conviction; and there is not one human mind incapable of getting into that state. The seeds of that are in human nature, in every one of us; in the mind as to conviction, the heart as to desire. We may think our desire is a perfectly pure and right one, and it may be utterly false; and so with our will, just the same. In us by nature there is no truth.

## LIVING BY THE TRUTH

I am going to get right down inside this thing. What is a Christian? A Christian is one who was not a very good tempered person, but is now good-tempered; not a very genial person, but is now very much more genial; a person who was not very zealous, but is now very zealous; a person who is different in disposition from what he was formerly. Is that a true definition of a Christian? Give me a homeopathic cabinet. Bring along to me a very irritable person. Give him a dose of, what shall I say?--nux vomica; in two or three hours he will be a very good-tempered man. Is he a Christian? Give him something else; turn him back to what he was before. Was he saved, and has he backslidden? Drugs can change a man's temper in a few hours. From being a lethargic, careless, indifferent person, you become alive, energetic,

active; from being miserable, discontented, morose, melancholic, disagreeable, irritable, you become amiable, pleasant, relieved from all that nervous strain which was making you like that, and all that disordered digestion which was making you such a boor to live with. For a little while, you have made a Christian with drugs! You see the point.

Where is the truth? If the truth about my salvation lies in the realm of my feelings, my digestive system, my nervous organism, I am going to be a poor Christian; because that will be changing from day to day according to the weather or to something else. Oh no! Truth; where is the truth? "Not what I am, but what Thou art." That is where the truth is, "Ye shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free." Free from what? Bondage! What bondage? Satan clapping his chains of condemnation upon you because today you are not feeling up to scratch. You are feeling bad in your constitution, and you are feeling depressed, you are feeling death all around, you are feeling irritable, and Satan comes along and says, You are not a Christian! a fine Christian you are! and you go down under it. Is that the truth? It is a lie! The only answer for deliverance and

emancipation is, 'It is not what I am, it is what He is; Christ abides the same.' He is not as I am, varying here in this human life from hour to hour and day to day: He is other.

Forgive me being so strong in my emphasis, but I do feel this is the only way in which we are going to be saved really. Jesus, you see, says, "I am the truth." What is the truth? It is that which stands up to all arguments of Satan who is "a liar and the father of it". It is that which delivers us from this false self which we are; and we are a false self. We are a bundle of contradictions. We can never be sure that we are going to be of the same mind for long together, that our convictions are not going to do a right-about-turn. Oh no, it is not ourselves at all; it is Christ. You see what a false position we could be in if we were on that other level of nature. What a game the Devil could play with us.

I am using these illustrations to try to get to the heart of this. What is the truth? What is true? It is not found in us. We are not true in any part of our being. Christ alone is truth, and you and I have to learn how to live on Christ, and until we have done that the Holy Spirit cannot do the other thing. Perhaps you are saying, Is not a true Christian less ill-tempered? Is there no difference at all? Is a Christian right to be irritable and all that? I am not saying that, I am not letting you off on that; I am saying that in the school, until you and I have learned to hold on to Christ by faith, the Holy Spirit has not the ground upon which to work to bring us into conformity to Christ. If we are going to live upon the false basis of ourselves, the Holy Spirit leaves us alone. When we come to live by faith on Christ, then the Holy Spirit can come in and make Christ good in us, and teach us victory and teach us mastery, and teach us by deliverance how not to become a prey to good or bad feelings in ourselves, but to live on another level altogether. I mean this, that you cut the ground from under a great deal when you really get on to the ground of Christ.

Take irritability, for example. Some of you, of course, may never suffer in that way at all, but others do know what that battle is. Well, let us take such a case. Today we feel like that, all nervy, strained and short. What are we going to do about it? Are we going to make that our Christian life or the negation of our Christian life? If we come on to that ground, then Satan is always swift to make the most of it and bring us into terrible bondage and really to kill all spiritual life. But if you will take the position, 'Yes, that is how I feel today, that is my infirmity today, but Lord Jesus, You are other than I am, and I just rest on You, hold on to You, make You my life', you see what you have done. You have cut the ground from under the feet of the Devil altogether, and you will find that there is peace along that line, and rest, and although you may still be feeling bad in the outer part of you, in the inner part you are at rest. The enemy is shut out from the

inner part of you, he has no place there. The peace of God stands sentinel over heart and mind through Christ Jesus; the citadel is safe. What Satan is always trying to do is to get into the spirit through the body or soul and to capture the stronghold, the spirit, and bring it into bondage. But we can remain free inwardly when we are feeling very bad outwardly. That is freedom by the truth. That is the truth! Not a thing, not an affirmation, but a Person. It is what Christ is, and He is altogether different from what we are. Well, the Holy Spirit would teach us, as the Spirit of Truth, that it is abiding in Christ that means everything. The alternatives are to get into ourselves, or into other people, or into the world, in a mental way. Abide in Christ and there is rest, there is peace, there is deliverance.

But do not forget that, if we mean business with the Holy Spirit, He is not going to allow us to be deceived. I mean that the Holy Spirit is going to expose our true selves. He is going to uncover us and show us thoroughly there is nothing sound in us, nothing to be relied upon in us, in order that He may make it equally clear that it is only in Christ, God's Son, that there is security, and safety, and life.

I have a sense of failure in trying to convey to you what I have in my heart. So many people think that the spiritual life, the life of a child of God, is a matter of things. It is a thing called 'the message of the Cross'. It is a thing called 'sanctification'. It is a thing called 'deliverance'. It is thing called 'death with Christ'--some thing. They are trying to get hold of it, and there is no deliverance that way at all. It does not work. 'Its' do not work! It is all a matter of the Person, the Lord Jesus, and the Holy Spirit will never save us by an 'it'. He will always bring us to the Person, and make Christ the basis of our life, of our deliverance, of our everything. So the word is "Christ Jesus . . . is made unto us wisdom from God, both righteousness and sanctification, and redemption" (1 Cor 1:30).

#### THE ABIDING NEED OF FAITH

Well, I must close. The work of the Holy Spirit is to conform us to Christ, to cause us to take the form of Christ, to form Christ in us; but Christ will always remain other than we are, so that there will never cease to be a call for faith. Do you expect to reach a point in this earthly pilgrimage when faith can be dispensed with? It is a false hope. Faith will be required as much as ever in your last moments in this life, if not more than at any other time. Faith is an abiding thing for the duration of this life. If that is true, that in itself dismisses any hope whatever of our having the thing in ourselves. That was the first sin of Adam, that choice of his, not to have everything in God, but to have it in himself in independence, to get rid of the idea of faith. So he sinned by unbelief, and all the sin that has come in since is traceable to that one thing--unbelief. Faith is the great factor of redemption, of salvation, of sanctification, of glorification; everything is through faith. It undoes the work of the Devil. And faith simply means that we are put into the position where we have not got it in ourselves, we only have it in Another, and can only know it and enjoy it by faith in that Other. Thus Galatians 2:20 always comes with renewed force--"I have been crucified with Christ; and it is no longer I that live, but Christ liveth in me: and that life which I now live in the flesh I live in faith. the faith, which is in the Son of God, who loved me, and gave himself up for me" (A.R.V.). I live the life in the flesh by faith in the Son of God.

The Lord interpret His word to us.

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