

**Discourses/Articles**  
by  
**Swami Krishnananda**  
The Divine Life Society  
Sivananda Ashram, Rishikesh, India

**CHARACTERISTICS OF THE TEACHINGS OF JESUS**

(From the "World Parliament of Religions Commemoration Volume" published in 1956.)

**Introductory**

Godmen appear on earth when the forces governing life take a course counter to the law of the integrity of the universe and the supremacy of the Divine Spirit. The power of the unity of life exerted by these noble souls influences the course of the lives of those around them. This influence may be felt consciously or received unconsciously, but its immanent presence and active operation is one of the grandest phenomena of existence, known to those who are alive to the glow of the spiritual light. Jesus Christ's incarnation is one such lofty instance of the descent of Divine Power for the overcoming of error on earth and the establishment of the law of Truth. The people to reform whom Jesus appeared on earth were ridden over by false beliefs, empty rituals and hypocritical practices in the name of religion. He came to make known the doctrine which is His that sent him, the law of God who rules the universe from inside and outside.

The doctrine of Christ is the system of the Supreme Consciousness, which is the highest Reality, and it implies the relative laws of what are termed here forms of righteousness. That is said to be righteous which tends to the conscious recognition of the Eternal Divine Presence. Hence righteousness consists more in spirit than in letter, in inward feeling than outward form, in psychological and spiritual attitude rather than ritualistic and traditional routine. And Christ came to bear witness to this righteousness underlying the law of the Truth. In essence, this righteousness consists in renunciation of appearances and affirmation of Reality. And all the stages that lead to this righteousness, also are righteousness. The whole of Christ's teachings abounds in this twofold revelation of the meaning of life. In the terminology of the system of Indian Yoga, these constitute Vairagya and Abhyasa. In fact, all saints have said only this, that phenomena have to be renounced, that the Imperishable Spirit should be contemplated upon and realized. Christ gives expression to these truths in various ways in his life and in his precepts.

**Suffering and Tolerance**

"What is a man profited, if he shall gain the whole world, and lose his own soul?" And yet this is what most men of the world do not care to think. Search for outward things in which man seems to be continuously engaged is really the denial of the independence and dignity of the Self, and the assertion of the unreal, tantalizing presentations to the senses. It is the teaching of Christ that man shall not live by bread alone, but by the Spirit within. But adherence to the righteousness of the Spirit means self-abnegation, an abandonment of the external temptations. Not only this; it implies

the possession of a power of enduring all persecutions from the opposing forces of the lower nature.

“Blessed are they which are persecuted for righteousness’ sake, for theirs is the Kingdom of Heaven.” “Blessed are ye when men shall revile you and persecute you, and shall say all manner of evil against you falsely, for my sake.” He that gains blessedness in the realm of Spirit, casts aside the corresponding negativity in the region of darkness. Suffering in this world is the price to be paid for the supreme fulfilment in the Consciousness of the Divine. Suffering cannot be avoided for man as long as he is an element of the relative universe. And this suffering should be accompanied by great tolerance; even positive evil should not evoke out propensity to retaliation. “Resist not evil” is a shining gem adorning the garland of the teachings of Christ. Perhaps it sums up the major teaching concerning spiritual life, that evil is the product of erroneous perception and that correct vision of things affirms the absoluteness of the pure Spirit.

All resistance is an affirmation of ego, however much it may be justified by false logic and prejudiced understanding. It may be that some forms of egoism are considered harmless in that they are supposed to tend to or even express righteousness, and sometimes indispensable. Yes, it is so as an apology for true righteousness; but it does not require much thinking to discover that it is a sanction to the weaker side of human nature and that the greatest heroism of spirit is manifest in unlimited tolerance. No retaliation can equal in its effects the majesty of endurance par excellence. ‘Love your enemies, bless them that curse you, do good to them that hate you, and pray for them which despitefully use you and persecute you;’ “for if ye love them which love you what reward have ye? Be ye therefore perfect, even as your Father which art in heaven is perfect.”

### **Love, Service and Dependence on God**

It is not only tolerance and non-retaliation that are required of us but positive love towards all. This love is expressed both in mind and body. A feeling of love for all, based on the omnipresence and supremacy of God, characterizes the psychic being. And in external life, love takes the form of service. Service should be done not to win the gratitude of the person served or to enjoy the goodwill and praise of the public but to purify the inner nature and fulfil the law of God. Hence Christ says: “Take heed that ye do not your alms before men, to be seen of them—when thou doest alms, let not thy left hand know what thy right hand doeth—and thy Father which seeth in secret, Himself shall reward thee openly.”

We do charity not to glory on earth, but to glory in God. If all the earth is to consider of a man great, but in the eyes of God he is little, he has gained nothing. But if, on the other hand, he is great to God and nothing to man, he has truly gained the all; for the opinion of those on earth counts not before the Sovereign of the Universe. And further, a desire to do service and charity in public implies a non-belief in the absolute reality of God and a faith in the phenomenal universe. It is this false faith in things that perish that constitutes real sin. Christ warns man not to trust the things of sense and not to bestow thought even on one’s creature comforts. The world is sustained by the spirit of God, and not by the egoistic efforts of man. Where the so-called effort of man seems to bring success, it is to be understood that it is on account of its flowing with the current

of the Law of God. And where it fails it is in variance with the Law. Individual effort is the name given to the function of the Universal Force when it passes through the egoism of the individual.

A wise person should put his trust in God and be a silent participator in the fulfilment of the Law. No 'individual effort' has a value independent of the working of the Divine Law. "Therefore I say unto you, Take no thought for your life. Is not life more than meat, and the body than raiment? Which of you by taking thought can add one cubit unto his stature? Your heavenly Father knoweth that ye have need of all these things. But seek ye first the Kingdom of God, and His righteousness; and all these things shall be added unto you. Take therefore no thought for the morrow; for the morrow shall take thought for the things of itself. Sufficient unto the day is the evil thereof." "Provide neither gold, nor silver, nor dress in your purses, nor scrip for your journey, neither two coats, neither shoes, nor yet staves, for the workman is worthy of his meat."

### **Seek the Eternal**

The power, the inner strength that is required to overcome the temptation to yield the urge to seek pleasure in external things is to be acquired from the Eternal Foot of God. One has only to seek it sincerely and one shall have it. Intense aspiration for the realization of the Eternal Spirit is like a fire which shall burn up all extraneous thoughts and lift the aspirant above the mire of sense-experience. The fault lies in man who does not sincerely seek it, for he seems to be satisfied with the constricted vision and the painful life to which he is tethered by ignorance of higher truths and values. A surrender of personality engendered by deep devotion to the Eternal shall pull out the bolt of the ego closing the door of the heart, and let in the flood of the blissful consciousness of perfection and power from above. But, for this, the condition is seeking-aspiring. "Ask, and it shall be given to you; knock, and it shall be opened unto you."

### **The Strait Gate**

Christ calls the path of God 'the strait gate'. The way to the knowledge and experience of God is distressful, abounding in difficulties. One may say that it is even painful, distasteful, and to some, fearful. Many turn away from it, after making the preliminary attempts to tread it. Fear, disgust, doubt and despair debar the aspirants from entering 'the strait gate'. Indian teachers call this 'the pathless path', 'the bird's path', 'the path of the fish', etc., meaning that the way to God is mysterious, hard to understand and untraceable like the path of birds in the air, or of aquatic animals in water. They call it 'the pathless path', because it is not a path but a state of consciousness; it is not accurate in space, which is the accepted meaning of path, but an internal transfiguration of one's entire being.

"Enter ye in at the strait gate; for, wide is the gate and broad is the way that leadeth to destruction, and many there be which go in thereat. Because strait is the gate and narrow is the way which leadeth unto life, and few there be that find it." It is easy to flow with the current of a river but hard to swim against it. To carry out the commands of the lower instincts is pleasant, for man generally lives in agreement with them; but to conquer them and listen to the silent voice of the Spirit is a task demanding extraordinary courage and understanding. It is quite likely that the aspirant may

experience at a certain stage of his spiritual practices a natural desertion of himself by other persons and things. This is not experienced at all times, but only at a particular situation in which the seeker finds himself while searching for Reality. While the earth is cut from under the feet, and the heavens have not yet lent enough support, the seeker finds himself in a peculiar predicament where consciousness of the pain of one's separation from objects of individual satisfaction supervenes.

At this stage the Light of God appears to be eclipsed and the natural forces are at wax with the seeker. There is an apparent suppression of Truth by the undivine forces before it finally overthrows them and reveals itself in glorious triumph. Christ, in his life of suffering symbolizes this position of the aspiring soul, and says: "The foxes have holes, and the birds of the air have nests; but the son of man hath not where to lay his head." When God's grace descends on man, he is first stripped of all his possessions and cut off from the centres of his enjoyment, Christ demonstrates this to mankind in his life of 'symbolic suffering'.

### **Self-Surrender**

The grandest peak of his teaching is the gospel of self-surrender. "If any man will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow me; for whosoever will save his life shall lose it; and whosoever will lose his life for my sake shall find it." The process of spiritual attainment is one of 'dying to live'. The complete negation of personality is the same as the attainment of the Impersonal Absolute. The cross of relative suffering and pain everyone has to take up, for the sake of the supreme peace that passeth all understanding. Love of life is the strong iron chain binding the soul to bodily life and misery, by which it loses the real life which is of the Higher Spirit. But he who aspires for the Supreme Blessedness of the Spirit shall have to cast aside the life of the flesh here on earth and surrender himself to the Supreme. Surrender is the fruit of faith. Faith can work wonders. "If ye have faith as a grain of mustard seed, ye shall say unto this mountain 'Remove hence to yonder place', and it shall remove, and nothing shall be impossible unto you."

Much discussion has been carried on in regard to the relation between self-effort and predetermination. But Christ declares emphatically that nothing can happen without the will of God. And so even the so-called self-effort should form part of the Will of God. "Are not two sparrows sold for a farthing? And one of them shall not fall on the ground without your Father. But the very hairs of your head are all numbered. Fear ye not, therefore ye are of more value than many sparrows." Man is bound not because he puts forth effort in some direction, but because he thinks and also feels that it is his separated individuality that exercises the effort, not knowing that he cannot lift a straw without the Divine Will. The moment effort is realized to be a single phase of the Spirit, effort becomes not a force directed to any individualized end but a cosmic movement, a process of the universe within itself in relation to the whole of itself, and not merely to one of its parts. In the consciousness of this universal nature of all actions and thoughts does consist the liberation of the individual.

Christ gives the assurance that those who go to him for help shall find it abundantly. Only, they have to bear his yoke. "Come unto me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you, and learn of me; for I am meek and

lowly in heart; and ye shall find rest unto your souls. For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light." How humble and simple is the supreme master of all the world! Yes, his burden is light, but men find it heavier than an iron hill. His yoke is easy, but difficult as baling the ocean with a blade of grass. But it is certain that those who have enough guts can attain through him the rest which he promises to give them. Sri Krishna has already given the same promise: "Abandoning all other duties, come to Me alone as refuge. I shall liberate thee from all sins; grieve not."

The assurance is highly consoling and solacing; but the yoke is hard to take up. This is the tragedy of the life of man, and also his glory. Wherever he turns, man finds himself gyrating in a vicious circle. This is because he has not learnt to think properly. And once he knows how to think, he is in the empyrean of the felicity of freedom. When he learns to think, he becomes humble and regains the purity and simplicity of the child. "Transcending learning, one should become a child," says the Upanishad. And Christ says, "Except ye be converted, and become as little children, ye shall not enter into the Kingdom of Heaven." These are the saintly men, who in his words, are those which have made themselves "eunuchs for the Kingdom of Heaven's sake". They are neither men nor women, not really humans, who have "forsaken" everything for his sake, to receive a "hundredfold," and "inherit everlasting life".

### **Relation to God and Man**

"Thou shalt love the Lord, thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind." A natural corollary of this commandment is that "Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself." Because thy neighbour is really thyself in the One God. Here is summed up the spiritual and the social ethics for man. God is one and since all are in the Being of God, each bears to the other a relation of brotherhood and an intimate kinship of the nature of identity. In the world of social relations this identity is relative and secondary; in God it is absolute and primary. The whole life of man is to be dedicated for the purpose of recognizing and experiencing this identity of Self. No doubt it is hard even to attempt it. "The spirit indeed is willing but the flesh is weak." But "I am with you always, even unto the end of the world." And so there is no fear. The temptations shall be overcome by the power of the eternal presence of Christ with us. He and his Father are one. And we are his. He is our way and the light and the life and the love, and by abnegating ourselves, we shall offer ourselves to him. When he is pleased, God is pleased, and when God is pleased we get installed in the Kingdom of Heaven which is within us. This is immortal life.

### **Conclusion**

The teachings of Jesus offer solutions to all problems of life. Metaphysical, ethical, social and individual relations, commonweal, national good, and all the values of life, are finally centred in the nature of God-consciousness. Everything should be judged from the stand-point of this consciousness; only then will the true worth of a thing be known. But other forms of judgment arise from mistake and lead to mistake. "Judge not, that ye be not judged." For, in the manner in which we behave towards things shall they, and shall God's Law behave with us. "All things whatsoever ye would that men should do to you, do you even so to them; for this is the law of the prophets." The incarnation of Christ have its mission in revealing to the world the greatness of God, the glory of Truth,

the worthlessness of things mundane which are estranged from God who is Truth, the necessity of surrender, and the importance of renunciation and fortitude.

Those who have these virtues are truly Christians, sons of God, the beloved of the Son of Man. They shall enter the Kingdom of Heaven who are united with Him in spirit, and “Not everyone that saith unto me, Lord, Lord, shall enter into the Kingdom of Heaven; but he that doeth the will of my Father which is in heaven.” He does the Will of the One Father who loves all as his own self, who serves all as variegated manifestations of the One, who hates none, wants nothing, gives whatever he has, and loses himself in contemplation of the Eternal—for this he knows is his supreme duty here. All is his who has God with him, who is in God, and no thought need enter his mind. His is the blessed life, the Divine Life, and he has come to raise humanity to this state of Divinity, through his thoughts, words and actions.