



Simplicity

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1. Simplicity, what does it mean?

Simplicity in today's world is a rare commodity. Yet few negative words are ever spoken about simplicity or simplicity of life. In fact many people long for simplicity in its peaceful direction and as a way of life. What is this commodity that is so hard to integrate into one's life?

Webster's Dictionary gives several meanings to the word simplicity. They are as follows: A. state of being simple; B. freedom from complexity, intricacy, or division; C. Absence of luxury, plainness; D. freedom from deceit or guile; sincerity, E. lack of mental acuteness or shrewdness.

The word simplicity is used in the Bible 5 times. It is generally used in the Bible in connection with the lack of evil, or lack of the knowledge of evil. In 4 of the Scriptures, simplicity is used with a lack of evil. In Proverbs 1:22, simplicity is used in a negative way, it is loved of those who are simple and refuse wisdom. In the New Testament it is used only with the pureness of Christ (Romans 12:8; 2 Corinthians 1:12; 11:3). True simplicity is seen in completeness in the birth, life, ministry, and death of Jesus. In His appearing on the earth, a perfect understanding of a life of simplicity is seen. Jesus lived in simplicity to His Father's will, simplicity in instructing His disciples, simplicity in healing the sick, in raising the dead, in

rebuking the Jews in their religion, in receiving the children, at His trial before Pilate, and in dying (Father receive my spirit).

The meaning of the word simplicity as it applies to a Christian will be examined in the following chapters.

2. Complicating the Simple Takes Great Effort

In the churches today there is much confusion of direction. This confusion does not involve who Jesus is or His deity, or who the Holy Spirit is, or who the Father is. In many churches, the confusion stems from allowing the carnality of man's nature to have place in teaching and practice. This confusion also comes from trying to fit the Church into the world's culture and spiritual direction. These diversions from the truth in Christ, give opening to the devil to complicate the simplicity of divine revelation for the believer in a practical walk of faith.

The divine revelation, given by God to the Church for living in the truths of Christ, is expressly given in the epistles. However, this does not exclude truths given in the other New Testament books. For example, when Jesus walked among His brethren the Jews, all the Jewish religious sects had disciplined order. However, the order they had was not from God, they had complicated the instructions that God gave through the Law of Moses, to the point that when

Jesus, the very image of God, stood before them they could not recognize Him as from God and their Messiah. The Jewish sects had added or taken away from the Law of Moses, complicating the Word of God so that they were no longer practicing the Word of God. Jesus said this to the Pharisees: “All too well you reject the commandment of God, that you may keep your tradition” (Mark 7:9). This spiritual condition is happening in the churches today.

When the Word of God in an assembly of believers is thought of as small or unnecessary, or in some cases suffers outright rejection then something else will be put in its place. The something else is manifested in the churches as the religion of man, the culture of the world, demonic deceptions, a sense of fairness (instead of divine truth), diversity, equality of sexes in headship, truth is relevant, Scripture or part of it is culture for the days in which it was written, legalism, antagonism toward the Scriptures, etc. All of these corruptions complicate the simplicity of truth made known by Jesus Christ and the apostles, and given to the people of God, the Church. Truths rejected in the churches, take away what the Holy Spirit has revealed. If the truth of simplicity were taught, many believers in churches would follow the Lord Jesus according to His Word.

3. The Devil's Interpretation of Simplicity

“Lest Satan should take advantage of us; for we are not ignorant of his devices” (2 Corinthians 2:11).

Scripture calls to our attention that the devil has ways, purposes, and devices to deceive the unaware.

Jesus said: “I will no longer talk much with you, for the ruler of this world is coming, and he has nothing in Me” (John 14:30). Satan could not deceive Jesus for a very simple reason. It is this: Jesus only had an ear for His Father's voice. It can also be true for the Christian who will allow only the Holy Spirit to direct the path in his walk. Herein lies the open secret that keeps a Christian from being deceived. The Holy Spirit is the Christian's light of life (John 1:4); the Scriptures are the lamp of the Christian's pathway (Psalms 119:105).

The devil takes the truths of God and adds on to them or takes away from them. This distorts and complicates the simplicity of God's word, and deceives those who think they are following the Word of God. For example, Jesus spoke this to the Pharisees, “And in vain they worship Me, teaching as doctrines the commandments of men. For laying aside the commandment of God, you hold the tradition of men – the washing of pitchers and cups, and many other such things you do” (Mark 7:7-8). A Jew, living

in the days of Jesus, attempting to follow the Word of God, would have had to discern the many complications and derailments of God's word that undermined the purposes of God. This deviating is the devil's work and purpose for the people of God, to misdirect them.

It is equally true in many churches today. The devil has complicated many simple truths taught in Scripture. Let us examine a few of these truths and see the leaven that has come into the churches.

Homosexuality: Today in some churches, homosexuality is increasingly being accepted as an acceptable practice (not sin). The message to back up the acceptance and practice of homosexuality is; we are all God's children, it is a genetic D.N.A. creation of nature, and a protected legal and constitutional right. Since many churches are tied in with the world and its culture, allowance is made for those practicing homosexuality in men and women to be put into headship as clergy, in hierarchy, and in power of authority in churches claiming to be Christian. The pure Word of God teaches us this; "Do you not know that the unrighteous will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived. Neither fornicators, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor homosexuals, nor sodomites, nor thieves, nor covetous, nor drunkards,

nor revilers, nor extortioners will inherit the kingdom of God. And such were some of you. But you were washed, but you were sanctified, but you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus and by the Spirit of our God” (1 Corinthians 6:9-11).

Nicolaitanism: dividing the Church into the clergy and the laity. This separates the people of God into 2 spiritual classes, effectively complicating and confusing the priesthood of all believers. It also relegates the ‘priesthood’ of believers into a place in the churches which are of no effect and of no value. This effectively confuses and puts aside the God given headship of men in the churches and in their homes. Equality in the churches is then practiced according to the world’s culture.

Jesus taught his disciples this truth: “But you, do not be called ‘Rabbi’; for One is your Teacher, the Christ, and you are all brethren. Do not call anyone on earth your father; for One is your Father, He who is in heaven. And do not be called teacher; for One is your Teacher, the Christ. But he who is greatest among you shall be your servant” (Matthew 23:8-11).

Headship of women in the Church: “Let a woman learn in quietness in all submission; but I do not suffer a woman to teach nor to exercise authority over a man, but to be in quietness” (1 Timothy 2:11-12 JND.).

Feminism in the churches today is accepted on the principle of fairness and equality (diversity). The devil has had great latitude in the churches to bring in the worlds culture and corrupt the Word of God.

One major denomination alone is reported to have over 7000 women in the clergy. More and more women are put into positions of spiritual authority over men in the churches. Just as Adam stood by while the serpent enticed the woman to eat, then ate with her (Genesis 3:6), so it is today in churches, as men refuse their God given positions and confer their position of headship over to the woman. Churches that are circumventing the Word of God, and then following the world’s culture, say they are progressive and have more understanding than the Word of God. “Now the serpent was more cunning than any beast of the field which the Lord God had made. And he said to the woman, has God indeed said, ‘you shall not eat of every tree of the garden?’” (Genesis 3:1).

This deception of the evil one has been successful in complicating the simplicity of God's word as the Holy Spirit warns, "But I fear lest somehow, as the serpent deceived Eve by his craftiness, so your minds may be corrupted from the simplicity that is in Christ" (2 Corinthians 11:3).

Jesus taught with authority (Matthew 7:29). The people were astonished at His authority because He did not teach as the scribes, the religious authorities of His day (Matthew 7:28-29). Jesus quoted Scripture for His authority; Jesus said He only followed His Father's will (John 8:29) for His authority. The religious culture of the scribes and Pharisees of His day was accepted by the people as from God. Jesus stated that their doctrines were not from God (Mark 7:6-7). This is also the case in this day. Men in many churches have derived teachings and doctrines by excluding or going beyond what is written (Matthew 4:4; 1 Corinthians 4:6). The Word of God being changed to present day culture has corrupted the Church of God; "an enemy has done this" (Matthew 13:28). Jesus asked the question; "When the Son of man comes, shall He indeed find faith on the earth" (Luke 18:8 JND).

4. Is Simplicity to Believe God in the Heart of man?

“They have all turned aside, they have together become corrupt; there is none who does good, no, not one” (Psalms 14:3).

“Assuredly, I say to you unless you are converted and become as little children, you will by no means enter the kingdom of heaven” (Matthew 18:3).

Children are quick to believe all that they are told. As children age, the reality of a corrupt world sets in and at some point they no longer believe everything they are told. For corruption is within themselves and within others. For a person to believe everything everyone tells them and act upon it will lead to their hurt and destruction. The wise man learns to have a distrust of man. As the Spirit of God teaches; “Thus says the Lord: cursed is the man who trusts in man and makes flesh his strength, whose heart departs from the Lord” (Jeremiah 17:5). Again it is written: “Jesus did not commit Himself to them, because He knew all men and had no need that anyone should testify of man, for He knew what was in man” (John 2:24-25). As these Scriptures testify, simplicity to believe God is not in the heart of man. However, Jesus said unless a person becomes converted into the simplicity of a child he would

not enter into the kingdom of heaven. This simplicity is nothing more than believing with an open heart what Scripture instructs. Believing the Father in all that He has shown us, without reservation, will put us into the state of simplicity in His kingdom. Believing faith will always follow the leading of the Holy Spirit through the truth in Scripture.

This is the mind and heart of God for everyone who claims the name of Jesus; to live according to the mind of Christ (1 Corinthians 2:16), and thereby become conformed to the image of Christ (Romans 8:28-29).

5. Success in Pursuing Failure

“O foolish Galatians who has bewitched you that you should not obey the truth, before whose eyes Jesus Christ was clearly portrayed among you as crucified” (Galatians 3:1).

The assemblies of Galatia had received the message of Christ crucified, then others (Judaizers), came among them began to add to the message of Christ. The believers of Galatia were told they needed to do something more than have believing faith to please God. It is in the heart of man to do something for God, rather than to believe what God has completed in Christ. Because of this natural desire in men to please God by what a person does, the Judaizing message in Galatia caught on and grew.

The difference between faith in the word and works of God, and the religious desires and works of man, correspond to the difference between God's Spirit and man's flesh. The result is having faith in Christ alone or having faith in the works of man.

In the Galatians' assemblies the flesh/works teaching was readily received. These assemblies, as numbers go, became a great success. Paul could later say of these assemblies to Timothy, "This you know that all those in Asia have turned away from me..." (2 Timothy 1:15). Paul, to whom God had given the revelation of Christ, found himself alone in his time of greatest need.

Attempting to reach or find favor with God by what a man can do, or *do for God*, is common to man's religious nature and human ideas. Cain is the first man but not the last man to pursue this religious course (Genesis 4:3-5).

The Galatians had moved away from the message that favor with God is found *only by grace through faith* in what God has said (prophecies) concerning Christ and the work He accomplished (Ephesians 2:8-9). In the Galatians case, they were told that circumcision would bring them into a more sanctified position with God. This was man attempting to put away the flesh by his own works, thereby thinking he would find more favor with God.

In religious bodies today there is abundant success in bringing in numbers of people. However, when the doctrines, teachings of psychology and practices of these churches are examined, the message of faith to the truth revealed in Christ, is either confused or nonexistent. Great numbers of people flock to these churches. The same is also true of the cults, who base all on what man does for God. Success in man's or Satan's religious purposes are in abundance today. There is great success in religious bodies today, but the truth in Christ is not in evidence. "Beware lest anyone cheat you through philosophy and empty deceit, according to the tradition of men, according to the basic principles of the world, and not according to Christ" (Colossians 2:8).

6. Simplicity in Christ, how can I have it?

Someone once stated that the simpler the truths of God are, the harder they are to enter into. Another way this could be stated is; "the battle to walk and live in simplicity." To receive and be in the place of simplicity which God has provided for the believer, one thing is necessary. It is to believe what God has said, without the add-ons of man or religious organizations.

Today the Scriptures are available in translations that are easily understood. Commentaries such as, William McDonald's "Believers Commentary" are put together so that anyone with a desire for Truth (Christ) may apprehend what Scripture teaches.

What is necessary to enter into a life of simplicity in Christ?

A. Believe God in what He has revealed to us in Scripture.

B. Turn the heart fully unto Jesus and away from the world, the flesh and the devil. To turn away from religious flesh (religion without the truth of Christ) is mandatory to enter into a life of simplicity.

C. Receive the truths of Christ as a child receives truth and instruction from his earthly father. Jesus said, "Assuredly, I say to you, unless you are converted and become as little children, you will by no means enter the kingdom of heaven."

D. Begin to put into practice the truths of Christ revealed in Scripture, knowing that every word of Scripture is God breathed (2 Timothy 3:16).

What about walking in simplicity in Christ as part of a Christian fellowship? A believer, attempting to walk in faith to the truth in Christ and attempting to be *one* with those in a church that does not receive all Scripture as from the

Spirit of God, will have a lack of spiritual rest. He also will be troubled with being double minded and by worldliness as the final result of his attempt. A believer must understand that he is following a person, Jesus Christ, not a church or religious group. For the Spirit of God to reign in the believer's life, the Spirit of God must be followed and all other voices must be secondary.

This does not mean perfection of life in the believer's walk. It simply means that following Christ in truth is not without weakness and falling down at times as Christian growth takes place. Yet always following the truth in Christ will bring the believer into a life of simplicity.

7. Christ, the reward of Pursuing Simplicity

“Knowing that from the Lord you will receive the reward of the inheritance; for you serve the Lord Christ” (Colossians 3:24).

The asset that all men lack is what Jesus Christ possessed fully and completely. That asset was the complete favor of God (Matthew 3:17; 17:5). Unlike the first Adam, Jesus the second Adam was fully and completely submitted to His Father. Jesus said: “...for I always do those things that please Him” (John 8:29).

Jesus' life was a life of complete simplicity. If a Christian is to live in simplistic oneness with the Father, as Jesus did, his life will be simplistic as well. The life of Jesus is the model and example for the Christian to follow.

Living in simplicity in the kingdom of God is the life to which a Christian has been called. For example, Jesus in His walk on this earth, did not travel over 240 miles from where He was born, did not own a dwelling place (Matthew 8:20), did not ask for money for making the gospel of the kingdom known (Isaiah 55:1), did not become a part of a religious hierarchy (John 3:32), did not go to a Bible school (Matthew 7:28-29; John 7:15), and was not ordained of men so His testimony and teaching were not received (John 3:31-33). The religious leaders did not accept Him or speak well of Him (Luke 23:13-25; John 7:46-48). He did not teach as men taught (Matthew 7:28-29), He spoke only those things that came from His Father (Matthew 22:29; John 8:28), and He had human emotions (upon hearing of the death of Lazarus, Jesus wept) (John 11:35). Jesus was called a friend of Publicans and sinners (Luke 7:34). He mingled with and allowed himself to be touched by the lowest class of people in society (Luke 7:36-50), He was called a winebibber by the religious leaders (Luke 7:34), and the religious leaders called His power, demon power (Matthew 12:24).

Jesus was human in every way without the pretentious pride and lust of men. Jesus practiced things that religious people today may well call sin, such as; drinking alcoholic wine (Luke 7:34), being physically touched by a known fallen woman (Luke 7:38), not keeping holy days (Matthew 12:1-8; Luke 6:6-11), and not keeping the religious traditions of the elders (religious norms of the day) (Matthew 15:2), His authority did not come from sects or the accepted religious leaders (Matthew 21:23). Jesus purposely caused strife in households for those who would follow the kingdom of God (Luke 12:49-53), He rebuked those in religious authority (Luke 16:14-15), and He was a servant to the lowest class of people in society (Luke 18:35-43; John 9:1-41; 13:14). Yet Jesus, in His actions and life was without sin or fault (1 Peter 2:22).

Because Jesus was the Son of God He only had an ear to hear and speak those things that came from His Father (Isaiah 42:6-7; 50:4-5). If a Christian is to follow the example of Jesus, he will be led of the Spirit of God and listen only to the Father's voice in grace and truth (John 1:16-17).

Simplicity for the believer, in the kingdom of Christ, is where the human spirit in a believer is only directed by the Holy Spirit. This is the life every Christian has been called

to follow. The cost of living this life may be rejection of the believer by family, friends, church, and in some countries, even the government (Luke 14:25-27).

However, the blessing of God is upon a believer who follows a life led of the Holy Spirit. This life of simplicity has the Lord Jesus alone as the reward of his faith. In this place of faith, God will be seen (Matthew 5:8) and followed, to the reward of the believer. The freedom of God, the pureness of God, the love of God, and the hope of God will become the believer's life and his inheritance. As the believer gives himself over to the simplicity in Christ, his knowledge of God will grow into a practical experience of spiritual life. In this life, simplicity will be the urgent direction of the believer. The one who believes God, and His word will have no higher priority.

The believer who follows Christ as the top priority of his life (not his church, his ministry, his wife, children, etc, Luke 14:26), will abide in the life of simplicity. In this place the Holy Spirit will have freedom to lead such a person and as Jesus said, reveal the Father to him (Matthew 11:27; Luke 10:22). This invitation is to every believer not to just some select few. God in Christ has made this available to every Christian. But the believer living in carnality cannot know

the Father, the Son or the place of simplicity. For the kingdom of Christ is not known in carnality.

The Christian who truly abides and walks in the hope of Christ and the truth of Scripture will be living in simplicity (1 Timothy 1:1; Titus 2:13; 1 John 3:2-3).

D. Neely

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