

Whatever happened to Simplicity?

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2Co 11:3 But I fear, lest by any means, as the serpent beguiled Eve through his subtilty, so your minds should be corrupted from the simplicity that is in Christ.

I love the succinct way the King James translates this verse. It is actually a model of “simplicity” itself. The other translations, tend to read similar to the ESV... “your thoughts will be led astray from a sincere and pure devotion to Christ.” For some reason “sincere and pure devotion” seems to complicate things and say nothing more than the word the King James Translators chose...the “simplicity” that is in Christ. I love that. It has a sort of Amish or Shaker quality about it. It takes my mind to a place and time back before everything was all a whirl and blur, a hustle and bustle... a wired and connected, jig saw puzzle of electronics, Hi Def images, videos, sounds, computers cell phones, microwaves, horns honking, bells and whistles ringing, people screaming to be heard, loneliness in the midst of chaos. Yes “simplicity” is a magical sort of word, that has an air, mystery and ambiance all its own. In fact most people in this crazy mixed up world don’t even have a clue what it is....Simplicity? Everything is so complicated today. What on earth is this?...simplicity?

Taken by itself the word conjures images of a little child playing with some colorful toy blocks and singing a happy song while the sun shine through a playroom window. Yes, that seems like simplicity. Or what about a little girl with golden hair picking daisies on a verdant meadow while a deer drinks from a nearby brook. Surely that is simplicity?

But maybe these images are not really images of simplicity, but images of innocence and purity, of childlikeness and peace. Maybe simplicity is actually something quite different?

I know that in a highly technological age, simplicity has come to mean something that I never would have imagined it to mean. Back in 1969, a computer would fill a large room, which required special air filters, and had multiple rows of whirling reels of magnetic tapes, and the whole thing was quite huge, but somebody came up with the idea that we need to simplify all this...I actually think it was either Texas Instruments, or Tandy Corporation who came up with the idea of making the whole affair about the size of a large desk. I remember seeing one of those, and I believe they did away with the tapes, and they actually gave it more memory. They made it better as they simplified it. I could have my historical facts wrong, but bear with me, and try to catch the

image. A few years later, it got even more simple, when they discovered transistors. They could eliminate moving parts altogether and soon they would go to a solid state technology. Boy, how much more simple could it get? No moving parts, and more computing power. Well, you know how technology has progressed. NASA put a man on the moon and it took a football field sized room full of computers to make all the necessary calculations, to get him there and back. It was quite an undertaking. But guess what? it got simpler still. Silicon was discovered with its amazing electrical properties. The ancient room sized computer, full of rows of whirling data disks, could now fit in a 3 inch silicon square resembling printed plastic. Today, they have computers that are one atom thick! And all those football fields of computing power, that together put a man on the moon, are now about one tenth as powerful as the chip in your cell phone. That is simplicity! Taking the most complex things and making them tiny, accessible, and more powerful than ever.

I think the word in my text actually has something to do with this idea. There is a simplicity in Christ that reduces all complexities, to tiny, accessible and powerful realities. I think we have lost that somewhere along the line. I used to read more theological material than I do now. I used to want to be up to snuff on every new thought, every new idea. I wanted to know what this professor said, or what that guy over there was teaching. I wanted to be up to date and informed. Trust me I was quite well informed. I knew what everybody believed. I amassed a world class theological library. I had tapes, and books, magazines and journals, whatever it took to stay connected and informed. But one day I woke up and realized. What am I doing here? Is all this whirl and busy-ness, and activity really necessary? Is being well informed, helping me be more like Christ? Is it making me a better husband and father? Is it making me a better preacher, or is it simply giving me tools that make me appear more intelligent than I really am? I woke up that day, and I knew deep down inside, that I did not feel like a little child.

The words of Christ, our Lord clearly pricked my heart that day, and I realize I had drifted far from simplicity.

Mat 18:3-6 And said, Verily I say unto you, Except ye be converted, and become as little children, ye shall not enter into the kingdom of heaven. 4 Whosoever therefore shall humble himself as this little child, the same is greatest in the kingdom of heaven. 5 And whoso shall receive one such little child in my name receiveth me. 6 But whoso shall offend one of these little ones which believe in me, it were better for him that a millstone were hanged about his neck, and *that* he were drowned in the depth of the sea.

Notice the idea. Become as a little Child...Humble yourself. This is a powerful thought, and right then, I began to change the way I pursued my Christian life. Before I did anything, before I read anything, before I busied myself with any matter, I asked myself a few simple questions, and I'm telling you they changed

my whole life and ministry. Let me share them with you. Here's the questions I began asking myself repeatedly, whenever I was about to do anything.

1. Is what I am about to do, or what I am currently engaged in, making me more like Jesus?
2. Is what I am about to do, or what I am currently engaged in, keeping me from thinking clearly?
3. Is what I am about to do, or what I am engaged in, making me more humble?
4. Is what I am about to do, or what I am engaged in, complicated or simple?
5. Is what I am about to do, or what I am doing, cluttering up my mind, my time or my real responsibilities, with things that do not matter.
6. Is this inconsequential or essential?
7. Is this important or trivial?
8. Will this benefit me, or help someone else?
9. In exactly what ways will this glorify God?
10. If I do this what will happen to the way others will perceive of me?
11. Is this going to make me be self-centered, self-absorbed and self-interested, or will it inspire me to serve God and others selflessly?
12. How will this benefit my family and my friend?
13. Does this have any value for changing a complicated world?
14. Is this going to help, or hinder, the Body of Christ?
15. How will this make me a better person? Or will it make me worse?

What happened in the years since I begin asking these questions, is sort of like what happened when the football field of computers was put on a 3 inch slice of silicon. I learned to uncomplicated things. To reduce them to small seemingly insignificant things. I removed the whirling wheels, and settled into a quiet stillness in my Christian life. I'm far from a model Christian. In fact, I'm a total mess, but deep down inside, on a level that I cannot show you, or put into words, I have found the joy, and peace, the trust and un-complication of things that comes from "The simplicity that is in Christ". Ask yourself...Whatever happened to that in my life?

I'll tell you this, it makes understanding the Bible a whole lot easier. I have learned not to clutter it up with a bunch of human viewpoints, and ideas of scholars, and high thoughts from theology texts and philosophy monographs. I'm not belittling the importance of research and study. I'm saying, that the Bible comes first. Relationship to Christ comes first. If it is mental and spiritual clutter, and complication, we don't need it.

Many years ago, I knew a man, who I believe was the greatest preacher in America. He has since died, and I've never heard any preacher since who could speak with such power and deep spiritual wisdom as this man could. When he opened his mouth in the pulpit, you could tell in an instant, that he had just come from the throne room of God, with an important message just for you. He touched people with great urgency and great relevancy. He carried Christ with him into the pulpit, and every word seem drenched in the dew of heaven. He was extremely powerful. The holy Spirit owned His every word, and used them to convict and convert thousands of people. He was amazing. I'm letting Him remain nameless for now, because I don't want to glorify Him. I don't want you clamoring to look him up on the internet. He would not have wanted that. He was very humble, and only wanted to talk about Jesus.

This great man was a personal friend and mentor to me, when I was first starting out in the ministry, and was struggling to learn the ways of God and the things of the Bible. And I went to his office one day, I don't even remember why. But I commented about the hundreds of volumes of books that he had on his office shelves. I said something about the books, I don't remember what. But instantly he made a comment that I'll never forget. He said, "Earl, see all these books, these commentaries, these theology books, and reference books...They are for decoration only! I have never opened even one of them. I only read the Bible. I have all these books, because they make me appear well educated, they create an air of importance, when people visit me at the office. But I would not give you 10 cents for the whole lot of them. I have them because they make me look like I deserve my Doctorate degrees" I was shocked by his words. He spoke so eloquently, and so powerfully. He certainly was not an ignorant man. I was shocked, I could not believe that he never read any other book but the Bible.

Listen to me. This man had several doctorate degrees and he pastored a church of 5000 people. He was no dummy by any means. I was dumb founded and shocked by his confession.

But one day, he took me out to his farm to work. I worked part time for him, when he would go up to his farm to pray and "get refreshed", as he called it. Well, on this particular day, I was near the house feeding the geese, and I caught a glimpse of him reading his Bible, and praying about each verse, and asking Jesus to explain it to him. And it is one of the most intimate things I ever witnessed in my life! I knew right then, the lesson that he wanted me to learn.

Complicating things, is never a substitute for the presence of God. Books mean nothing, if you have not talked to Jesus and asked Him to show you. For years I did not follow the example that he set. God brought it home to me the hard way. But now I look back on the lesson, this great man taught me, and I cherish it as one of the most valuable lessons I have ever learned in all my life. I know it seems simplistic. But it is the secret to truly great power in preaching, and more importantly for power in living. Be with Christ! Get alone with Him. Experience simplicity in Christ, and you will have all the treasures of wisdom and glory unlocked for you. The storehouses of heaven are in Christ. Being like a little child in the presence of the Lord, is far better than having a thousand theological degrees hanging on the wall and knowing nothing! Simplify it! That's what we need now, in this extremely complicated age, more than ever. Now, I too, for the most part, use my books as office decorations. It's so much better. They look so distinguished and important. But guess what? I wouldn't give you 10cents for the whole lot of them, in comparison with the Word of God. I finally learned the lesson of "simplicity in Christ". And I don't intend to ever let it go, or to ever go back to the cluttered up good old days. Christ is all I need.