

2Cor. 11:1-15

The Simplicity that is in Christ

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 – v. 3

Have you ever noticed how often the things that have the greatest impact on your life are the simple things - the things that you come to take for granted. The light bulb is a simple thing. It's true that the invention of the light bulb is very profound. The genius of Thomas Edison is unparalleled but the concept behind the light bulb is very simple - the concept of lighting a room that is dark. Or how about turning on a faucet and having access to water? There's another simple and yet profound blessing when you think of everything that's behind it. Or how would you like to be the person who invented post-it notes? Here, again, is something very simple and yet something that's become so useful that we can hardly imagine being without them.

The gospel of Jesus Christ is quite profound and yet very simple. It's profound in the sense that we cannot fathom what it meant for Christ to leave behind Him heaven's glory in order to come into this world as our mediator to accomplish salvation for us. We cannot comprehend the extent of His sufferings. We cannot fully take in the meaning of His cry of anguish when He cried *My God, My God why hast thou forsaken me?* Nor can we comprehend such love which comes to us contrary to what we deserve.

But we can understand the truth that we're sinners in need of salvation and that Christ can and will save us if we repent of our sins and believe the gospel. You could argue that the simple gospel of salvation by grace through faith has a profound effect on the lives of all those who have sincerely embraced it. And yet the proclamation of the gospel is very simple.

When you read through the book of Acts that's what you find – a simple message boldly proclaimed. *Christ died for our sins, was buried and is risen from the dead*, the disciples of Christ announced. Everywhere the Apostle Paul went and preached the gospel in its simplicity, the gospel had an impact. It wasn't always a positive impact. We know that many souls were saved by Paul's preaching. We know that many churches were started as a result of Paul's ministry. But we also know that sometimes uproars and riots were the result of Paul's ministry.

Now the surest indication that the devil has been at work is that simple things become complex; sufficient solutions become inadequate. And based on this standard I think we would have to conclude that the devil has done great damage to Christianity in our day and age.

The problems we face are unique to our day and age, the devil tells us, and so the solutions to these problems must be different than the solution to problems in previous generations. It's the devil's lie. While some things have changed over time, human depravity hasn't changed and the solution to sinful depravity hasn't changed either. The

text makes it very clear to us where the line is drawn when it comes to our spiritual warfare against the devil. The ground that must be held according to Paul is this *simplicity that is in Christ*.

I fear, Paul says. Paul's fear was that the Corinthian Christians would lose this simplicity. The attack against this simplicity, according to Paul would be varied. It could take place *by any means*.

The text also reveals to us that this attack would not be a frontal assault. Sometimes the devil does attack the church that way. But in this instance Paul is telling us that the devil's assault would be through his subtility – even *as the serpent beguiled Eve through his subtility*. And in the verses that follow Paul explains how the devil's ministers are manifested as *angels of light* (v. 14). They appear to be apostles of Christ but are in fact false apostles, who come preaching another Jesus and another gospel.

And these false apostles may be smooth in their speeches and they may appear to be very sincere – It seems that this ploy of the devil is widespread today. We are not so much concerned with the truth by and large today so much as we are concerned with a person's sincerity.

So the devil's attacks are varied and they're subtle. They play upon human emotions and they have a single aim which is to corrupt the believer's mind when it comes to the simplicity that is in Christ. All of which leads me to say that if we are to wage effective warfare, if we are to follow after Christ, if we would be servants of Christ then:

We Must Understand the Simplicity that is in Christ

And this is what I want us to consider today in the moments that remain. Think with me first of all on:

I. The Simplicity of our Doctrine – *the simplicity that is in Christ*

Many Christians tend to think that doctrine is anything but simple. The very fact that controversies have raged throughout church history about various points of doctrine seems to indicate that doctrine is complex. The doctrine of the trinity was forged through intense theological debate. The same could be said for the doctrine of the person of Christ, the doctrine of original sin etc.

It's important for us to understand the meaning of simplicity, then, when we speak of the simplicity of our doctrine. I am not suggesting that for a doctrine to be simple it must easily be comprehended. Indeed we cannot comprehend the doctrine of the trinity. We attempt to draw analogies that illustrate the trinity but every illustration falls short of truly explaining it. The same is true when it comes to the person of Christ. We affirm that Christ is one person in two natures. He is fully God and fully man. These two natures come together in one person with no mixture and no confusion. This is truly beyond our comprehension.

But when we refer to the simplicity of our doctrine we are speaking of those things that are plainly revealed in Scripture – not necessarily easily understood, but plainly revealed. One of the meanings given to our English word *simplicity* is *plainness*. We refer to the plain teaching of Scripture.

Now turning to our text, Paul states that he feared that the Corinthians would be corrupted from the simplicity that was in Christ. Christ, then, is the focal point of our doctrine or the focal point of this simplicity. *We preach Christ crucified* Paul says in his earlier epistle to the Corinthians (1Cor. 1:23).

Here is the most concise and comprehensive statement regarding Paul's doctrine. The focus is Christ. Paul endeavored to make known the person of Christ. He wanted the world to know that God has come into this world as a man in the person of Jesus Christ. And he wanted the world to know why Christ came into this world. He came as our substitute. He came as the 2nd Adam to fulfill the law that Adam had failed to fulfill and then to pay the price of that broken law by being crucified.

So in that statement *we preach Christ crucified* we discover that Paul's focus was on the person and work of Christ. And Paul never deviated from that stated purpose. It is true that when Paul wrote to the Corinthians he had to deal with many problems. There was the problem of division in the church. There was the problem of immorality in the church. There was the problem of the misuse of spiritual gifts in the church. And if you go and study those problems carefully and note how Paul confronts those problems you discover that Paul never deviates from the person and work of Christ. It becomes a matter of applying the person and work of Christ – or applying the gospel to these various problems.

You see Paul never leaves us in doubt as to where the source of power and wisdom was to be found in the Christian's life. *For the preaching of the cross is to them that perish foolishness; but unto us which are saved it is the power of God* (1Cor. 1:18). And a few verses later he emphasizes this again when he says *we preach Christ crucified, unto the Jews a stumblingblock, and unto the Greeks foolishness; But unto them which are called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God, and the wisdom of God* (vv. 23,24).

Doesn't this reveal the marvelous simplicity of Christianity? Our mission is to make men and women and boys and girls know who Jesus Christ is and what Jesus Christ has done. We endeavor to make known the glory of God as that glory is revealed in Christ. The solutions to the problems we face in this fast paced, modern day of technology and immorality are to be found in Christ.

This makes our religion so simple and so sublime. And I'm afraid that the simplicity of the gospel is what tempts many Christians into thinking they need answers to life's challenges that take us beyond the gospel. I can remember many years ago sitting in a Sunday School class in a Baptist church. The teacher of this class was going through a

series on the family. Wives be submissive to your husbands; Husbands love your wives; Children obey your parents etc. On this particular occasion the emphasis was on wives submitting to their husbands. This was being brought out from 1Pet. 3 which begins *Likewise, ye wives, be in subjection to your own husbands.*

There was a lady in the class who brought up a question pertaining to the difficulty a friend of hers was having submitting to her husband because of her husband's character. Apparently this man was not a Christian or if he was it was only in a very nominal sense. The lady raising the question in the Sunday School class thought it would be inadequate simply to remind her friend how Christ died for her. And the teacher along with the rest of the class seemed genuinely perplexed over how difficult this precept can be at times.

And yet the inspired Apostle himself treated the subject with the simplicity of Christ. In 1Pet. 2:24 we read *Who his own self bare our sins in his own body on the tree, that we, being dead to sins, should live unto righteousness: by whose stripes ye were healed. For ye were as sheep going astray; but are now returned unto the Shepherd and Bishop of your souls.* And a little later in 1Pet. 3:18 we read *For Christ also hath once suffered for sins, the just for the unjust, that He might bring us to God, being put to death in the flesh, but quickened by the Spirit.*

It is in between these two references to the cross that Peter elaborates on this precept of wives being in subjection to their husbands. The simple answer that this lady in that Sunday School class felt was inadequate was in fact the right answer and the best answer. This lady just didn't know how to apply the cross to the precept – which is a shame because it really wouldn't be that hard to do. *Do you find submission hard, because you are not being treated right?* – she could have said. *How much more did Christ suffer – the just for the unjust. How fair was His treatment at the hands of sinners? What did He do to deserve death, even the death of the cross?* The answer is of course that Christ did not deserve any of the treatment He received at the hands of sinners and yet He was faithful to submit to His heavenly Father even when He was being treated so unjustly by His adversaries.

This is exactly what is pointed out in 1Pet. 2:21,22 – *For even hereunto were ye called: because Christ also suffered for us, leaving us an example, that ye should follow His steps: who did no sin, neither was guile found in His mouth: Who, when He was reviled, reviled not again; when He suffered, He threatened not; but committed Himself to Him that judgeth righteously.* The answer to a difficult marriage is to look to Christ and spend time at the cross contemplating all that Christ bore for your salvation.

Oh how the devil desires for Christians to think that the gospel of Jesus Christ is inadequate. *It may do for heaven in the hereafter, but it won't do for living in this present world* – the devil whispers in our ears. Let's be careful that we are not led astray from the simplicity that is in Christ. If the devil can corrupt our minds with regard to this simplicity then he can rob us of our wisdom and rob us of our power. It's no wonder

Paul had such a fear for these Corinthian believers. So much is at stake in the matter of this simplicity that is in Christ. We must understand this simplicity. We have seen how this simplicity applies to our doctrine. Think with me next on:

II. The Simplicity of Our Practice –

The very word *simplicity* conveys the meaning of singleness – singleness of heart, singleness of devotion. One Greek lexicon defines it this way – *the virtue of one who is free from pretense or hypocrisy.*

The word is used with specific reference to the Christian's conduct back in 1:12 where Paul writes – *For our rejoicing is this, the testimony of our conscience, that in simplicity and godly sincerity, not with fleshly wisdom, but by the grace of God, we have had our conversation in the world, and more abundantly to you-ward.* The word *conversation* in our King James Bibles means conduct.

So Paul is saying that he rejoiced because of the testimony of his conscience that he conducted himself with simplicity and sincerity before the believers at Corinth. He had no ulterior motives in other words. He simply had a desire to follow Christ. And that desire controlled everything he did and everything he didn't do.

You see, if the gospel is truly the power of God unto salvation to everyone that believeth then the gospel will effect your conduct. Indeed, it will effect much more than your conduct. It will effect your outlook on life. It will effect how you view your purpose in life. It will effect how you view every circumstance that you face in life. It will totally redefine your mission in life. This is what Paul meant when he said in 2Cor. 5:17 that *if any man be in Christ, he is a new creature: old things are passed away; behold, all things are become new.*

The man or woman who has gained a true saving interest in Christ now hates the sin that he once loved. I hate the sin that was damning my soul. I hate the sin that nailed my Savior to a cross. I hate the sin that defiled me and weighed me down with guilt and was an offense to God.

But I love my Savior who gave Himself for me. I love Christ because He rescued me from sin's guilt and sin's dominion. I love Christ because He has gone to prepare a place for me in heaven and has given to me eternal life. I love Christ because He has subdued my rebellion against God and has opened my blind eyes so that I might see that I was on the broad road leading to destruction and He has turned my gaze to His atoning death where I glory now in what once repulsed me. I rejoice to see the bleeding sacrifice knowing that He hangs on that cross in my place.

The gospel, then, effects our lives in a powerful and yet a simple way. It turns love for sin into love for Christ. It turns hatred for Christ into hatred for sin. The devil, of course seeks to undermine this simplicity. We find Paul having to battle the devil's perversions to the gospel time and again. In the city of Corinth they were abusing grace by turning it

into lasciviousness by failing to discipline a man for sin. In Galatia Paul had to combat legalism which sought to add the law to the gospel and thus bring men back into bondage.

And so we are taught throughout Paul's epistles that we must ever be on our guard. We must guard ourselves against making God's grace an excuse for sin. And we must guard ourselves against those forms of legalism that cater to our pride and deceive us into thinking more highly of ourselves than we ought. The gospel works in us and through us in a very simple fashion. We become aware of our sins and we turn to Christ. We believe that He is the Son of God who gave Himself for us so we repent of our sins and turn to Him. And in praise and thanksgiving we say to Him *Lord Jesus thou hast loved me and died for my sins. I would be hell-bound apart from thine atoning death. You deserve my devotion. My life is yours. I consecrate myself to your service. Lord, what wouldest thou have me to do?* To which the reply of Christ through His word is this – *If ye love me, keep my commandments.*

And those commandments win over our hearts because they are good and right and spiritual. But it doesn't take long before we stumble and fall again or we recognize that our best efforts fall short of what these commandments require. So we come to Christ again for grace. We hate the sin that defeats us. But we come to Christ just as we are and in the simplicity of our faith we acknowledge our sins and receive His forgiveness and in this repeated cycle we advance in holiness.

What love! What grace! What transforming power! What simplicity! Is this your testimony before God today? I'm afraid all too many people who call themselves Christians have an empty form of religion but know nothing of the power. The simplicity of the gospel is seen in its life-transforming power – power to convert sinners to saints. Have you experienced the power of the gospel?

And so we see the simplicity of our doctrine. We see the simplicity of our practice. If we guard ourselves against the devil's attempt to corrupt our minds from the simplicity that is in Christ we must understand finally:

III. The Simplicity of our Defense –

The text reveals to us that the devil's aim is to move us away from this simplicity. *I fear says Paul 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.*

The devil's attacks will come in various ways all of which are very subtle. It may come in the form of those who preach another Jesus according to v. 4; or another gospel it tells us in that same verse. The Corinthians were in danger of being corrupted because of their willingness to bear with those who preached another gospel.

This underscores the need for God's people to be grounded in the truth of the gospel. And for the most part Christians are not grounded in the gospel. And one of the reasons

Christians are not grounded in the gospel is because of a misunderstanding about this whole idea of simplicity. The devil has successfully corrupted the minds of many by distorting the thinking of Christians about this whole matter of simplicity.

All that matters, we are told today by popular evangelists and ecumenists is that a man or woman make a decision for Christ. *Ask Jesus into your heart* we're told. That's the important thing; that's all that matters. Who Christ truly is – that's of minor importance. What is sin and what isn't sin – that's of minor importance. Whether or not you bear evidence of grace and gospel power in your life – that's of minor importance. All that really matters is that you have made a decision for Christ. And if this is indeed the case then we really need not sound the warnings about false religions and false cults that seek to call themselves Christian. As long as this notion is common that the gospel is a mere decision then the differences between these so called branches of Christianity will be perceived as minor and may be merely a difference in style.

Need I say that we're reaping the rotten fruit of the devil's lie in this generation? While many evangelists and churches boast of their numbers the nation continues to sink in sin. Multitudes have become twice the children of hell by thinking there's nothing more to the gospel than a decision. *Isn't this the simple gospel?* – they argue. *Isn't this the simplicity that is in Christ?*

There is, you know, a kind of simplicity that is to be detested and abhorred – *Cf. Prov. 1:22-23*. This is the devil's counterfeit to the simplicity of the gospel. And if you would take the time to trace this word through proverbs you would discover that the simple one is associated with the mocker and the scorner and the person who is void of understanding who has no desire for wisdom.

We live in such a generation today. I read a pamphlet some time ago put out by a preacher who was able to sit on a committee that had access to an extensive study of religion in American life conducted by the Gallup organization. The conclusion reached by this study was that Christian faith makes little or no difference in people's lives. The author of this pamphlet puts forth two different and contrasting views as to why this is so. The first view is that most of these people that say they have faith – really don't have faith. The second view reasons that although these people have faith they've never been grounded in the gospel – they've been sort of stuck in Christian infancy so it would seem.

Can you imagine that – a gospel that has no more power but to create a generation of spiritual derelicts? This would have to be the first time in the entire history of church that such a phenomena has occurred. This seems to be the view that the author of the pamphlet takes for the whole rest of the booklet is designed to leading immature Christians into maturity. God bless him. I hope he can succeed in leading some into maturity. But I think we have to acknowledge that a gospel that is so powerless is not of God.

Again I fall back upon the meaning of simplicity – it means plain and we can view it that way when we refer to our doctrine being plainly revealed and it means singleness which is the way we should view it with regard to our practice – i.e. singleness of heart. Simplicity, then, must apply to our understanding and our practice. The gospel is plainly revealed in Scripture. There is a text in the book of Isaiah 35:8 that refers to the way of holiness and we are told with regard to that way that it is so plainly revealed that *the wayfaring man, though a fool, shall not err therein*.

The gospel is profound, and yet the gospel is simple. This simplicity is not to be mistaken for a childish immaturity that remains willfully ignorant of the truth concerning sin, and concerning Christ and concerning the salvation purchased by the blood of Christ. We must take our stand on what is clearly revealed by God in His word. And what is clearly revealed is that we are by nature sinners bound for hell. We can do nothing to save ourselves. Christ, the Son of God, has come into this world to die for sinners and we must repent of our sins and believe in Him. Nothing short of a new birth is required to enable us to repent of our sins and believe in Him.

This is the gospel in its simplicity. May God help us stand for it. May God help sinners to respond to it. And may God help us to guard ourselves against the wiles of the devil who would endeavor to corrupt us from the simplicity that is in Christ.