

Article of the Month

August, 2021

Simplicity

(II Corinthians 11:3)

In the above text, Paul says, "But I fear, lest by any means, as the serpent beguiled Eve through his subtlety, so your minds should be corrupted from the simplicity that is in Christ."

The serpent lied to Eve, but Paul calls it "beguiled." Beguiled implies that the serpent made it look so logical, so tempting, so right! And Paul uses this as a comparison to what can happen to us. Eve, of course, was beguiled into sin. But Paul is expressing that the same kind of beguiling can subtly take away a Christian's "simplicity."

We should note first that Paul is NOT saying that everything a Christian needs for his growth is "simple!" It's not. Even the great Apostle Peter said that Paul's writings (which comprise most of the New Testament) had in them "some things hard to be understood, which they who are unlearned and unstable wrest, as they do also the other Scriptures, unto their own destruction." (II Peter 2:15, 16) Peter is rightly acknowledging that our handbook (the Bible) is not simple; it can be "hard to be understood."

Therefore, Paul's words in II Corinthians 11:3 are NOT about simple ideas, but about simplicity of character. Simplicity of character is so vital to us because it shows honesty and trust. It shows the lack of suspicion and fear. It shows a mind ready to accept anything which is conformable to the Divine Word. It is "without guile."

Therefore, one of our objectives as disciples is to keep transforming our ways of thinking (Romans 12:2) in such ways as to rid ourselves of the complexities of our human thinking. Only by ridding ourselves of a fleshly mind (a complex and irrational mind) can we build the kind of "simple" character which God will insist upon in us. And only with that simplicity of character can we "enter into His rest." (Hebrews 4) And THAT simplicity can be achieved ONLY when we have a total trust in the inspiration of Scripture. Only the mind of the New Creature, the mind built by the Holy Spirit, virtually the mind of Christ and of God, can be trusted in our relationship to God. He is looking for no less when He considers our worthiness to be called His sons.

Satan can take that simplicity of character away from us; and he wants to! If he can convince our minds to be suspicious, non-trusting, convinced of the need for intricacies

of character, not reliant on faith, or ready to be deceived because we think we will be deceived, then he has accomplished all he needs to keep us from faithful service to the Lord.

We now live in a world which has anything but simplicity of character. Whatever might be their motives, humans are attempting to tell us that everything is subject to doubt, suspicion, and all kinds of deceptions out there to confuse us. It is frequently all lumped under the general heading of "Conspiracy Theories." The title, of course, implies that we can't trust anyone because everyone is hiding something and is "out to get you." What a tragic state of mind to have! And it is this very thing that Paul is warning against.

The Christian has NOTHING to fear if he is being faithful. Who cares if people are lying and manipulating? In Psalm 76:10, it is written, "The wrath of man shall praise you. The remainder of wrath You will restrain." In these words God, Himself, is telling us that, no matter how man's works or words are wrong, they will, in the end, praise God. How can we worry when this kind of promise is given? God will not only make all bad things work ultimately for good, but He will STOP anything that won't! That covers every possibility.

The secret for our "rest" in the Lord is that we take ONLY His Word as our guide, our authority, and our comfort. If we mix in the profane babblings of this poor world, we will have only stress in our minds. The "simplicity" of character which is in Christ will disappear in favor of confusion, and complexity, fear, and stress. We will have given up one of our most cherished benefits of discipleship.

The answer, of course, is true reliance on the Bible and its testimony. We must look there, and there only, for any and all of the answers we need. We must not read into it our own preferences or preconceived ideas. We must search it daily, like the brethren at Berea, to "see whether these things are so" (Acts 17:11). If, on the other hand, we daily search the news, the internet, or the uninformed opinions of others, we will be subject to the "beguiling" influences of Satan which will surely take away our simple trust in the Lord.

Among the most dangerous and complicating things for a Christian's welfare are speculations, "thinks," opinions, guesses, secrets, conspiracies, fears, suppositions, personal preferences -- and the list goes on! It even includes "Christian" doctrines which are not solidly based on Scriptural proofs. The "simplicity" of character which accepts the testimony of Scripture above all else is the proof of discipleship.

Early in I Corinthians (2:1-16), the Apostle Paul stresses this simplicity -- the strength of spiritual thinking above any human reasoning strengths. Paul even goes so far as to suggest that, if we consult Scripture, we will be able to determine which scientists and which historians, and which theologians are correct -- and which are not. He also

suggests that those scientists, historians, theologians, and even the rest of people who deal with us, will not be able to "figure us out." They will not be able to understand ("appraise") how we can weigh things we have never studied and be certain of our conclusions. (2:13-15) THAT is, indeed, a simplicity of character -- built on a complexity of Scripture.

Our point is this: Those of us who follow Christ MUST follow him, not follow the ideas, ways, and standards of men. And since Scripture (according to the Greek text) is "God-breathed" (inspired), it is infallible in giving us what we need and want. If we choose to adulterate our information intake with non-Scriptural sources, we will be the poorer for it. Our spiritual lives will suffer; the development of our "New Creatures in Christ Jesus" will be stunted. We will look less and less like saints and more and more like ordinary men. Our characters will be confusing, contradictory, and complex. We will be unstable. But simplicity of character is what we want -- not only because it is beautiful, restful, and spiritually healthful, but because it is what our God and our Lord Jesus want in us.

- - - - -