
Simple Solutions

“But I fear, lest by any means, as the serpent beguiled Eve through his subtilty, so your mind should be corrupted from the simplicity that is in Christ” (II Corinthians 11:3).

Naaman was a leper. His physical condition had baffled medical science. No human doctor was capable of a healing prescription.

The Word of the Lord came to Naaman through Elisha the prophet:

“Go and wash in the Jordan seven times and thy flesh shall come again to thee, and thou shalt be clean” (II Kings 5:10).

The simplicity of this solution made it seem unsatisfactory to Naaman. The Scriptures record:

“But Naaman was wroth, and went away, and said, Behold I thought, He will surely come out to me, and stand, and call on the name of the Lord his God, and strike his hand over the place, and recover the leper . . . so he turned and went away in a rage” (II Kings 5:11-12).

His servants came and reasoned with him:

“My father, if the prophet has bid thee do some great thing, wouldest thou not have done it? how much rather then, when he saith to thee, wash and be clean.” (II Kings 5:13)

Naaman hearkened to their advice, washed in the Jordan, and his flesh came again like unto the flesh of a little child.

A Rotten World

We live in a rotten world. Not only have evil men waxed worse and worse, but their capacity to do evil has been greatly multiplied by the inventions of modern science. For the first time in the history of the world mankind has at his disposal the weapons and technology to annihilate the human race. Before the weeping eyes of angels the blood-stained juggernaut of war rumbles on over the bloated bodies of its victims. It siphons off the wealth of nations and leaves vast multitudes in ragged and wretched despair. It takes food from the mouths of starving babies to buy bombs and bullets with which to maim, and cripple, and destroy. It fans the flames of hatred and revenge to blacken the pages of history with atrocities beyond imagination. It promotes and perpetrates hostility and retaliation. It rapes the heart and robs the soul of virtue.

The sophisticated weapons of World War II have been systematically discarded as hopelessly out-of-date. The billions which we invested in this military hardware now slowly turns to rust in the thousands of acres consigned by our Government for the storage of surplus junk. In the meanwhile the monsters of starvation and vitamin deficiency stalk our starving world like ravening wolves. Twelve thousand people die every day of starvation and malnutrition and millions more are left blind and crippled and diseased.

But war is only one of the many problems in our world's great repertoire of wrongs. Besides it are multiplied woes without number and a million sufferings which defy description.

A Divided Church

In the midst of the carnage and confusion of a lost world is a divided and impotent church. No matter how you slice it the disciples of Jesus in the twentieth century are not distinguished by their love for one another. While three billion precious souls languish outside the saving grace of Jesus we convene our theological conclaves to debate the price of admission. While millions of hopeless men have never even heard of Jesus we marshal our forces to conjugate a difficult verb or split a theological hair. We have taken the sword of the Spirit which God intended for us to use on the devil and turned it into a weapon to cut and slash at our own brethren.

Those outside the framework of the Christian faith behold in us a babel of confusion. They watch with bewildered eyes as we wave sectarian flags and rally around the slogans and shibboleths of our own particular denomination. One visitor from Nepal told me that Americans worshipped many Gods. He arrived at this conclusion because he saw us pay homage at different shrines. His background caused him to believe that a different deity demanded a little different type of building and a different type of worship. I tried to explain that all denominations were trying to worship the same God but somehow I don't think that I ever quite convinced him. The longer I think about it the less I am able even to convince myself.

Simplicity in Christ

Paul warned the Corinthians that the devil through his subtily may corrupt them from the simplicity that is in Christ. Two Greek words are of particular interest in this verse.

The word "subtily" is from the Greek word "panourgia." The word "pan" means "all," and the word "ergon" means "work." The word "panourgia" therefore literally means "all working." In other words the devil will do anything to make us depart from the simplicity that is in Christ. He is totally without scruples and the moment we think we understand how we will act we betray an ignorance of his treachery.

The word "simplicity" is from the Greek "haplous" which means to be "single" or "simple" in contrast with "diplous" which means double.

The immediate application of this verse involved corrupted teachers who sought to take advantage of the Corinthian church. They were like "hucksters" hawking their wares at a market of religious ideas (II Corinthians 2:17). They were "false apostles, deceitful workers . . . transformed as the ministers of righteousness . . ." (II Corinthians 11:13). They lacked the simple straightforward integrity to adhere to principle but were characterized by duplicity as they slithered around the issues and sought to project the proper image. Rivers are crooked because they take the easy way around every obstacle, and people get crooked in the same way.

The word "simplicity" is also used to describe the generosity of the Macedonians and the Corinthians. In II Corinthians 8:2 it is translated as "liberality"; in 9:11 as "bountifulness";

and in 9:13 as "liberal." It refers to an unswerving and single-hearted devotion which prompted these Christians to give more than they could afford to give. The Macedonians were in deep poverty but their blind and unswerving trust in Jesus prompted them to give "beyond themselves." Their abject poverty made it necessary for them to urge Paul with "much entreaty" for him to even receive their generous gift.

This then, is the simplicity which Paul feared would be corrupted. Once you find someone with the integrity and faith to put God first regardless of the circumstances, you begin to wonder how long it will be before some smooth talker comes along and beguiles him into a more conventional approach to Christianity. Many a radiant witness has been tarnished by duplicity and obscured by the "broadening" influence of those who question the wisdom of taking Christ literally.

A Sad Letter

Some months ago I received in the mail a series of sad statistics. 5,500 congregations had only shown a net increase in membership of 5,373 in a six year period of time. A disastrous shortage of preachers was much in evidence and churches were folding as fast as others were being started. Of twenty-one area churches involved in a Bible School Contest only three showed a greater attendance than the year before. One out of every four priests was said to be leaving the priesthood and one out of every eight protestant ministers was said to be quitting the ministry.

The letter concluded with this quotation:

"We have several discouraged preachers, puzzled elders, confused deacons, many searching for answers and many wondering what we are doing? Are we getting anywhere? Where are we going? Many of us feel that we have been in a rut for years without facing the issue."

My response to the letter was straightforward and simple. If the brethren referred to in that letter are not known for their love toward one another perhaps we have put our finger upon the problem.

Regardless of your own personal views about love, it cannot be denied that love was of paramount importance to Jesus. When asked about the greatest commandment in the Bible He responded that it was to love God with all the heart, mind,

soul, and strength. He then continued that the next most important commandment in all the Bible was to love your neighbor as yourself. His final instructions to His disciples informed them that all men would know of their relationship to Him if they would only love one another. But alas! Such a solution is too simple for many to accept!

A Sad Story

One of the saddest stories I have ever read was about the life of Dr. Ignax Phillip Semmelweis. He was born in 1818 and died in 1865. The following facts were taken from his biography, *The Cry and the Covenant* by Morton Thompson.

Dr. Semmelweis is said to have done more for the mothers of this world than any man since Jesus Christ. He was the first man in history to make an accurate association between physical contamination and childbed fever.

In that age of ignorance, a doctor began his daily routine by going to the morgue and dissecting the bodies of people who had died within the preceding twenty-four hours. Then, without ever washing his hands, he would proceed to the hospital and make pelvic examinations upon expectant mothers. One out of every six women died in childbirth.

Dr. Semmelweis began to associate these examinations with the fatal infections of puerperal fever. He brought in basins of a chlorine solution and demanded that doctors wash before and after every examination. The death statistics dramatically improved but Dr. Semmelweis lost his job and his wash basins were discarded.

He moved to Budapest and again instituted the practice of making doctors wash their hands. Again he lost his job and his colleagues laughed him to scorn.

He opened a clinic of his own and in eleven years 8,537 babies were delivered with the loss of only 184 mothers. He incorporated these statistics into a book entitled *The Etiology, the Concept and the Propylaxis of Childbed Fever*. He spent the prime and vigor of his days debating the issue and answering objections with statistical evidence. Virtually no one believed him!

On June 15, 1848 he delivered these words to a medical society in Europe:

“I have now shown on three occasions before this body, that puerperal fever is caused by decomposed material conveyed to a wound. I have shown that it is a pyemia, a pus in the blood. I have shown that a man can infect a woman with this pyemia and that a man can infect another man with it — for so Kolletschka

died. I have shown that it can arise after surgery as well as after childbirth and in the non-pregnant as well as the pregnant. I have shown that it can be prevented. I have shown how it can be prevented. I have proved all that I have said with facts, with records, with laboratory experiments, and with human beings. I have talked a great deal. But while we talk and talk, gentlemen, women are dying. And doctors are killing them. There is no lying-in hospital where women are not dying of childbed fever. And their children with them. And we talk, gentlemen. We talk and talk and talk. And it is not necessary to talk. I am not asking anything world shaking. I am asking you only to wash. In the name of pity — stop the murder of mothers, gentlemen. Wash your hands. Wash everything that contacts a patient. Stop this murder. For God's sake wash your hands."

They did not believe him! In desperation he printed handbills and passed them out like a madman upon the streets. Before they led him away to an asylum he rushed into the dissecting room and slashed his own finger and rubbed the open wound in the abdominal cavity of a bloated corpse. He died in the asylum at the age of 47. His hand had almost rotted off and the death rattle of a thousand women was ringing in his ears. His son Bela committed suicide at the age of 25 because he despaired that no one would believe his father.

Before his death Dr. Semmelweis penned these memorable words to humanity:

"When I with my present conviction look back upon the past, I can only dispel the sadness which falls upon me by gazing into the happy Future when where the lying-in hospitals, and also outside of them, throughout the whole world, childbed fever will be no more . . .

But if it is not vouchsafed me to look upon that happy time with my own eyes, from which misfortune may God preserve me, the conviction that such a time must inevitably sooner or later arrive will cheer my dying hour."

Conclusion

It is with profound regret that I admit the many fallacies and imperfections of this documentary on love. Others who are better organized and more incisive will no doubt present the case with greater force and clarity. I can only say that I have tried. These words are penned with the prayer that the Blessed Holy Spirit will magnify this meager effort into a monument

of praise to the cause of Christ and hasten the day when men will beat their swords into plowshares and their spears into pruning hooks. If it is not vouchsafed me to look upon that happy time with my own eyes, from which misfortune may God preserve me, the conviction that such a time must inevitably sooner or later arrive will cheer my dying hour.

“By this shall all men know that ye are my disciples, if ye have love one to another.” (The words of Jesus Christ as recorded in John 13:35)

Questions for Discussion — Lesson Thirteen

1. Would Christianity have made greater progress if Christ had chosen highly educated men as apostles instead of peasant folk who were considered “unlearned and ignorant”?
2. How does satan blind the minds of unbelievers? (II Corinthians 4:4)
3. Is the world getting better or worse? Why?
4. What influences in our modern world hinder a proper emphasis upon brotherly love?
5. Who would object if all Christians suddenly began to love one another as Christ commanded?
6. How should one begin a personal campaign to love the brotherhood?
7. If you should die today what would your relatives and friends remember as the major emphasis of your life?