

DOCTRINE FOR THE YOUNG

SIMPLICITY

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Many people in our complex modern world feel a desire to return to a simpler kind of life. They long to escape from automobiles, television, bureaucracy, food additives—and get back to basics. The artificiality of many things in our culture makes us aware of the value of simplicity.

Of course, this is not just true on the material level. On the intellectual and spiritual plane, also, simplicity is a great virtue. It is often noted how simple the Ten Commandments are, or the Sermon on the Mount, or the Lord's Prayer. Basic wisdom is simple, while human philosophy often involves obscure, cumbersome, and tortuous reasoning.

Mere mortals could never produce something which is both as simple and yet as filled with deep wisdom as the Sermon on the Mount. And it is not just the style of the Lord's words that is simple, but the message itself. Now, there is infinite wisdom in His words; they are not simple in the sense of being shallow. But they are simple in the sense of being direct, going to the heart of the matter and expressing coherent truths. And these truths are all united interiorly, because they come from one source, one Divine Love.

In order for us to receive the Lord's words, we too, must be simple—simple in the sense of being single-minded or looking to one source of truth, and in the sense of having our internal and external thought in agreement.

The lamp of the body is the eye. If therefore your eye is single, your whole body will be full of light. But if your eye is evil, your whole body will be full of darkness (Matthew 6:22-23).

The “eye” stands for the understanding. If it is free from distortion, then the whole life will be enlightened. Our understanding *is* “single” if it looks to what is good from the Lord—not partly to surface appearances, partly to worldly expediency, and partly to selfish satisfaction, but simply to what is truly good.

It is interesting to note that insects, such as locusts, which represent sensual reasoning, have a compound eye, which gives them a multiple image instead of a unified single picture. Similarly, people who reason from the evidence of the senses rather than from the Word, get a fractured view of things. When they look at a particular idea, parts of their minds are looking to see whether it is popular, whether it is easy, whether it is intellectually stimulating, and so on. But a single-minded “simple” person merely wants to know whether the idea is true or not.

From the Word we can know what is right and wrong. But debating or rationalizing about something from self-intelligence can obscure the truth with us. Therefore the Lord said, “Let

what you say be simply ‘yes’ or ‘no’; anything more than this comes from evil” (Matthew 5:37, RSV).

The Heavenly Doctrine for the New Church often notes that the learned believe in spiritual things less than the simple. But it isn’t learning in itself that is the problem. It is the sensual attachment to the world and the conceit of self-intelligence which may accompany much knowledge. The greatest philosophers have been essentially simple, in that they just tried to express their ideas straightforwardly. But their followers have often entangled themselves in a web of terms, seeking truth through terminology, instead of using terms to express truth.

When the Lord was on earth, He said that Divine truths were hidden from the wise and prudent, but they were revealed to babes, that is, unto those who were willing to be led by the Divine in simplicity of heart (see Matthew 11:25). And when He sent forth His disciples, the Lord commanded them to go simply—not to take money, nor bread, nor shoes, nor more than one tunic (see Matthew 10:9-10; Mark 6:8). The things mentioned which the disciples were not to take represent goods and truths which come from the Lord alone. We cannot supply them for ourselves. For example, the one tunic represents Divine truth. All we need to clothe our minds is the truth of the Lord’s Word. We don’t need to carry along spare philosophies to use in different situations. The truths of the Word can be applied in every situation.

Now what about the Heavenly Doctrine? Isn’t it quite complicated? In what sense can it be said to be simple? The Heavenly Doctrine is different from the Old and New Testament scriptures because it contains the *internal sense* of the Word.

Internals are more complex than externals. A simple-looking leaf, for instance, when examined under a microscope is seen to be a marvel of complex order. A seed has within it the potential of a whole plant. There is tremendous energy within a single atom. The Word is like this, also. Countless things are hidden within its literal sense.

If the Heavenly Doctrine seems complicated, then, it is because it reveals internal things—the causes and purposes behind creation and human life. Yet, the principles it presents are essentially simple. The truth that there is one God, for example, has endless meaning within it, but it is a simple truth. It agrees with common perception.

Now most people in the modern world do not have an intuitive perception which enables them to say “yea, yea; nay, nay” without instruction. So, we must come to *good* (which is one—or simple) by means of *truths* (which are many). This is the way our minds are ordered. But the truths of the new revelation, of the Heavenly Doctrine for the New Church, can lead us into a simple faith. This faith contains complex truths and, at the same time, embodies a simple-hearted acknowledgment of the Lord.

Texts: Matthew 5:37; Matthew 6:22-23