

# ***Teaching Sound Doctrine***

## **The Simplicity of the Gospel**

In 2 Corinthians 11:1-3, the apostle Paul introduces a section of his letter which he with these words: "For I am jealous over you with godly jealousy: for I have espoused you to one husband, that I may present you as the chaste virgin to 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." Long ago the prophet Isaiah, speaking of the times of redemption and "the way of holiness," said, "the wayfaring men, though fools, shall not err therein." Thus we have emphasized the simplicity of the gospel of Christ and man's part in God's plan for man.

It is admittedly true that much of the bible is difficult to comprehend in fullness, and many questions we would desire to have answered must remain, for the time, in relative obscurity. Moses said to the people of God long ago, "the secret things belong unto the lord our God: but those things which are revealed belong unto us and to our children for ever, that we may do all the words of this law" (Deuteronomy 29:29). As Peter speaks of the beloved brother in Christ -- Paul -- and his written record he says, "in which (Paul's writings, ref) are some things hard to be understood, which they that are unlearned and unstable wrest, as they do also the other scriptures, unto their own destruction" (2 peter 3:16.)

### **Scriptures are in harmony**

At first glance it would appear that we have two contradictory thoughts set forth in these passages; one the idea of simplicity and certainty of understanding, and the other the idea of difficulty and uncertainty of comprehension. However, when we note the thoughts more carefully this apparent contradiction vanishes completely. Moses said the secret things belong to God, but the revealed things belonged to men so they could "do all the words of the law." this would be impossible for man if he could not understand that which had been given by revelation from God. There is little evidence of the Israelites feeling they were incapable of keeping the law given by Moses because of failure to understand

and comprehend it. Peter says the destruction of which he speaks that may have been influenced in some way by the difficulty of the things Paul had written came about by the wresting of the scriptures. The thought is that they twisted, turned from its proper meaning, or perverted the words of Paul. Note also the description of the individuals mentioned in this action -- the unlearned (those ignorant of spiritual truths, not those with little formal education) and the unstable (those who are without real convictions -- "tossed to and fro, and carried about with every wind of doctrine, by the sleight of men, and cunning craftiness, whereby they lie in wait to deceive" (Ephesians 4:14); the unsteadfast ones who have not the strength of character to put down roots to be able to stand). These are the individuals who not only have problems with the scriptures Paul had written on the difficult subject being discussed in Peter's context, but who are described by Peter as they who "do also (wrest) the other scriptures." it will ever be noted by the careful observer that the individual who does not hesitate to twist and turn the difficult passages will also be free in taking liberties with "the other scriptures" which so clearly set forth man's part in obedience and service in God's plan.

### **The plan has two parts**

A great deal of man's problems is his failure to remember at all times that there are two different aspects clearly set forth in the plan God has given for the salvation of men's souls. There is the part, which belongs to divinity and that which belongs to man. Any time we start delving into the mysteries (unrevealed secrets) of God and trying to understand why God has acted in every instance as he has, or why he did not do something in a different manner, or what the details of the life to come will be, etc., We are going to find many things that are only briefly mentioned and referred to at best. Some questions we have are not even remotely discussed at all, and thus we cannot comprehend and understand these things clearly. On the other hand, when we come to the question of "what must I do to be saved from sins?" the answer is so amazingly simple we cannot miss it unless we have help from those who "lie in wait to deceive," and who wrest "also the other scriptures" to do so.

### **Man's part is simple**

We must believe in God (Hebrews 11:6), in his son Jesus (1 John 3:

23 and John 8:24), and in the gospel as his power to save (Romans 1:16 and Mark 16: 16) for this faith enables one to have the power to become the son of god (John 1: 12): we must repent, which is a duty requiring us to change the mind or controlling will (Luke 13:3 & 5 and Acts 17:30), thus being transformed from the ways and sins of the world unto the good, and acceptable, and perfect will of God by renewed minds (Romans 12: 1-2): we must confess Jesus with our mouths in the presence of men, that he may one day acknowledge us in the presence of God and his angels (Matthew 10:32: Luke 12:8; and Romans 10:9-10): we must obey Christ's command to be baptized (the word means to be immersed. Dipped, submerged, buried, etc.) In water (Acts 10:47) into Christ (Galatians 3:27), and specifically into the death of Christ (Romans 6:3) where He shed His blood to purge us from the dead works of sin (Hebrews 9: 14-22 and 1 Peter 1: 19) that we may be thus saved from the guilt of sin, (Acts 2; and also see 22:16 and 1 Peter 3:21): and, we must walk; in newness of life as new creatures in Christ (Romans 6:4 and 2 Corinthians 5: 17) always abiding in His doctrine and keeping His words (2 John 9 and John 14:23) even unto the point of dying for our convictions if necessary and until this life is no more (Revelation 2:10). Even after becoming Christians we must realize and acknowledge our sins (1 John 1: 8 & 10), repent of them (Acts 8:22), confess them to God and to those against whom we sin (1 John 1:9 and James 5:16) and pray for forgiveness through Jesus Christ our only mediator (Acts 8:22: James 5:16: and 1 Timothy 2:5). Thus, being "kept by the power of God through faith unto salvation ready to be revealed in the last time," we shall receive "the end of your (our) faith, even the salvation of your (our) souls" (1 Peter 1:5 & 9).

### **The simplicity is clearly seen**

In the passage given at the beginning from 2 Corinthians 11:1-3 a comparison was made by the inspired Paul between the simplicity in Christ and the danger of being corrupted there from, and the simplicity in the garden and eve being beguiled and corrupted then by the subtlety of Satan in the form of the serpent. She did not miss the simplicity of the instruction then, nor can we miss it now, unless we are beguiled (deceived) into thinking we can deviate from the simple pattern of faith, repentance, confession of Christ, baptism into Christ for the remission of sins, and a life of faithful service to

God so cleanly revealed in his word.

Perhaps there is no easier way to emphasize the simplicity of the gospel plan for man to point to the readiness of its reception by men of the first century. On the first Pentecost after Christ's resurrection about 3000 souls obeyed the gospel plan after one sermon (Acts 2:41). After the sermon by Peter when the man had been healed at the gate of the temple about 5000 men believed (Acts 4:4). We read quickly of multitudes of believers being added to the Lord of both men and women (Acts 5:14). We read of the number of the disciples multiplying and a great company of priests being obedient to the faith (Acts 6: 7). We see a tremendous success in Samaria as "the people with one accord gave heed unto those things which Philip spake" (Acts: 6), and obeyed the preaching of the truth (Acts:8 12-13). After one session of study with Philip as Christ was preached to him, the Ethiopian nobleman obeyed Christ (Acts:8:26-40). It took only one visit for Ananias to convince Saul of Tarsus he must be baptized into Christ when he was once awakened to the truth that Christ was truly sent from God (Acts 9:1-18). We read of the churches multiplying in Acts 9:31. Cornelius and his household surely obeyed Christ after just one sermon (Acts 10: 1-4). Immediately after the Lord Jesus was preached unto the gentiles in Antioch they believed and turned to the Lord in great numbers (Acts 11: 21 & 24). As we follow Paul and his companions in his preaching tours we find those who believed and obeyed doing so quickly on most occasions. Note especially the accounts of Lydia and her household and the jailer of Philippi and his household in Acts 16:12-34. The gospel and man's part in God's plan had to be a very simple arrangement for mankind to receive and accept it so quickly. It was thus possible for the gospel to be preached to all creation during the short period of the life of Paul (Romans 10:18 and Colossians 1:23).

Do not let anyone deceive and beguile you with regard to the simplicity that is true of the plan for you to get into Christ, nor the simplicity that is in Christ after one obeys the gospel. We shall note the simplicity of the Christian's life in a later article. In the meantime, will you not obey "from the heart that form of doctrine which was delivered you," so that "being then made free from sin, ye" can become "the servants of righteousness" (Romans 6:1 7-18)?