

Simplicity

By the Rev. Derek Elphick

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INTRODUCTION

There's a part of us that scoffs at the idea of simplicity.

We have experience tapping us on the shoulder every day, reminding us that life is far from simple...

Some of us

- worry about finances
- or health concerns
- or challenges at work
- strained relationships with loved ones and friends
- or the disappointment of broken dreams

We have plenty of situations we know can't be solved by a simple fix...

So when somebody suggests a simple solution to a complex problem

we tend to dismiss it as naive, unsophisticated

...woefully inadequate to the task at hand.

A common refrain, when asked how a difficult or tense situation is going, is for us to shrug and say,

"It's complicated."

Today, I'd like to suggest that while we can't avoid facing the confusing and complicated parts of life in this world, the Lord nevertheless wants us to strive towards simplicity, whenever the opportunity presents itself...

because this *approach*

this *spiritual practice*

...promises to center us, anchor us, and keep us open to the influence of the Lord and His angels.

...promises to keep us focused on the things that really matter in life

SIMPLE OR COMPLICATED?

Ecclesiastes 7:29 says,

"God made us simple; our complex problems are of our own devising."

It's refreshing to be reminded that the Lord didn't create us to live in a fog of complexity and confusion.

Of course, a fair amount of life's complexity is thrust upon us...
through no fault of our own

But we can still make things more complicated than they need to be...

When it comes to trying to say or do the right thing...

much of the confusion, hesitation, inaction, or procrastination we experience can be traced back to the influence of the hells

who, as we know, hate the light (truth/clarity)

and who therefore strive to keep us in the dark (falsity/confusion).

Evil spirits do this by *"relaxing all restraints"* on our thinking and willing...

so that our efforts, our works, end up being half-hearted, or as the book of Revelation says, "neither hot nor cold" (Rev. 3:15; AE 233:4, 239:3).

Think of the *tactics* that evil spirits use to keep us from taking a simple approach to life...

They...

- distract us
- induce boredom
- inject lethargy and laziness into our mind/spirit
- trigger cynical, negative thought patterns

And they...

try to keep us locked in an earthly mindset...

in which we only believe what we can touch & see & feel in this world
(what the Writings call sensory or sensual thinking)

- which cuts us off from the influx of heaven (see HH 602; AC 5089).

Note: this last tactic of evils spirits may not sound particularly threatening or dangerous, but it's probably the **single biggest reason why we don't opt for taking a simple approach to life's challenges.**

Let's explore why.

HOW DO THE WRITINGS DEFINE THE "SIMPLE?"

Writings refer to the "simple" a lot.

To our modern ears, "simple" seems like a derogatory term, but the Writings are introducing a much bigger concept...

a mindset, a way of living...

- that HELPS us, *not* hinders us, on our path toward spiritual growth and development

Who are the simple?

The uneducated

The educated
 Those in the church
 Those out of the church
 Those who are intelligent
 Those who are not so intelligent
 Those who are wise
 Those who are not so wise

We learn about the *strengths* of the simple...

Some...

Readily accept the afterlife (AC 3482, 6053)
 Accept the truth as the truth (AC 589)
 Protected from the "diabolical crew" (AC 1667:3)
 Can see spiritual causes easily (AC 10185:4)
 Can rise above sensory evidence and accept spiritual realities (AC 5089)
 Live charitable lives (AC 3986:5)
 Capable of knowing "matters of angelic wisdom" (AC 4269)

And, at the same time, we learn about the *vulnerability* of the simple...

Some...

Susceptible to falsity (AC 1106)
 Susceptible to the fallacies of the senses (AC 4788:2)
 Can get led astray by 'signs and wonders,' superstitions (AC 3900:3)
 Accept the truth on the say-so of someone else (AC 4653)
 Can get led astray by "sheep in wolves clothing" (AE 624:2)

At first glance, these descriptions of the simple seem to contradict each other...

How can some be "strong" and "clear-sighted" and some be "weak" and "vulnerable" and easily led astray?

To answer this question, let's dig a little deeper.

The teachings of the New Church speak about...

"the simple in faith and heart" whose mindset permits them to remain open to the "influx out of heaven" (HH 602).

An important reason is given:

The simple in faith and heart don't allow physical, sensory evidence to cloud their judgment, and the teaching goes on to say:

"and have not let worldly knowledge snuff out what is implanted in them from heaven" (HH 74; AC 5089).

This explains why the "simple" fall into these different categories...

You see, knowledge (an education) is a two-edged sword...

- too *little* of it runs the risk of making people vulnerable, open to being taken advantage of
- whereas too *much* of it runs the risk of making people arrogant, of thinking they don't need God or religion

And so obviously there needs to be a middle-ground.

And it is the teachings that speak to this "middle-ground" that we turn to now...

to what we could call the *discipline* of being "simple in heart."

THE DISCIPLINE OF SIMPLICITY

Many teachings say the simple in heart accept a heavenly way of living more readily than others because...

"in their ideas there is no doubting [the truth] or negativity as there is the ideas of those who think they are wise..." (SE 2663)

the simple in heart *"take the Word of the Lord at face value, believing it with a simple heart, thinking, 'Since the Lord said it, it is true" (AC 589).*

And *"instead of smothering their rational mind [with endless arguments] the simple in heart nurture their mind by means of the Word of the Lord" (AC 196).*

[PAUSE]

The Lord wants us to keep things simple because...

simplicity of heart is the gateway to all the joys and delights of heaven

it serves as a "gateway" because innocence, a *willingness to be led by the Lord*, is at the core of this spiritual practice (HH 278).

Simplicity is not a liability.

It's a virtue.

It means striving to be of "one mind"

It's worth noting that the word "simple" is related to the word, "single" especially in Greek and Latin. This is where we get the phrase, "single-minded."

A simple or single-minded approach to life is...

...where our inner and outer thoughts and feelings match
don't clash or contradict each other (AR 294; TC 443:2)

In our reading today,

"In the spiritual world people do not possess two levels of speech, but a single one...

"...there, people speak as they think" (AR 294)

This is the point, the goal...

To be of one mind, one heart, one soul.

Simplifying our lives gives us the freedom to think and act in the way the Lord intends.

The opposite - *duplicity*, in which we are double-minded - saying or thinking one way but acting in another - is what creates much of the confusion and hurt and complexity we experience in this world (AR 294).

This is why the Scriptures say:

"Let your 'Yes,' be 'Yes,' and your 'No,' 'No.' For whatever is more than this is from the evil one" (Mt. 5:37)

Because *"No one can serve two masters..." (Mt. 6:24)*

Therefore, *"Seek first the kingdom of God" (Mt. 6:33).*

THE GIFT OF SIMPLICITY

To act with simplicity is a gift.

Simplifying things, whether that be clutter in our house or breaking a complicated problem down to size, is an inherently *appealing and satisfying activity*.

It brings order and peace to an otherwise chaotic world.

It means doing simple "acts" like opening the Word, saying a prayer, reading the Word, saying thank-you or sorry (simple things that evil spirits try very hard to stop us doing).

Deep down inside we're drawn to the mindset of simplicity because...

it draws on a freedom we desperately want

a freedom that acts in unison with the Lord's goals and purposes,
 which, as the Psalmist writes, fulfills the Lord's goal...
 of "*making wise the simple*" (Ps. 19:7).

CONCLUSION

When the opportunity presents itself to simplify our life in the fog of complexity and confusion...

Let us remember to resist the influence (and lies) of the hells...

who scoff at the idea of simplicity and innocence
 who tell us this approach won't work
 who tell us that we're being naive and unsophisticated
 who try to keep our mind locked in an earthly mindset where the truths of the Word are viewed as irrelevant, unimportant

Instead, let us embrace this angelic approach, this spiritual discipline, and see it for what it is - a gateway to the Lord's heavenly kingdom.

Let us accept the Lord's invitation to be as "wise as serpents and simple as doves" (Mt. 10:16)

Let us be like the simple in heart who "*nurture their mind by means of the Word*" (AC 196)...

Practicing the discipline of simplicity will...

center us

anchor us

and keep us open to the influence of the Lord and His angels.

AMEN.