

The Simplicity of Faith and the Ribbons of Blue

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The Simplicity That Is in Christ

Second Corinthians 11:3 records one of Paul's deepest anxieties for those he had cared for: 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 thought is not that we should be unintelligent, or naive in our understanding. The word simplicity here — better rendered in the Christ, pointing to that mystical relationship with Christ and His body in the heavenlies — means uncorrupted as to the apprehension of the testimony. The danger Paul feared was not ignorance but a sophistication that would displace the simple and pure grasp of what Christ is and what we are in Him.

That simplicity is most purely on display in the patriarchs of Genesis. J. N. Bellett observed that the simplicity of patriarchal faith is very remarkable. There was nothing of the spirit of bondage in the Genesis saints. The patriarchs walked in the assurance that God was their God, His promises their portion, and the city and land of glory their inheritance. They lived and died in the spirit of faith. No suspicions, no questionings, no mistrust of grace defiled their souls. They were as children who had never yet been from home — in infancy, in the best sense, moving in the presence of God in a spirit of complete confidence that their Father's house was their home.

Abraham, told to leave his country and his kindred and his father's house, left. He did not ask where he was going or how he would know when he arrived. He went. Told to offer up his only son, his son of promise, he rose early in the

morning, saddled his donkey, and made for Moriah. He did not argue. He did not delay. He went. That is the simplicity of faith — not the absence of understanding, but the absence of the complicated negotiations between the soul and God that characterise a faith that has begun to distrust.

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2 Corinthians 11:3*

Mary and Martha — Choosing the Good Part

The story of Mary and Martha is a small but precise illustration of this simplicity. Martha was occupied — preparing, serving, doing things that were genuinely good. We are told elsewhere that with such sacrifices God is well pleased: hospitality, the practical care of those who come to us. There was nothing wrong with what Martha was doing in itself.

But Mary sat at the feet of the Lord and heard His word. And the Lord said she had chosen the good part. Not the better part — the Scripture does not say better. It says good. The one good part. The one thing that is simply and completely right, the thing that cannot be set aside or crowded out by other concerns, however worthy those concerns may be: to be in the presence of the Lord, listening to Him.

Martha complicated things. She was distracted, troubled about many things, worked up and distressed, and eventually she came to the Lord to complain that her sister was not helping. The service she was doing in her own strength had become a burden rather than a joy. She had lost the simplicity of faith — the quiet confidence that the most important thing is always to be at His feet. Mary had kept it.

Peter Sitting Among Them — When Separation Is Lost

Luke 22 records one of the saddest details of the night of the Lord's betrayal. After He was arrested and led to the house of the high priest, the soldiers and servants lit a fire in the courtyard. And Peter sat down among them. He followed, as it says, afar off. And he sat with them.

The contrast with what the early Christians did when Peter was in prison is pointed. They did not go and sit with the soldiers to see what would happen. They gathered in a house and prayed. They had a resource and they used it. Peter, in the courtyard, had that same resource — but he was not using it. He wanted to see what was going to happen. He was curious. He was concerned. And perhaps those were real feelings. But the action they led him to was the loss of separation.

It has been said, and it is true, that when we lose our separation our soul is in declension. The moment Peter sat down among those who were the Lord's enemies, something was already wrong in his soul. The denials that followed came from a soul that had already compromised its ground. The seed was planted in the courtyard; the fruit grew from seed that had already been sown.

Peter had said, confidently, that even if everyone else abandoned the Lord, he would not. That confidence was the sign of a man who thought he had some strength in himself. He did not understand what he was. When he discovered that he had no strength, when the cock crowed and the Lord turned and looked at him, he went out and wept bitterly. The weeping was right. The soul was being restored. But the path to that point had been the loss of separation, in the courtyard, beside the fire.

Samson — Separation, Strength, and the Downward Stair

The life of Samson traces the same principle on a much larger canvas. Judges 14 opens with him going down to Timnah and seeing a woman of the daughters of the Philistines. He came back and told his parents: she pleases me well, take her for me. His parents asked the right question: is there no woman among the

daughters of thy brethren among all my people, that thou goest to take a wife of the uncircumcised Philistines? And Samson's answer was final: she pleases me well.

He was not guarding his eye. He was not practicing separation. And from that moment, though the Spirit of the Lord continued to come upon him and he continued to do mighty things, the path was downward. His marriage ended in betrayal. He moved to Delilah. He told her, eventually, the true secret of his strength. She had him shorn while he slept. He awoke and did not know that the Lord had departed from him.

The sequence is worth tracing: Samson gave up separation — and lost his strength. Lost his strength — and lost his liberty. Lost his liberty — and lost his sight. Lost his sight — and lost his life. Each loss flowed from the one before it. The root was the abandonment of separation at the gate of Timnah, when he saw a woman that pleased him and would not be turned aside.

And he knew not that Jehovah had departed from him. And the Philistines laid hold on him, and put out his eyes. — Judges 16:20–21

The end of Samson's life was, in one sense, his greatest moment — he slew more of the enemy in his death than in his life. But that is a mercy of God, not a redemption of the choices that led to the millstone and the prison house and the blindness. The grace that used even Samson's death for God's purposes does not erase the long, sad cost of a life lived without separation.

The Ribbons of Blue — A Heavenly Reminder

Numbers 15:37–40 records an instruction that seems small but carries a large weight: God told Israel to make tassels on the corners of their garments, and to attach to each tassel a lace of blue. The purpose was explicit: that ye may look upon it and remember all the commandments of Jehovah and do them, and that ye seek not after the lusts of your own heart and your own eyes, after which ye go

a-whoring.

Blue in Scripture broadly speaks of heavenly things. The commandments in their original context were for Israel as an earthly people, and the blue ribbon was a reminder of the God who had brought them up out of Egypt. For us, the reminder is different in application but the same in principle. Our commonwealth has its existence in the heavens. We are heavenly people. Our interests, our true home, the government under which we live — all of it is in heaven, not on earth.

Many Christians have not understood this. They act as though their commonwealth is here on the earth — engaged in political campaigns, seeking to pass laws and elect candidates, investing their energy in the governing of nations. That is understandable in one who does not see the heavenly calling clearly. But for those who do see it, that kind of engagement is a loss of separation. It is to sit down beside the fire in the courtyard. It is to take a wife in Timnah. And it leads the same direction.

Ye seek not after the lusts of your own heart and your own eyes... that ye may remember and do all my commandments and be holy unto your God.
— Numbers 15:39–40

The ribbons of blue were not primarily a burden laid on Israel. They were a mercy — a visible, daily, physical reminder that they belonged to God, that they were different from the nations, that they had a calling and a God who had brought them out. So too for us. The heavenly calling is a mercy. The reminder that our commonwealth is in the heavens is a kindness that lifts us out of the mire of earthly entanglement and sets our feet in a large room.

Our Commonwealth Is in the Heavens

Philippians 3:20 states it plainly: our commonwealth has its existence in the heavens, from which also we await the Lord Jesus Christ as Saviour, who shall transform our body of humiliation into conformity to His body of glory. A

commonwealth is a system of law and government that orders life. The commonwealth that governs us, that defines our obligations and our rights and our identity, is not any earthly nation or political structure. It is in the heavens.

That has a direct bearing on separation. If my commonwealth is in the heavens, I do not fight the battles of earthly commonwealths. I am subject to earthly governments — the Scripture is clear about that, and we obey the laws of the land except where they directly conflict with God's commands. But I am not a participant in their contests. The machinations by which believers have sought to move earthly politics in a more righteous direction have consistently produced the same result: not the change they hoped for, and a loss of their own separation in the process. The Lord laughs at the nations who think they can engineer things. Why would His people want to be part of that?

Our separation is the ribbons of blue. It is the daily, visible, practical reminder that we are heavenly people — that as we move through this world, our identity and our interests and our home are not here. That reminder is what keeps us. Without it, the heart and the eyes begin to wander, as they did with Samson, as they did with Peter, as they did with Israel again and again until Babylon took them. With it — with the consistent reminder that we belong to another order, and that our Lord is coming to take us to it — we can walk in that simplicity that Paul longed for in his converts: uncorrupted, unentangled, looking up.

The Lord Remembers the Kindness of Youth — Restoration

When Peter denied the Lord three times and went out weeping, the story was not over. Jeremiah 2:2 gives us the Lord's own word: I remember for thee the kindness of thy youth, the love of thine espousals, when thou wentest after me in the wilderness. That is the Lord speaking of what He holds onto in those who are His, even when they have failed.

Peter's restoration in the soul came before the public restoration in John 21. When the disciples were fishing and John said from the shore, it is the Lord, Peter did not wait for the boat to land. He jumped into the water and swam. That was not the action of a man estranged from the Lord. Something had already happened between Peter and the Lord, quietly, privately — probably in the brief and unrecorded meeting mentioned in Luke 24:34: the Lord is indeed risen and has appeared to Simon. The Lord had seen to the restoration before He dealt publicly with the failure.

That is the remedy for lost separation. It is not trying harder, or resolving more firmly, or steeling the will. It is time with the Lord — looking at the ribbons of blue, remembering who He is and what He has done and what we are to Him, and letting Him restore what has been lost. He is not looking on us unkindly. He remembers the kindness of our youth. And He stands ready, as He stood ready for Peter, to restore and to recommission. The soul that knows this will not linger beside the fire in the courtyard. It will go back to the upper room and pray.