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Simplicity of the Gospel— P6

“But I am afraid that, as the serpent deceived Eve by his craftiness, your minds will be led astray from the simplicity and purity of devotion to Christ” (2 Corinthians 11:3).

The Gospel for Salvation is very simple to understand—after all, Jesus came *“to preach the gospel to the poor”* (Matt. 4:18b), not intellectuals. Yet, the New Testament is also filled with some complexity, especially the Epistles with their directions on how to live and their detailed expectations for our behavior towards others for the sake of Christ. How do we reconcile the simplicity with the complexity?

First, what is the Gospel? *“For this is the will of My Father, that everyone who beholds the Son and believes in Him will have eternal life, and I Myself will raise him up on the last day”* (Jn. 6:40). To believe in Jesus is more than just acknowledging His existence—it is to *“believe in His name”* (Jn. 1:12b). Indeed, John says, *“these have been written so that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God; and that believing you may have life in His name”* (Jn. 20:30-31). *“Of Him all the prophets bear witness that through His name everyone who believes in Him receives forgiveness of sins”* (Acts 10:43). Believing in the name of Jesus is marital terminology—you are taking His name as your own, entrusting your life to Him, acknowledging His headship (responsibility over your life), His provision, His sufficiency, His protection, trusting His promises, and honoring Him. We are Justified before God by our union with Jesus, for God accepts Jesus’ payment for our debt of sin through His Headship over us, having been made *“one spirit with Him”* (1 Cor. 6:17).

In contrast, the Epistles are more complex because they are largely dealing with Sanctification—the process of Believers maturing in

their knowledge, behavior, and responsibilities to the Lord under the teaching and management of the indwelling Holy Spirit—seeking to live the most rewarding and pleasing lives to God. The Apostles taught Sanctification to already Justified Believers at Antioch: *“It seemed good to the Holy Spirit and to us to lay upon you no greater burden than these essentials: that you abstain from things sacrificed to idols and from blood and from things strangled and from fornication; if you keep yourselves free from such things, you will do well”* (Acts 15:28-29); and *“make every effort to supplement your faith with virtue, and virtue with knowledge, and knowledge with self-control, and self-control with steadfastness, and steadfastness with godliness, and godliness with brotherly affection, and brotherly affection with love. For if these qualities are yours and are increasing, they keep you from being ineffective or unfruitful in the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ”* (2 Pt. 1:5-8 ESV).

In large part, the Epistles instruct Believers how to avoid the harm towards others, self-harm, collateral damage, and all-around destructiveness that flows from acting in our sin nature and our ignorance of the knowledge and expectations of God. The Apostles set us on the straightest road possible as we begin our walk with the Lord to be pleasing to Him and to avoid carrying on the immense consequences of sinful behavior in our lives. These directions are generally not necessary for salvation, but without them, we live very unfruitful, damaging lives, and will be disqualified from the eternal rewards. This is why it is so important to be sober and take Sanctification seriously. Growing in the Lord through Sanctification is not an optional bonus—it is essential for this life and the next. May we all live to honor the Lord in our thoughts, words, and actions—growing in maturity and responsibility into the fullness of Christ. Even so, Amen.

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