

LETTER XXIII

On Simplicity and Godly Sincerity.

Dear Sir,

IT would be a happy time if all professors of the gospel could, with the apostle, rejoice in the testimony of their consciences, that they walked in simplicity and godly sincerity. How many evils and scandals would be then prevented! But, alas! too many who name the name of Christ seem to have hardly any idea of this essential part of the Christian character. A few thoughts upon a subject so little attended to may not be unseasonable. The most advanced in the Christian life have something of this lesson yet to learn; and the greater proficiency we make in it, the greater will be our inward peace, and the more will our light shine before men, to the glory of our heavenly Father.

Simplicity and sincerity, though inseparable, may be distinguished. The former is the principle from which the latter is derived. Simplicity primarily respects the frame of our spirit in the sight of God; sincerity more directly regards our conduct as it falls under the observation of men. It is true, the terms are frequently used indifferently for each other, and may be so without occasioning any considerable mistake; but as they are not precisely the same, it may be proper, if we would speak accurately, to keep this distinction in view.

Some persons who have been more enamoured with the *name* of simplicity than acquainted with its *nature*, have substituted in its stead a childishness of language and manners, as if they understood the word *simple* only in the mere vulgar sense, as equivalent to *foolish*. But this infantine softness gives just disgust to those who have a true taste and judgment of divine things; not only as it is an unnecessary deviation from the common usages of mankind, but because, being the effect of art and imitation, it palpably defeats its own pretences.

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An artificial or affected simplicity is a contradiction in terms, and differs as much from the simplicity of the gospel as paint does from beauty.

The true simplicity, which is the honour and strength of a believer, is the effect of a spiritual perception of the truths of the gospel. It arises from, and bears a proportion to, the sense we have of our own unworthiness, the power and grace of Christ, and the greatness of our obligations to him. So far as our knowledge of these things is vital and experimental, it will make us simple-hearted. This simplicity may be considered in two respects: a simplicity of intention,—and a simplicity of dependence. The former stands in opposition to the corrupt workings of self, the latter to the false reasonings of unbelief.

Simplicity of intention implies, that we have but one leading aim, to which it is our deliberate and unreserved desire, that everything else in which we are concerned may be subordinate and subservient. In a word, that we are devoted to the Lord, and have by grace been enabled to choose him, and to yield ourselves to him, so as to place our happiness in his favour, and to make his glory and will the ultimate scope of all our actions. He well deserves this from us. He is the all-sufficient good. He alone is able to satisfy the vast capacity he has given us; for he formed us for himself: and they who have tasted he is gracious, know that "his loving-kindness is better than life;" and that his presence and fulness can supply the want or make up the loss of all creature comforts. So likewise he has a just claim to us that we should be wholly his: for, besides that, as his creatures, we are in his hand as clay in the hands of the potter, he has a redemption-title to us. He loved us, and bought us with his own blood. He did not hesitate or halt between two opinions, when he engaged to redeem our souls from the curse of the law, and the power of Satan. He could, in the hour of his distress, have summoned legions of angels (had that been needful) to his assistance, or have destroyed his enemies with a word or a look; he could easily have saved himself: but how then could his people have been saved, or the promises of the Scripture have been fulfilled? Therefore he willingly endured the cross, he gave his back to the smiters, he poured out his blood, he laid down his life. Here was

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an adorable simplicity of intention in him; and shall we not, O thou lover of souls! be simply, heartily, and wholly thine? Shall we refuse the cup of affliction from thy hand, or for thy sake? Or shall we desire to drink of the cup of sinful pleasure, when we remember what our sins have cost thee? Shall we wish to be loved by the world that hated thee, or to be admired by the world that despised thee? Shall we be ashamed of professing our attachment to such a Saviour? Nay, Lord, forbid it. Let thy love constrain us, let thy name be glorified, and thy will be done by us and in us. "Let us count all things loss and dung for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus our Lord." Let us not desire any thing thou seest fit to withhold, nor repine to part with what thou callest for; nor even take pleasure in what thou bestowest, unless we can improve it for thee, and ever prefer thy love above our chief temporal joy. Such is the language of the heart that is blessed with gospel simplicity. It was once the strong-hold of sin, the throne of self; but now self is cast down, and Jesus rules by the golden sceptre of love. This principle preserves the soul from low, sordid, and idolatrous pursuits, will admit of no rival near the Beloved, nor will it yield either to the bribes or threats of the world.

There is likewise a simplicity of dependence. Unbelief is continually starting objections, magnifying and multiplying difficulties. But faith in the power and promises of God, inspires a noble simplicity, and casts every care upon him, who is able and has engaged to support and provide. Thus, when Abraham, at the Lord's call, forsook his country and his father's house, the apostle observes, "He went out, not knowing whither he went." It was enough that he knew whom he followed. The all-sufficient God was his guide, his shield, and his exceeding great reward. So when exercised with long waiting for the accomplishment of a promise, he staggered not, οὐ διεκρίθη, he did not dispute or question, but simply depended upon God, who had spoken, and was able also to perform. So likewise when he received that hard command, to offer up his son, of whom it was said, "In Isaac shall thy seed be called," he simply obeyed, and depended upon the Lord to make good his own word, Heb. xi. 18, 19. In this spirit David went forth to meet Goliath, and overcame him: and thus the three

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worthies were unawed by the threats of Nebuchadnezzar, and rather chose to be cast into a burning furnace than to sin against the Lord. And thus Elijah, in a time of famine, was preserved from anxiety and want, and supported by extraordinary methods, 1 Kings i. 14. In these times we do not expect miracles in the strict sense of the word; but they who simply depend upon the Lord, will meet with such tokens of his interposition in a time of need, as will, to themselves at least, be a satisfying proof that he careth for them. How comfortable is it to us, as well as ornamental to our profession, to be able to trust the Lord in the path of duty! to believe that he will supply our wants, direct our steps, plead our cause, and control our enemies! Thus he has promised, and it belongs to gospel simplicity to take his word against all discouragements. This will animate us in the use of all lawful means, because the Lord has commanded us to wait upon him in them: but it will likewise inspire confidence and hope when all means seem to fail, Hab. iii. 17, 18. For want of this dependence many dishonour their profession, and even make shipwreck of the faith. Their hearts are not simple; they do not trust in the Lord, but lean unto their own understandings, and their hopes or fears are influenced by worms like themselves. This causes a duplicity of conduct. They fear the Lord, and serve other gods. By their language, at some times, one would suppose they desire to serve the Lord only; but, as if they feared that he was not able to protect or provide for them, they make a league with the world, and seek either security or advantage from sinful compliances. These cannot rejoice in the testimony of a good conscience. They must live miserably. They are attempting to reconcile what our Lord has declared to be utterly incompatible, the service of God and mammon. They have so much sense of religion as embitters their worldly pursuits; and so much regard to the world as prevents their receiving any real comfort from religion. These are the lukewarm professors, neither hot nor cold; neither approved of men, nor accepted of God. They can attend upon ordinances, and speak like Christians; but their tempers are unsanctified, and their conduct irregular and blameable. They are not simple; and therefore they cannot be sincere.

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I need not take time to prove, that the effect of simplicity will be sincerity. For they who love the Lord above all, who prefer the light of his countenance to thousands of gold and silver, who are enabled to trust him with all their concerns, and would rather be at his disposal than at their own, will have but little temptation to insincerity. The principles and motives upon which their conduct is formed, are the same in public as in private. Their behaviour will be all of a piece, because they have but one design. They will speak the truth in love, observe a strict punctuality in their dealings, and do unto others as they would others should do unto them; because these things are essential to their great aim of glorifying and enjoying their Lord. A fear of dishonouring his name, and of grieving his Spirit, will teach them not only to avoid gross and known sins, but to abstain from all appearance of evil. Their conduct will therefore be consistent; and they will be enabled to appeal to all who know them, "that in simplicity and godly sincerity, not in fleshly wisdom, but by the grace of God, they have had their conversation in the world." Corl. 12

To a sincere Christian, that craft and cunning which passes for wisdom in the world, appears to be not only unlawful but unnecessary. He has no need of the little reserves, evasions, and disguises, by which designing men endeavour (though often in vain) to conceal their proper characters, and to escape deserved contempt. He is what he seems to be, and therefore is not afraid of being found out. He walks by the light of the wisdom that is from above, and leans upon the arm of almighty power; therefore he walks at liberty, trusting in the Lord, whom he serves with his spirit in the gospel of his Son.

I am, &c.