

April 2, 2008 | Prestonwood Connection | Prestonwood Baptist Church, Plano, TX

“Out of complexity, find simplicity.”

—Albert Einstein

These few, but choice words, comprise not only great advice for those who are scientists and physicists, but also for every contemporary Christian.

Paul’s warning and concern: 2 Corinthians 11:3

Paul compared the danger they were facing to that in which Eve faced with Satan, the serpent in the Garden of Eden. Like it or not, good or bad snakes get attention.

Illustration—snake in the garden

There is a tendency to get side tracked and off course. Paul was personally concerned for this church because of “false teachers” who were taking advantage of his absence—slipped in, took opportunity, led astray . . . likely to get separated, isolated and destroyed.

Paul writes as a church leader with a message to the church. He was concerned for the well being of the church. His concern was not just the simplicity of individuals whose minds may be twisted, but also a group whose hearts and witness may be divided.

Last Week: Simple Faith
Tonight: Simple Church

The first gathered biblical community is describe in Acts 2—“group photo”

“And they continued steadfastly in the apostles’ doctrine and fellowship, in the breaking of bread, and in prayers. Then fear came upon every soul, and many wonders and signs were done through the apostles. Now all who believed were together, and had all things in common, and sold their

possessions and goods, and divided them among all, as anyone had need. So continuing daily with one accord in the temple, and breaking bread from house to house, they ate their food with gladness and **simplicity** of heart, praising God and having favor with all the people. And the Lord added to the church daily those who were being saved (Acts 2:42-48 NKJV).

Simplicity created strength, beauty and identity for the church. They showed undividedness and oneness of heart. They showed beauty of true biblical community and common identity in Christ.

SIMPLY STATED:

Church is a Believing Community, Not Just a Belonging Community

I told you last week, the background of all this was Paul’s great fear and concern for the church—a twisted belief like that accomplished by Satan with Eve in the Garden of Eden.

2 Corinthians 11:1-2

Descriptive language: 2 Corinthians 11:1. Paul speaks of “jealousy” (Hosea, Old Testament). God is a “jealous” God. God wants pure and uninhibited devotion—like a husband and wife.

New matchmakers have come in to call you to find a new lover—note “The Bachelor”

Many matchmaker shows on TV today—reality “marriage brokers” and lots of viewers with hidden fantasies and dreams. (Bachelor—plot—dairy of the departed—on line—demeaning to women—like cattle at an auction in Ft. Worth?)

There are possibilities of losing purity and simplicity of faith for the church.

The Church begins with Christ.
Acts 2:22-24, 37-38

Faith is clearly defined. It was the precedent and prerequisite for those being added to the Church.

Acts 2:40-41

Jealousy is zeal for God's causes, but also reflects God's own character.

Issue today:

Oprah is one of the most likable, powerful, wealthy and high profile people today. Oprah is a great person and personality.

(Video, Oprah's *A New Earth*).

—10-week web event with Eckhart Tolle...from 200,000 into the millions.

"Eckhart Tolle, spiritual teacher and author, was born in Germany and educated at the Universities of London and Cambridge. At the age of twenty-nine a profound inner transformation radically changed the course of his life... Eckhart's profound yet simple teachings have already helped countless people throughout the world find inner peace and greater fulfillment in their lives. At the core of the teachings lies the transformation of consciousness, a spiritual awakening that he sees as the next step in human evolution. An essential aspect of this awakening consists in transcending our ego-based state of consciousness. This is a prerequisite not only for personal happiness but also for the ending of violent conflict endemic on our planet." (http://eckharttolle.com/eckhart_biography)

"I'm all inclusive... but I will not tolerate you being exclusive." (Oprah)

The message of Christ is exclusive. It defines the identity of our faith and the character of our God. We cannot escape the reality or consequence of defined belief in the Christian church.

Christ is the beginning and the end of all faith for the Christian—definitive faith—believing, then belonging.

Church is a Relationship, Not an Organization

"Here is the church, here is the steeple, open the doors and see all the people."

My love is not the focus on a building, but the connection it represents. We are connected with other believers in Christ.

The Christian life is one of relationship with God that brings us into fellowship with other believers. It is a relationship forged and formed by faith—all beginning and ending with Christ.

Colossians 1:15-23

This is a transformational relationship—with God, other believers, the world.

It is the reality that Christ and Christ alone has saved us out of individual isolation and alienation, and placed us into a new relationship within a community of faith.

Almost everything God has commissioned the church to do involves personal responsibility within the context of interpersonal relationships.

Word pictures concerning the Church:

Building—Ephesians 2:19-22

Body—Ephesians 4:15-16

Flock—1 Peter 5:1-2

Family—Ephesians 1:3-5; 3:14-15

Biblical community = a relational quality that gives credible witness to the reality of Christ in us.

"This community is not merely the social gathering of people with common values, but rather a people who display proof of God's redemptive work in the world. This 'proof' flows forth from converted individuals whose transformation is authenticated through their interaction with each other. This community, the church, is intended to bear testimony to the restoration of fellowship with God and each other—a community of self-sacrificing love and support that stands in stark contrast to the fallen world. Jesus himself established this as the authenticating fact of our faith when he said, 'By this all people will know you are my disciples, if

you have love for one another' (John 13:35). Was this not the preeminent testimony of the first century church in which 'they had all things in common?'" —Michael Craven

Church is a Reciprocal in Function, Not Individual For Consumption

Many times clubs have "reciprocals." You belong to one, but have access to many.

God has placed us in a common or community relationship that we should function together and then provide instruction for this purpose.

There is a "corporateness" to the Great Commission and every command given to the New Testament church. One fascinating study is to see this thematically in Scripture.

Reciprocal Commands
It's all about what you do for others, not yourself!

Reciprocal Commands: 19 Positive

1. Love one another, John 13:34-35
2. Receive one another, Romans 15:7
3. Greet one another, Romans 16:16
4. Care for one another, 1 Cor. 12:24
5. Submit one to the other, Eph. 5:18-21
6. Forbear one another, Eph. 4:1-3
7. Confess your sins one to another, James 5:16
8. Forgive one another, Colossians 3:12-13
9. Be kind one to another, Eph. 4:32-33
10. Serve one another, Galatians 5:13-14
11. Bear one another's burdens, Galatians 6:2
12. Be hospitable to one another, 1 Peter 4:9
13. Pray for one another, James 5:16
14. Build up one another, Rom. 14:19; 1 Thes. 5:11
15. Teach one another, Colossians 3:16
16. Exhort one another, Hebrews 3:12-13
17. Admonish one another, Colossians 3:16
18. Speak to one another in psalms, hymns, Eph. 5:18
19. Prefer one another, Romans 12:9-10

Reciprocal Commands: 7 Negative

1. Do not judge one another, Romans 14:13
2. Do not speak evil of one another, James 4:11
3. Do not murmur against one another, James 5:9
4. Do not bite and devour one another, Gal. 5:25-26
5. Do not provoke one another, Gal. 5:25-26
6. Do not envy one another, Gal. 5:25-26
7. Do not lie to one another, Col. 3:9-11

Consumerism is and has destroyed the church in America.

Distributed love

Simple statements, but vital, functional truth for developing and displaying faith in the world.

"The Christian church is not a static institution. It is men and women who flesh out in daily life the message of faith, the reality of the risen Christ."

—Myron Augsburger