

The Challenge of Simplicity

The following is taken from an interview with Clifford Schrock conducted by Reagan Schrock.

What is the “simple life”? The simple life is often defined as canning food, making your own clothes, having campfires, and things of that sort. Maybe that’s part of it, but that’s not really what the simple life is all about. Simple life is about having a singleness of focus. In 2 Corinthians 11:3, Paul uses the word simplicity: “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 word simplicity is drawn from the Greek ἀπλότης (hap-lot’-ace), which means singleness or sincerity, the opposite of hypocrisy. Os Guinness spoke of the concept of “an audience of one,”¹ living with a single focus towards God, a single eye like Jesus talks about in Matthew chapter 5. Mark 12:30-31 speaks of this as well when it says, “And thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind, and with all thy strength: this is the first commandment. And the second is like, namely this, Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself.”

The simple life is not a list of “do this” or “do that.” It is not just an idea or a theological concept. The simple life needs to be woven into the fabric of our lives. Singleness of mind and focus is about discipleship. It’s about following the Master and learning to talk, think and live like Him. The simplicity of discipleship is wanting to be like Christ, to take on the mind of Christ; “Let this mind be in you, which was also in Christ Jesus.”(Philippians 2:5)

From a theological or philosophical perspective, the simple life is a worldview. It is taking the words of Jesus and the writings of the New Testament seriously, putting them into shoe leather in our lives. Sometimes we reduce the Christian life to checking boxes, thinking that we can check off the right boxes and thereby live a simple life. But the simple life is much bigger than that. It’s a way of thinking about life with a single goal and focus, which is to do the will of the Father. Jesus had conflicting desires; we can see this very clearly in the Garden of

Gethsemane. He would have had conflicting desires throughout His human life, but He had a single goal and that was to do the will of the Father.

The simple life can look pretty complex, but really it comes down to just loving people, loving the Lord our God, and loving our neighbor as ourselves. It is having a singleness of focus and doing whatever God calls you to do. If He calls you to Tibet, then the simple life is to follow His call to Tibet. If He calls you to live in Lancaster County, then the simple life is to follow Him in Lancaster County. It would be much easier to check off five or six boxes and say, "Now I've got it." It's much more difficult to follow the heart of God. Jesus said, "If any man will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross daily, and follow me." (Luke 9:23) As humans we live with conflicting desires. We want our own way, but as followers of Jesus we know we should do it His way.

The simple life, as I understand and see it in Scripture, is to follow Christ. He may call people to different things in that simple life. He may call some to a vow of poverty. He may call people to other things such as business, or farming, and other aspects of "normal life." Regardless of where we are called and whatever we're called to do, it has to be undergirded by yieldedness. The early Anabaptists had a German word for it: "gelassenheit" or yieldedness. We may live the "simple life," but we lack the brokenness and yieldedness to do what God calls us to do and to follow wherever He calls us. To enter into the simple life is to take up our cross, deny ourselves, become broken and yielded, follow Him, and seek to become like Him; living out His vision given to us in Scripture for what Kingdom citizens should look like and how they should live.

This should become very practical, including the things we often consider when we think of a simple life: our dress, the way we drive, the cars we drive, the houses we live in, all of that. It should be expressed and affect those practical parts of our lives. It's not about a list. It's about committing to that to which God calls us. The Jews also had their lists. Alms, prayer, and fasting were three key trademarks of Jewish piety to which Jesus spoke directly. They were doing their list; they were putting in their alms, they were praying, they were fasting; but obviously they missed something. It's not about the list, it's about the heart, which then becomes part of the fabric of our lives.

Living the simple life is connected with our salvation and sanctification journey, it is a lifetime of transformation. We are daily being transformed as we behold His glory and are conformed into the image of His Son. The simple life on the one hand is very simple, but on the other it

can be very difficult, and that's part of the journey of following Christ.

¹Guinness, Os. The Call. W Publishing Group, 1998, pp. 71-77. [Return to context↵](#)