

Is God's Way Simple?

From Simple to Complex

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Henry Wadsworth Longfellow once said, "In character, in manners, in style, in all things, the supreme excellence is simplicity." Ralph Waldo Emerson, another American writer/thinker said, "Nothing is more simple than greatness. Indeed, to be simple is to be great." August Hare, an English clergyman in the early 19th Century made this comment: "The greatest truths are the simplest, and so are the greatest men." Alexander Pope, an English satirist and novelist said, "There is a majesty in simplicity which is far above the quaintness of wit."

We can see from these quotations that there is a common belief in our culture that simple things are best. When circumstances or ideas or things that we have to face become complex, most of us become frustrated, or we become distrustful. The common reaction that we have to these sorts of things is to reject the complicated thing in favor of something that is more simple, something we feel we can understand, something that we can grasp.

I know that I have done this many times. If something like math becomes too complicated, and it takes too much of my time, and there is too much of an equation to go through, I say, "Forget this. Give me a calculator." That is much more simple than having to do it myself. I really prefer the simple and the straightforward, and I think just about everybody does. It just makes things so much easier. The intricate and the seemingly convoluted, even though it may not be, I will touch maybe with a ten-foot pole, but no closer.

When I write, it is one of my aims to be concise and present things plainly and clearly so that people can understand. That is a good goal for a writer to have, or a speaker to have when he speaks.

In the church, we have become accustomed to accepting the simple and dismissing the complex, because we label it as confusion when such a thing happens or comes up. We would quote maybe I Corinthians 14:33—"God is not the author of confusion"—and say that something that is complex is ungodly just because we simply do not understand it because it is just a bit beyond our grasp at the moment. That is not always the case, however.

I think we tend to be this way. We want things simple because Herbert Armstrong had a way of grasping the heart of a matter. He then, very simply and clearly, in rather forceful and "in your face" kind of language, made you understand whatever it was that he was trying to get across. He used big capital letters. He was forceful with the use of an exclamation point, or he asked a very telling question, and what seemed to be complicated theological issues boiled down to something that most of us could take a good solid bite into and swallow, and it made sense to us.

I think over the years of study that we have become conditioned in a way to think that God's way is *always* simple and plain. But I am here to tell you today in this sermon that this is not the case. I do not want to say that Mr. Armstrong did us a disservice, because he did not. You have to remember what Mr. Armstrong was doing. He was preaching the gospel to the world primarily, and when you preach the gospel to the world you must simplify everything into what we call today "sound bite."

"Sound bite" not only gives you the idea that it is something short, but it is also something that you can digest easily. Look at all of Mr. Armstrong's booklets. There is hardly a booklet out there that is deep because it is presenting the issues in a very simple manner, but the basics of those issues only. A book like *The Incredible Human Potential* got somewhat deeper into the subject of human nature and the mind of man, and the potential of man to have the mind of Christ and to be made into a spirit being—to be made God. That book got quite a bit deeper, and why we can understand things as God's children that the people in the world cannot.

Mystery of the Ages, on the other hand, was not really all that involved, because he was presenting these matters in a very simple way as a refresher to us and as a book or booklet of welcome, or what have you, to those who were coming into the knowledge of the truth. It put everything in very concise, simple, plain terms. But if all we ever did in our study was to go over Mr. Armstrong's booklet (not that this is a bad thing), we could end up just rehearsing the fundamentals all the time. Remember what it says in Hebrews 6, that once we learn those things, we need to go on to perfection. We need to go on to things that are slightly more deep until we can understand them.

Is God's way simple? I do not think so. I do not think God's way is simple at all. I hope to show you today that the answer to that question is really "Yes" and "No." On some levels, God's way is extremely simple, like Mr. Armstrong got everything down into a very easily understood message. What could be more simple than to say that God's way is *give*, and Satan's way is *get*? That is something we can all understand.

On the other hand, once you get past those beginning simple ideas, there is a great deal of depth to God's way of life and the theology behind all those things. Many things, in fact, are totally beyond our comprehension. To believe that God's way is *always* simple is an error.

I feel I should tell you why I am giving this sermon. There are those out there who are advocating calendar change. One of their proofs is that the Hebrew Calendar is complicated and therefore it must not be godly, because God's way is simple, and if a person cannot understand the Hebrew Calendar, then that must be a proof that the Hebrew Calendar is wrong. Now that is hogwash.

The reason it is hogwash is that there is no calendar ever, in this world, that is simple. If it is simple, it is wrong, because it will not be able to keep up with what is going on in the heavens, especially when you are trying to correlate the moon and the sun which do not have synchronized orbits at all, or revolutions, or however you want to say it. They just do not go together, and so to combine the two of them and correlate them into a calendar takes a great deal of mathematics and astronomy and a lot of thought.

I just wanted to let you know what my motivation for giving this sermon is, and from this point out I will not mention the calendar again because that is really just a side issue to the overall issue of "Is God's Way Simple?"

Let us for a short while take a lesson in rhetoric. I do not know if you know what rhetoric is. It has kind of gone out of use in everyday education. Rhetoric is the art of the effective use of language. It is what people took a hundred to two hundred years ago to learn how to speak and to write, and to persuade people. They wanted to be effective in how they used the language so that other people would be convinced of their arguments.

Part of rhetoric is learning what kind of argument is logical, and what kind of argument is illogical. Those who teach rhetoric today teach you to say things, to persuade you of things that are not logical or true because all they are trying to do is win the argument. A true study of rhetoric would teach you that certain arguments are illogical and should not be used and that other arguments are logical and should be used and followed very closely.

What the study of rhetoric has done is that it has compiled over the years a great many, what are called, logical fallacies. These are false ways to present things in terms of an idea or argument that you wish to make because you come to a false conclusion by using a false line of thought.

A logical fallacy that I want to get into today, which is an illogical argument, is what I call "the always/never trap." Those who are schooled in rhetoric will call this "the fallacy of broad generalization," where you say that something is *always* this way, or it is *never* this way, where it is just a sweeping broad generalization of something that may be the case in most circumstances, but there are exceptions.

This is saying that something is always true, or that it is never true when exceptions certainly exist, and they are very easily seen if you break it down. That is what we are going to do. We are going to break this down by making a chart.

True or False? Since "A" is simple, it is true. Since "B" is complex, it is false.

Now this is what we are going to do a proof to see if this is a correct statement. We are going to insert some theological concepts, some theological ideas into this "A" and "B" that we have set up.

A = Simple

Hope of the resurrection.

Now "Hope of the resurrection" is going to be our true statement. If the hope of the resurrection is simple, it is true.

Is not the hope of the resurrection a very simple concept? We can explain it like this: Christ died and was raised from the dead by His Father, and therefore we have the hope that we will be resurrected in like manner. Is that not a very simple way of describing the hope of the resurrection? Now there is much more to it, but that is a very simple way of understanding it. He died for our sins, and if we therefore believe and have faith in that, when we die, in time we hope to be resurrected because we followed the path of Christ. Very simple.

Now this one might throw you. Under "B = Complex," write "God is a trinity." (Remember, the statement is, "Since B is complex, it is false.")

A = Simple

Hope of the resurrection.

B = Complex

God is a trinity.

What do you know about the trinity? I could go around here and talk to each one of you, and we would come up with probably about sixty different answers for what the trinity is. It is a very complex subject. As we heard in some sermons a couple of years ago, it is a combination of biblical teaching and Greek thought, among other things that are thrown in there from other religions and other philosophies. It is something that even theologians have a hard time explaining because there is nothing in the Bible that talks of such a thing.

We have our two true statements here. It is true that the hope of the resurrection is a simple concept, and so it is true. That is right. And the "God is a trinity," being complex, is false. So that is also a true statement.

Let us go to the false statements that disprove this over-generalization.

Under "Hope of the resurrection," write "Hope of going to heaven."

A = Simple

Hope of the resurrection.
Hope of going to heaven.

B = Complex

God is a trinity.

This is a simple idea as well, and it is formed along the same lines as the "Hope of the resurrection."

What happened to Christ after He was resurrected? He ascended to heaven, and so if you use the same idea in the "Hope of the resurrection," the same logical way of thinking, you would say then that just because Christ rose from the dead and went to heaven (and we are following Christ), that we too are going to be raised and go to heaven. But that is wrong. It is not a true statement.

Under "God is a trinity," write "God is a family."

A = Simple

Hope of the resurrection.
Hope of going to heaven.

B = Complex

God is a trinity.
God is a family.

This too is not an easy thing to explain. You have to know the words like "Elohim," and what all that means, and its being a collective noun, and what a collective noun means, that sometimes it can be singular and sometimes it can be plural, and the way the Hebrew does this and that with the use of Elohim, that Elohim can also talk about human people, and judges, and anybody in authority.

There is quite a lot about "God is a family," not to mention all the ways of talking about us being part of that family, and that God the Father is One Being, and God the Son is another Being, and there was the Word, and the Word was made flesh and dwelt among us. All that has to go into the thought about "God is a family." It can get rather complex, but just because it is complex does not mean that it is false.

We cannot make such an over-generalization that, because something is simple, it is true, and that, because something is complex, it is false. You have got to think deeper than that, because if you thought that way, you are setting yourself up to be deceived very easily. This simple proof that we have done in this chart shows that very plainly.

What is it that allows us to understand this so easily? How can we say, "Yes, that's true. The hope of the resurrection is a simple concept, and it's true, but the hope of going to heaven, another simple concept, is false?" How is it that we can say that very quickly and easily? Is it not because we have advanced knowledge given to us through the Holy Spirit about these subjects? What was it that added and made our reasoning so sound on that? It is because we know more. We have gone deeper into these things than just these simple statements.

It also follows that the greater our knowledge of a subject, the greater the chance that the subject will become complex because the details that we add always add levels of complexity, always add more and more and more to it that we have to research and cover all the angles. So details add complexity. Deeper knowledge adds complexity. Things do not stay simple if you are constantly adding to your knowledge of the subject.

Let us go to Ezekiel 47 to a very interesting illustration that God gave Ezekiel. This just pops out of the blue. God suddenly gives Ezekiel a vision of this.

Ezekiel 47:1-4 Then he brought me back to the door of the temple; and there was water, flowing from under the threshold of the temple toward the east, for the front of the temple faced east; the water was flowing from under the right side of the temple, south of the altar. He brought me out by way of the north gate, and led me around on the outside to the outer gateway that faces east; and there was water running out on the right side. Then, when the man went out to the east with the line in his hand, he measured one thousand cubits, and he brought me through the waters [meaning he had to walk through the waters to get to the one thousand cubits]; the water came up to my ankles. [He was just barely getting his toes wet.] Again he measured one thousand and brought me through the waters; the water came up to my knees. [It is getting deeper.] Again he measured one thousand and brought me through; the water came up to my waist.

I think by this time Ezekiel was starting to get a little bit panicky. He was still wading, and it was always getting deeper, and the angel was still going.

Ezekiel 47:5 Again he measured one thousand, and it was a river that I could not cross; for the water was too deep, water in which one must swim, a river that could not be crossed.

This is a perfect analogy for the way God's Word should work in us. This simple illustration has been applied to the four Gospels. It is very interesting how you can do that. The Gospel of Mark is rather short and to the point. It is very simple. That is like water up to your ankles.

Depending on which way you look at it, Matthew or Luke is a little bit deeper. It might be Matthew, which talks about Jesus as King. That is the way the Jews looked to their Messiah. Matthew, I would say, is like water up to your knees.

Luke is about Christ the Man—all man—that He was willing to pull in the Gentiles. There are other deep things in there about Christ's humanity, that we have a hard time distinguishing between His divinity. That is like water up to your waist because you are starting to get into concepts that are quite complex, trying to separate out, even if you can, the humanity and the divinity of God, of Christ.

And then you plunge into the book of John, where you really find out just how much God Jesus was. He was the Word, and He was there from the beginning, but He was made into a man and became flesh. All those things you go into in the book of John ("born again," chapter 6 about "the bread of life," chapter 7 about "the waters flowing from one's belly"), present Jesus in a way that was so different from the other three writers. It is much deeper.

You could do this with the rest of the Bible if you wanted to. Certain of Paul's epistles are easier. The epistles to the Thessalonians are *far* easier than something like Romans, or Galatians. To plumb the depths of Ephesians and Hebrews you really have to think deeply on those things.

The book of James is pretty simple. We call it "the nuts and bolts" type of epistle. Peter is pretty simple, but a little bit more complex than James. But I, II, and III John—Wow! Some of those things are incomprehensible unless you really have the mind of Christ.

You can do that elsewhere too. Some of the writers were very simple people that spoke in simple language. Others were very well educated, and God used them to present things in a much more complex way. The Bible is full of levels. You can even take certain verses and come out with a very simple meaning, and then you can go into it and plumb the depths and come up with something that may seem really complex and convoluted, but it is still as true as the simple one, the simple meaning.

The prophecies have so many different levels, types, and anti-types. They have fulfillments back in history, fulfillments in our modern times. It is hard to say what is what sometimes, but the Bible has been purposely constructed so that it could be understood on many different levels. As deep as we want to go, the Bible will still be relevant, and be just as true. That is just the way it is.

Where has God ever made anything that does not start simple, and once we understand it, is almost unfathomable in its complexity? Just think about things like atoms. Two atoms of hydrogen and one of oxygen make a simple water molecule, but look at how many things a water molecule can be and does. It has three states: a gas, a liquid, and a solid, depending on what the temperature is. It is the universal solvent. It is necessary for our lives.

We are made up of about seventy-five or so percent water. It is something that is very simple—H₂O. But once you start looking into it, we still have not quite understood all its uses. That is how the

Bible is. It is not quite as simplistic, let us say, as a water molecule, but the function is the same, meaning it can be put to all those different uses, and be made to fit so many different circumstances because that is just the way God's mind is.

If we ever make anything, we design things for one purpose. It maybe works very well for that one purpose, but when God creates, He creates things that can be used in many circumstances, and often time and time again. That is just the way God is. Do you find that simple? I do not. I cannot come up with anything *near* that. I do not have the mind for it. Does it not say in Isaiah that "His thoughts are not our thoughts"? We are trying the best we can to make His thoughts our thoughts. We have a long way to go. We have not come anywhere near the mind of God in its depth. We are just scratching the surface.

What we have here in Ezekiel 47, to me, is an example of our Christian walk. Remember, He made Ezekiel walk through it. He measured out a thousand cubits. Let us call that a measure of time rather than distance, and by this time Ezekiel was up to his ankles. And then we took another measure of time, and by this time Ezekiel was up to his knees. And then in another measure he was up to his waist, and then another measure he was over his head. He was swimming in it. That is how our Christian walk should be. It should be steady progress deeper into the mysteries of God until, by a certain time, we should be doing the Australian crawl in it. Do you understand what I mean?

In Hebrews 5, Paul tells the Hebrews, "By this time you should have been teachers. You've been in the church for thirty years or so, and by this time you should not just be learners, you should be teachers. You should be so well grounded in the depths of God that you can actually help others who are coming along."

Let us go to II Peter 3. This section has several things in it to teach us about God's way not necessarily being simple.

II Peter 3:14-18 Therefore, beloved, looking forward to these things, be diligent to be found by Him in peace, without spot and blameless; and account that the longsuffering of our Lord is salvation—as also our beloved brother Paul, according to the wisdom given to him, has written to you, as also in all his epistles speaking in them of these things, in which are some things hard to understand, which those who are untaught and unstable twist to their own destruction, as they do also the rest of the Scriptures. You therefore, beloved, since you know these things beforehand, beware lest you also fall from your own steadfastness, being led away with the error of the wicked; but grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. To Him be the glory both now and forever. Amen.

First and most obvious of these things that we can learn about God's way not necessarily being simple, is that Peter declares unequivocally that Paul writes things that are hard to understand. He admits that there are things in Paul's epistles that are complex. They are complicated. They take a great deal of deep thought to really get it stuck in there so we know it and understand it fully.

How many sermons did it take my Dad to discuss the "Covenants, Grace, and Law" as it applies to the New Testament church? Twenty-nine, if I remember correctly, and I am sure he could have gone on because there is a lot in the epistles of Paul and the rest of the Bible on these covenants, and how

grace and law work together. It is not a simple subject. Peter could have just as easily have said this about any, let us say, of John's writings, that John wrote things that were hard to understand. It takes time and effort and a great deal of diligence to understand some of these things.

The second point that I want to bring out here is that we must be diligent in enduring in our Christian walk. This includes study and growth in the knowledge of God and God's way. You can see, and you can read it between the lines in what Peter says here, that if we do not diligently grow in grace and knowledge, we are far more likely to be led away in the error of the wicked. He says, "Be diligent and steadfast. Keep on growing, because if you don't, you're going to be easier pickings for the wicked." He warns us not to be proud in our steadfastness. "Beware, lest you also fall from your own steadfastness."

We can get a feeling after a while that we know it all, and that we cannot be bowled over by Satan. Do you remember, probably about twenty years ago, Mr. Armstrong warning the church, and in a way chastising us, for thinking that we cannot be deceived. But that us false. We *can* be deceived, especially if we begin to neglect things. If we are not diligent, we can, as it says at the end of II Peter 2, return to our vomit like the proverbial dog. That is what happens over years of neglect of the gift that is in us.

A third point is his description of those who twist the Scriptures. He calls them "untaught and unstable." It is a very interesting way of putting it. It is an interesting combination of terms. This word "untaught" is only here in the New Testament. Peter is the only one who uses it. It means ignorant, uneducated, and uninstructed. It refers to people who have not learned or who have not been properly taught. Such people, if they are among the church, have a deficiency in their spiritual education. It is not that they maybe have not studied. It may be that they have not studied properly, or have not studied the right things. They are people who may have some knowledge, but they are really uninstructed and untaught, so they do not know how to put things together properly.

This other word, "unstable," is another one of those words that only Peter uses. It is found only here and in II Peter 2:14. It is talking there about people who are unstable and are able to be easily deceived. It says that "these false teachers beguile unstable souls." These unstable people are easily tricked.

Unstable means "unsteady," "unfixed." That means they are not moored. They are not anchored to a point. Another definition could be "unsettled," meaning that they are all over the place; "unestablished," meaning they have no foundation; "unsupported," and "vacillating from pillar to post." It could even mean "weak," like your legs are weak, so you do not have a good understanding. Get the point? It could also mean "not firm," like a raft on a boat is "un-firm." It will pitch, will it not, if you step to one side or the other and get off-balance, which leads to another illustration in the Greek. In normal Greek this word was used to describe a ship tossing on a turbulent sea. It is unstable. It is unsettled. It is unfixed. It is unestablished. It is unsupported. It vacillates in the water, you could say.

In the context of II Peter 3:16, it means a person who has no fixed or settled principles. That is a hallmark of today. We have post-modernism where there are no absolutes. Nothing can be said to be true, and it is something that could come into the church very easily. Such a person regards nothing as settled. There is no final say. There are no absolutes.

Another hallmark of such a person is that there is no authority outside of himself who can decide the issue. What it comes down to is that such a person does not believe God. When God states something very plainly, he has got to decide for himself if such a thing is true. He is unsettled. He is unfixed. He is not moored to anything that is stable. He is vacillating. Barnes says that such people are often under the influence of their emotions.

But that is how they decide things. They do not decide things by reason. They do not decide things by evidence. They decide things by how it makes them feel, and that is a very dangerous thing, because your emotions change almost constantly. You can believe one way one day because you are feeling good, and believe another way the next day because you are feeling bad. You are fickle if you would do such a thing.

Peter paints a picture here of people who are either ungrounded in the truth or unsettled or both. Even longtime church members can become this way, and it can happen because one never learned from the very first the right way, or by not unlearning error. Both have to be done. You have to learn the good, and unlearn the bad. If you just learn the good and do not unlearn the bad, it is still there, and it can still bite you.

Another way that such a thing can happen in longtime members is if such people neglect diligent study and practice of God's way of life. That is what happened in the book of Hebrews. They were taught correctly. More than likely it was the Jerusalem church he was talking about. They had the best ministers to teach them, so they were well-grounded in God's way, but they neglected it, and they were, as Paul said there in the book of Hebrews, about ready to just slip right away from the church and lose everything that they had accomplished up to that point.

The Corinthian church may have been an example of the first thing that I talked about, whereas they may not have learned it properly in the beginning, or they had not unlearned what was the common thought of the day. They were living among very hedonistic circumstances there in Corinth, and it seems like that they had not come out of the world, and so they had their problems too.

Let us go to II Corinthians 11. I think this is where people get tripped up on this because they take this particular verse too simplistically. This is the famous verse that talks about the "simplicity which is in Christ." If you look at it just from the face value, they might have a case, but you have to go deeper to understand what Paul is actually saying here.

II Corinthians 11:3 But I fear, lest somehow, as the serpent deceived Eve by his craftiness, so your minds may be corrupted from the simplicity that is in Christ.

Just looking at it like this, one could say that Satan's way is crafty and complex and that God's way is simple. On the surface, that is what it *appears* to say, but that is not what it says. In a way the translators have done us a disservice by translating this word as "simplicity." That is a definite definition of the word. That word is *haplotes*. Do you know what this word really means? It means "singleness." Remember, in the Sermon on the Mount where Jesus says, "if your eye be single"? The word means "singleness."

A modern English definition of "simplicity" to us means something that is uncomplicated or something that is easily understood. We call such things "simple." They are easy. They are uncomplicated. But this is one of those English words that has evolved since 1611 when the *King*

James was translated. The original meaning of "simplicity" is more in line with what "*haplotes*" means. It means guileless, direct, candid, not duplicitous.

Paul defines it for us in II Corinthians 1. This is the same word. Paul uses it here in a way that we can understand it better than the way it was back there in II Corinthians 11.

II Corinthians 1:12 For our boasting is this: the testimony of our conscience that we conducted ourselves in the world in simplicity and godly sincerity, not with fleshly wisdom but by the grace of God, and more abundantly toward you.

My margin in the *New King James* says "simplicity is the opposite of duplicity." Remember I said that the word meant "singleness." If your mind is single, things are straightforward, but if you are duplicitous, you are of two opinions on something, are you not, or you are trying to convince somebody of something that is not necessarily true. We say somebody has a forked tongue. He does not have a single tongue; it is forked. That is a common analogy of somebody speaking out of both sides of his mouth, or of being a hypocrite, or of trying to deceive by saying things that are not true. That is what this word back in II Corinthians 11:3 means.

You have to remember here that he is comparing Christ's simplicity with Satan's duplicity, his deception. He is not saying that God's way, Christ's way, is simple or easy. All he is saying is that it is straightforward. There is not something in it that is going to deceive you. What he is saying is that Satan is trying to get you off on another track. He has ulterior motives for what he says and tries to teach us. But Christ has no ulterior motives. He has one very simple goal, and that is what He is preaching all about. It is that single way that leads to eternal life. He is not trying to get you to go one way or the other, He is trying to get you to the Kingdom of God.

Paul was concerned here that the Corinthians were getting all messed up with the deceptions of Satan and his ministers and not sticking with the one way, the narrow way that is going to lead to the Kingdom and eternal life.

Paul, of all people, would hardly call God's way easy. Look at his own life. The man went through hell on earth to preach the gospel. It is not easy. The man was probably the most educated of any church member that has ever existed, and it was given to him to explain the deep things of God to us. Do you think coming up with these arguments that we take so lightly sometimes in the New Testament, in the epistles, were easy to formulate?

Let us look at Romans 9 through 11. We are not going to go into the depths of these things because I do not have time, and it would take many sermons to explain Romans 9 through 11. But I want to show you something. Three chapters Paul devoted to basically one subject in the book of Romans. He felt it was so essential in this book of doctrine that he get this point across, that the one thing he is trying to explain here is, "Where does Israel fit in all this?" and it is hard to explain.

If you look between the beginning of Romans 9 and the end of Romans 11, you will see several citations of the Old Testament, because he has to reach deep into the Old Testament to prove his point that Israel has not been totally cut off. What he is trying to get them to understand, he finally says at the end of Romans 11:26, "and so all Israel will be saved." That was what he was getting to, because he started out Romans 9 talking about that it seems like Israel is cut off, and what is going to happen to them. And then he has to go through the explanation of "they are not all Israel who are of Israel," and explain that. He has to go through all those arguments.

He finally gets to chapter 11 where he talks about the natural branches have been cut off so that the wild olive branches can be grafted in. He is trying to come up with a good analogy that people will understand so that they would know that Israel still has a chance, and that by jealousy God is going to get them to repent and be grafted in. But it is a long convoluted argument that he has to make.

Let us go to Romans 11. This is how he ends his discussion about this very deep subject.

Romans 11:32 For God has committed them [the Israelites] all to disobedience, that He might have mercy on all.

Now listen to this!

Romans 11:33 Oh, the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God!

He says, "I still don't get it! This is really deep, guys."

Romans 11:33-36 How unsearchable are His judgments and His ways past finding out! "For who has known the mind of the LORD? Or who has become His counselor? Or who has first given to Him and it shall be repaid to him?" For of Him and through Him and to Him are all things, to whom be glory forever. Amen.

Did you notice what he said there? I had given it away. Some things of God we are just not going to understand. They are unsearchable. They are past finding out. God's thoughts are indeed higher than our thoughts, and we are never going to attain them in the flesh. It is just impossible. Our minds are too small. They are too finite. We do not think His way all the time. It is too much to cram into the grey matter, and our minds and our way of thinking has been messed up by this world. We cannot grasp some things. They are going to be beyond our knowledge, beyond our understanding. We may nibble at the edges of them, but some things are just going to be beyond us and we have to deal with it. God's way is very deep and complex.

I Corinthians 2:6 However, we speak wisdom among those who are mature [Did you catch that? It is the mature who can understand the wisdom that they speak.], yet not the wisdom of this age [It is totally different from the way this world argues.], nor of the rulers of this age, who are coming to nothing.

The rulers of the world cannot understand it. It is not the way that they think.

I Corinthians 2:7-8 But we speak the wisdom of God in a mystery, the hidden wisdom which God ordained before the ages for our glory, which none of the rulers of this age knew; for had they known, they would not have crucified the Lord of glory.

These things are even mysteries to us in many cases, and it is certainly a mystery to those out in the world. They cannot understand it. Why?

I Corinthians 2:9-10 But as it is written: "Eye has not seen, nor ear heard, nor have entered into the heart of man the things which God has prepared for those who love Him." But God has revealed them to us through His Spirit. For the Spirit searches all things, yes, the deep things of God.

We would not even know them except the Spirit of God reveals them to us. Thank God that it does. Otherwise we would be way out of our depths in everything pertaining to God.

I Corinthians 2:13 These things [the deep things of God, the spiritual things] we also speak, not in words which man's wisdom teaches, but which the Holy Spirit teaches, comparing spiritual things with spiritual.

We have an easy enough time understanding physical things, but when we get into the spiritual realm our minds are not spirit, our minds are fleshly. It is hard, so we have to compare spiritual things with spiritual. We have to do "apples and apples" and not "apples and oranges."

I Corinthians 2:14-15 But the natural man does not receive the things of the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness to him; nor can he know them because they are spiritually discerned. But he who is spiritual judges all things [he discerns all things], yet he himself is rightly judged [or discerned] by no one.

They have no earthly idea how He judges, because they are judging physically, and He is judging spiritually.

I Corinthians 2:16 For "who has known the mind of the LORD that he may instruct Him?" [Nobody, except those he says here]: But we have the mind of Christ.

We cannot instruct God, but at least we are thinking on the same lines as He is if we have the Holy Spirit, That is the only way we can understand the depths and the complexities of what God has given us in His Word.

Let us go to I Corinthians 13—the "Love Chapter." Paul is trying to explain some of these deeper concepts, and he comes upon *agape* love—another very complex idea of love that is totally foreign to mankind. It is the love of God. We do not understand how God loves. We have to, over time, learn what it is and how to apply it. Paul gives us some idea in the first three-quarters of this chapter how it acts so that we have a way of understanding it. And then he gets down to verse 11. It seems strange always to me that this was in this chapter, but now I understand why he puts it in here. He says:

I Corinthians 13:11 When I was a child, I spoke as a child, I understood as a child, I thought as a child; but when I became a man, I put away childish things.

He is talking about maturity here. He is talking about our *spiritual* maturity, that our spiritual childhood should be only so long, and then we put those things away and we become mature in our thinking in the way the we react with one another. Remember, he is talking about love here. He says, "Don't be babies in the way you treat one another. Don't be babies in the way you think along the lines of the mind of God. Learn to grow in it. Be mature."

Remember, Christ tells us in Matthew 5:48 that we are to become perfect, meaning mature, or complete, or fit for use like God the Father in heaven is mature. He is perfect. He is complete. Spiritual maturity is a Christian goal that we should have.

But now notice what he says in verse 12. He makes a caveat here. After he just said, "Let's go on to perfection. Let's go on to maturity," he says:

I Corinthians 13:12 For now we see in a mirror, dimly, . . .

The caveat is that we are not going to know everything, or understand everything. Some things we will just have to, in a way, take on faith knowing what we know, because we cannot explain it. It is a reflection dimly seen in a mirror. But he assures us:

I Corinthians 13:12 . . . but then [meaning in the resurrection, when we are finally changed into spirit, we will see] face to face.

That is, when we look into the mirror, we will see the exact reflection of what is casting the image. What he is saying is that up until then, in our fleshly minds, we are not going to understand. But when we become spirit, we will understand exactly everything. It will all come together. This is his own admission. Remember, I said this is probably the best-educated man that has ever been in the church. He says:

I Corinthians 13:12 Now I know in part [He did not even know it all. He could not even explain it all to us.], but then I shall know just as I also am known.

"I will know the things of God," he says, "just as well as God knows me inside out." That is encouraging, but it is also telling us we are not going to know everything in this life either, because some things are just too hard to understand for physical human beings. That is the way God's way is.

Do you know that the Bible has been given to us so that we will not be simple and ignorant? That's the reason for this Book, so that we will *know* God's mind, so that we will *know* what is coming down the road, so that we will know that there is salvation, so that we will know all the things that will get us to that point, so that we will know everything we need to do to please God.

Let us go to Proverbs 1. This is one book, but it could be the purpose statement for the whole collection of books. Solomon is telling us why he wrote this book.

Proverbs 1:1-7 The proverbs of Solomon the son of David, king of Israel. [Solomon is saying, "This is why I wrote this book."]

To know wisdom and instruction,
To perceive the words of understanding,
To receive the instruction of wisdom,
Justice, judgment, and equity;
To give prudence to the simple,
To the young man knowledge and discretion—
A wise man will hear and increase learning,
And a man of understanding will attain wise counsel,
To understand a proverb and an enigma [mystery],
The words of the wise and their riddles.
The fear of the LORD is the beginning of knowledge,
But fools despise wisdom and instruction.

Put all of these together that he just mentioned in those first seven verses, and the reason turns out that he wrote this book because God wants us to be able to understand the depths of His way. God wants us to understand Him, and how He works and how He thinks, and what He does, and so He

gave us a book (an instruction manual, as Mr. Armstrong called it), on how to do those things. Some of these things are simple on their surface, but many of them are very deep.

Look at verse 4. It says, "To give prudence to the simple." In the *King James* it says, "To give subtilty to the simple." Do you know what that means in just our common everyday language, that somebody is subtle in his knowledge? That means he is deep. He knows the details of things. He is wise. He knows the ins and outs of whatever it is. There is even a phrase—"a subtle scholar." It is someone who is very learned, and he knows every which way about his particular area of expertise. That is what God wants us to be. God wants us to be subtle, or prudent.

Proverbs 14:15 The simple believes every word, but the prudent man considers well his steps.

Proverbs 14:18 The simple inherit folly; but the prudent are crowned with knowledge.

Does that not give you an idea of what a prudent person is?

Proverbs 22:3 A prudent man foresees evil and hides himself. But the simple pass on and are punished.

These are warnings that we do not want to be simple. We want to be *prudent*. We want to be subtle in our understanding. "Wise as serpents." Does that ring a bell?

What does prudent mean? It is contrasted to simplicity. Listen to this. This is straight from *Webster's Dictionary*: "Prudence is governance or discipline by the proper use of reason."

It is self-discipline; self-government by using your noggin. That is what it means. "Prudence is managing your own affairs through wisdom, skill, and sound judgment." That is another definition from *Webster's*. It is "acting and living as a result of deep consideration and circumspection." That is what a prudent person does. He thinks things through to their depths, if need be. We do not want to be simple. We want to be prudent. We want to govern ourselves or discipline ourselves by proper godly thinking.

As I mentioned before, to remain simple, i.e., to grasp only the basics of a matter, invites deceivers and makes one an easy prey for Satan because there is no ground to sink your roots into. If we are firmly dug in, if we are grasping the trunk of the tree, as the old church saying goes, we are less likely to be pried off by some deceiver because our roots go deep. We built our house on a rock and not on shifting sand.

If you want, you can go through the epistles of Paul, and you will see in several places that Paul says, "Brethren, I don't want you to be ignorant about this," and he gives them some warning or some amount of information that is going to help them in their Christian walk. Similar types of statements go throughout the Bible, which are:

"Brethren, let's not be ignorant about this.

"Let's not forget this."

"Let's not slip away from what you have."

"Don't let go of this [particular amount of knowledge]."

"You guys were deceived about this. You should be doing this."

This all has to do with this idea of knowing the depths of God's way. So do not be fooled when someone claims that God's way should be simple. Only at its most basic level is God's way simple. Beyond that are levels and depths of understanding none of us can or ever will fully fathom in this life. Truly, the deeper we understand, believe, and live those things, the stronger and purer our character will be.

As I started this sermon, I gave you some quotations. I would like to give you a couple more. These I think understood simplicity.

Quote by Isaac Barrow, an English clergyman:

Upright simplicity is the deepest wisdom, and perverse crafts is mere shallowness.

Quote by William Hazlett, an English author and critic:

Simplicity of character is the natural result of profound thought.

Let us conclude with the words of Christ in Matthew 13.

Matthew 13:10-17 And the disciples came and said to Him, "Why do You speak to them in parables?" He answered and said to them, "Because it has been given to you to know the mysteries of the kingdom of heaven, but to them it has not been given. For whoever has, to him more will be given, and he will have abundance; but whoever does not have, even what he has will be taken away from him. Therefore I speak to them in parables, because seeing they do not see, and hearing they do not hear, nor do they understand. And in them the prophecy of Isaiah is fulfilled, which says:

'Hearing you will hear and shall not understand,
And seeing you will see and not perceive;
For the heart of this people has grown dull.
Their ears are hard of hearing,
And their eyes they have closed,
Lest they should see with their eyes and hear with their ears,
Lest they should understand with their heart and turn,
So that I should heal them.'

"But blessed are your eyes for they see and your ears for they hear; for assuredly, I say to you that many prophets and righteous men desire to see what you see, and did not see it, and to hear what you hear, and did not hear it."