

Simple Faith – Part 1

The New Covenant

I. The Need for a New Heart

1. Jesus came demonstrating the heart of God, and calling people to repentance. It is the continuous message, both of His life and His teachings, especially the Sermon on the Mount – **you need a transformed heart.**

Matthew 4:17 From that time Jesus began to preach and to say, “Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand.”

2. The whole of the Sermon on the Mount is Jesus expanding and pounding home that message – you need a new heart. Your desires and motivations aren't like Mine (*Matthew 5:3-10*), you may follow the letter of the law but your thoughts and motives are in total disagreement (*5:17-48*), you may do spiritual disciplines but your heart is not right (*6:1-23*), and at the end of the day, the central competition is over the dream and desire of your heart (*6:24-33*). God wants to confront us with His ways and thoughts that are so much higher than ours.

Isaiah 55:8 “For My thoughts are not your thoughts, Nor are your ways My ways,” says the LORD. 9 “For as the heavens are higher than the earth, So are My ways higher than your ways, And My thoughts than your thoughts.”

3. His desire is not that we would despair or even that we would only worship Him knowing our heart does not love half so well. **It is to provoke us to eagerly long for and embrace the righteousness of God and the promise of the New Covenant – that we would be given a new heart.** He came to crush a false hope and give a new and better one. All our efforts at better behavior are empty and fruitless... but Jesus wants to give us a new heart.

Matthew 4:17 From that time Jesus began to preach and to say, “Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand.”

Ezekiel 36:26 I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit within you; I will take the heart of stone out of your flesh and give you a heart of flesh.

Philippians 3:8 Yet indeed I also count all things loss for the excellence of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord, for whom I have suffered the loss of all things, and count them as rubbish, that I may gain Christ 9 and be found in Him, not having my own righteousness, which is from the law, but that which is through faith in Christ, the righteousness which is from God by faith; 10 that I may know Him and the power of His resurrection, and the fellowship of His sufferings, being conformed to His death, 11 if, by any means, I may attain to the resurrection from the dead.

4. Jesus' teaching was not primarily about a new standard of righteousness; it was about a new **provision** for righteousness. The kingdom is at hand – seek for it. The Father wants to give His own righteousness – ask for it.

Matthew 5:6 Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, For they shall be filled.

Matthew 6:33 But seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness...

Matthew 7:7 Ask, and it will be given to you; seek, and you will find; knock, and it will be opened to you. 8 For everyone who asks receives, and he who seeks finds, and to him who knocks it will be opened. 9 Or what man is there among you who, if his son asks for bread, will give him a stone? 10 Or if he asks for a fish, will he give him a serpent? 11 If you then, being evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father who is in heaven give good things to those who ask Him!

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5. That is the glorious distinction between the way the New Covenant was established and the way the Old Covenant was established. In the Old Covenant, God **revealed** His righteousness and handed it down to men as a list of written requirements: 10 on stone, but 613 altogether. In the New Covenant, God promised to **give** His righteousness, written on our hearts and our minds by a living knowledge of (relationship with) Him – we get the Person, not just the principles.
Jeremiah 31:31 “Behold, the days are coming, says the Lord, when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and with the house of Judah— 32 not according to the covenant that I made with their fathers in the day that I took them by the hand to lead them out of the land of Egypt, My covenant which they broke, though I was a husband to them, says the Lord. 33 But this is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days, says the Lord: I will put My law in their minds, and write it on their hearts; and I will be their God, and they shall be My people. 34 No more shall every man teach his neighbor, and every man his brother, saying, ‘Know the Lord,’ for they all shall know Me, from the least of them to the greatest of them, says the Lord. For I will forgive their iniquity, and their sin I will remember no more.”

II. The New Covenant Lifestyle – The Upper Room Discourse

1. The New Covenant is totally different in its nature, and demands a totally different response. The Old Covenant was a list of commands that demanded men read and obey. The New Covenant looks totally different and demands a totally different response. It looks so different that few even recognize what Jesus is doing as He talks with His disciples in the Upper Room in **John 13-17** – Jesus is laying out the terms of the New Covenant: what part God promises to play, and what part we are to play in response.
2. **John 13-17** takes place on the night of the Last Supper. Jesus initiates the New Covenant by offering the bread, symbolic of His body, and the wine, symbolic of His blood, and then gives one of His longest recorded teachings, and His only teaching on a critical topic: the New Covenant and how His followers were to live a life of faith in this new day of God's relationship with His people.
Matthew 26:26 And as they were eating, Jesus took bread, blessed and broke it, and gave it to the disciples and said, “Take, eat; this is My body.” 27 Then He took the cup, and gave thanks, and gave it to them, saying, “Drink from it, all of you. 28 For this is My blood of the new covenant, which is shed for many for the remission of sins. 29 But I say to you, I will not drink of this fruit of the vine from now on until that day when I drink it new with you in My Father's kingdom.”
3. **John 13-17** is foundational to our Christian walk, because while we all say, “Christianity is a relationship, not a religion,” **this teaching is where Jesus tells us what that actually looks like.**

III. Simple Faith

1. It is absolutely stunning in its simplicity – a total contrast to the attempts of men to pursue a righteousness apart from faith. Jesus only gives three commands in His entire teaching on the New Covenant: **believe**, **abide** and **love**. They're all really simple, but they're all totally impossible apart from God. Which is why the fourth thing Jesus calls us to do is to **ask**, though He never says it as a command, only again and again as a promise: “If you ask anything in My name, I will do it.” (**John 14:14**)
2. The simple demand of the New Covenant is to **love** as God loves. That's the desire of God – to fill men, whom He created in His image, with the same love that's in Him (**John 17:26**).
John 15:12 “This is My commandment, that you **love** one another as I have loved you.”

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3. Alongside that command, comes a most profound and necessary revelation about man's place in God's heart. We cannot love men as God loves them until God reveals to us what His intentions are for men. What empowers us to love is the revelation Jesus gave just before the command, and the call that goes along with it:

John 15:9 “As the Father loved Me, I also have loved you; **abide** in My love.”

John 15:15 “No longer do I call you servants, for a servant does not know what his master is doing; but I have called you friends, for all things that I heard from My Father I have made known to you.”

4. These two commands we recognize from Jesus' summary of the Law and the Prophets. The second depends on the first, because we cannot **love** others rightly apart from **abiding** in God's love. Only out of us entering into a right identity as those created to love God and to be loved by God can we rightly love others in the truth of their identity and the truth of God's love for them.

Matthew 22:37 Jesus said to him, “‘You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind.’ 38 This is the first and great commandment. 39 And the second is like it: ‘You shall love your neighbor as yourself.’ 40 On these two commandments hang all the Law and the Prophets.”

John 17:22 And the glory which You gave Me I have given them, **that they may be one just as We are one: 23 I in them, and You in Me; that they may be made perfect in one, and that the world may know that You have sent Me, and have loved them as You have loved Me.**

5. The simplicity of Jesus' call is to live to see God get what **He** desires: first in our own life, and then in the lives of those around us.

John 17:24 “Father, I desire that they also whom You gave Me may be with Me where I am, that they may behold My glory which You have given Me; for You loved Me before the foundation of the world.”

6. Jesus, though, further fleshes out for us what makes fulfilling that call possible. He inserts below those two basic calls another even more basic call for the saints: the first and second commandments both depend on “the zeroeth commandment” – to **believe**. We can only **abide** in God's love to the degree that we see and **believe** His love toward us and His invitation to relationship, and we can only **love** others to the degree that we see and **believe** what God says about their worth and about His ability to fulfill in them His dream.

7. When faith takes its rightful central place, it results, Jesus tells us, in a life of **asking**. Asking is the fuel for **believing**, **abiding** and **loving**, because New Covenant life is not meant to be lived out of human strength but out of dependence upon His strength. If we **believe** even a little the most basic truth that holds it all together, **which is God's desire for us**, then we **ask** with confidence for **Him** to grow our faith and our love.

8. New Covenant faith at it's simplest is about **love** that flows from **belief**. Seeing who He is and **believing** empowers us to respond in faith by saying yes to His desire to give Himself to us and **abiding** in Him and saying yes to His desire to give Himself to those around us and **loving** as He loves. **Believing** produces a longing, not only to receive, but to give, a love far beyond ourselves. That longing drives us to **asking** and our Father loves to give the best gifts: **abiding** and **loving**. *Galatians 5:6* For in Christ Jesus neither circumcision nor uncircumcision counts for anything, but only **faith working through love**.

IV. The Battle for Simple Devotion

1. The challenge of Jesus' teaching is to actually embrace the simplicity and humility of the New Covenant. The most provoking thing in the Sermon on the Mount, even beyond the commands themselves that are humanly impossible, is that Jesus empties outward behavior of having any merit and instead focuses us on having a heart that truly believes in Him, truly desires Him and truly loves His ways. He not only sets the bar for “doing justly” impossibly high, but He tells us even if we did, it's not the fullness of what God's looking for.
Micah 6:8 He has shown you, O man, what is good; And what does the Lord require of you But to do justly, To love mercy, And to walk humbly with your God?
2. Jesus rebuked the Pharisees for using outward 'good behavior' as a cover when in their hearts they had never developed faith or learned to love justice and mercy.
Matthew 23:23 “Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you pay tithe of mint and anise and cumin, and have neglected the weightier matters of the law: justice and mercy and faith. These you ought to have done, without leaving the others undone.
3. Paul, too, tips us off that a healthy spiritual life in an individual or a healthy spiritual culture in a community can't be detected by things that are taking place on the outside and the level of anointing or deeds of love we're walking in. Rather, it's primarily an internal journey (that then has an outward expression) of cultivating faith, hope and love.
2 Corinthians 13:1 Though I speak with the tongues of men and of angels, but have not love, I have become sounding brass or a clanging cymbal. 2 And though I have the gift of prophecy, and understand all mysteries and all knowledge, and though I have all faith, so that I could remove mountains, but have not love, I am nothing. 3 And though I bestow all my goods to feed the poor, and though I give my body to be burned, but have not love, it profits me nothing... 13 And now abide faith, hope, love, these three; but the greatest of these is love.
4. What's going on in our heart with regards to the Person of God is always primary. Faith, hope and love are always primary. Do we believe He is who He says He is? In our heart of hearts, do we love who He is? Do we really believe that holiness is happiness? Have we made Him our portion? Do we believe He'll give us Himself if we ask? Do we trust Him?
5. If there's one place that the enemy finds the most room to gain ground, particularly in the West but also just with human nature, it's in **adding to** simple devotion. He'd get nowhere by telling people not to love God, and he's way too smart for that. Instead, he simply distracts us from the Person of God by adding to and complicating what loving God actually means and looks like, because in doing so he succeeds in taking away from our devotion to God.
6. The apostle Paul says that was the place where God called him to fight: against those things exalting themselves against (literally, in pride raising themselves up alongside) the knowledge of Jesus. That's the place where – **with jealousy** – we're to fight to make it all about the knowledge of God, lest the enemy deceive us and lead us away from pure and sincere devotion to Christ.
2 Corinthians 10:4 For the weapons of our warfare are not carnal but mighty in God for pulling down strongholds, 5 casting down arguments and every high thing that exalts itself against the knowledge of God, bringing every thought into captivity to the obedience of Christ... *11:2* For I am jealous for you with godly jealousy. For I have betrothed you to one husband, that I may present you as a chaste virgin to Christ. 3 But I am afraid that as the serpent deceived Eve by his cunning, your thoughts will be led astray from a sincere and pure devotion to Christ.

V. A Simple Faith Spiritual Check-up

1. **Is it simple?** Man says righteousness is complicated and therefore it's hard to gain entrance to the elite club who “get it” and know the right way to live. Jesus says righteousness is so simple we must become like children to understand it. Man invents a righteousness that gets along well with our pride. Jesus says true righteousness demands humility.
Matthew 18:1 At that time the disciples came to Jesus, saying, “Who then is greatest in the kingdom of heaven?” 2 Then Jesus called a little child to Him, set him in the midst of them, 3 and said, “Assuredly, I say to you, unless you are converted and become as little children, you will by no means enter the kingdom of heaven. 4 Therefore whoever humbles himself as this little child is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven.
2. **Is it wholehearted?** Jesus teaches a righteousness that's moment by moment and ongoing unto eternity. You cannot turn it off; you cannot graduate. We're to believe, abide and love in every situation forever; we're to ask without ceasing. Man invents a righteousness that can be checked off the list. Man inserts “levels” of faith to which we graduate, after which we give ourselves permission to change our focus from simple belief and love. Jesus pleads with us get back to the first things, grow in believing, abiding, loving and asking from day one until the very end.
Revelation 2:2 “I know your works, your labor, your patience, and that you cannot bear those who are evil. And you have tested those who say they are apostles and are not, and have found them liars; 3 and you have persevered and have patience, and have labored for My name's sake and have not become weary. 4 Nevertheless I have this against you, that you have left your first love. 5 Remember therefore from where you have fallen; **repent and do the first works**, or else I will come to you quickly and remove your lampstand from its place—unless you repent.
3. **Is it supernatural?** Man devises a righteousness that's complicated, but attainable in our own strength. Jesus says it's simple, but it's utterly impossible. The thing that most provokes the flesh about simple devotion to Christ is that we can't do it – He has to do it. Believing, abiding, loving and asking all leave us helplessly dependent upon Him: to reveal Himself to us, to commune with us, to fill us with His love and to answer when we pray.
Matthew 19:25 When His disciples heard it, they were greatly astonished, saying, “Who then can be saved?” 26 But Jesus looked at them and said to them, “With men this is impossible, but with God all things are possible.”
4. **Is it Personal?** Man hates nothing more than it all being about Him and His desire, and not about us. Man loves checklists because our flesh will do anything to skip the humiliating encounter with that glorious Man that leaves us trembling and burning in a revelation of His goodness and His greatness and our darkness and our smallness. **If it's not killing us – not because we're working so hard but because we are losing ourselves as we find Him – it's not righteousness.** It all comes back to a Man, and therefore it all comes back to faith. We are to be seeing Him and responding. **We cannot skip the encounter.** The moment we take a true principle and separate it from the One who is Truth, it's no longer righteousness, because righteousness will always result in an ever-increasing love for the Man Christ Jesus.
John 17:24 “Father, I desire that they also whom You gave Me may be with Me where I am, that they may behold My glory which You have given Me; for You loved Me before the foundation of the world.”
Romans 14:23 ...for whatever is not from faith is sin.
Luke 9:23 Then He said to them all, “If anyone desires to come after Me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross daily, and follow Me. 24 For whoever desires to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for My sake will save it.