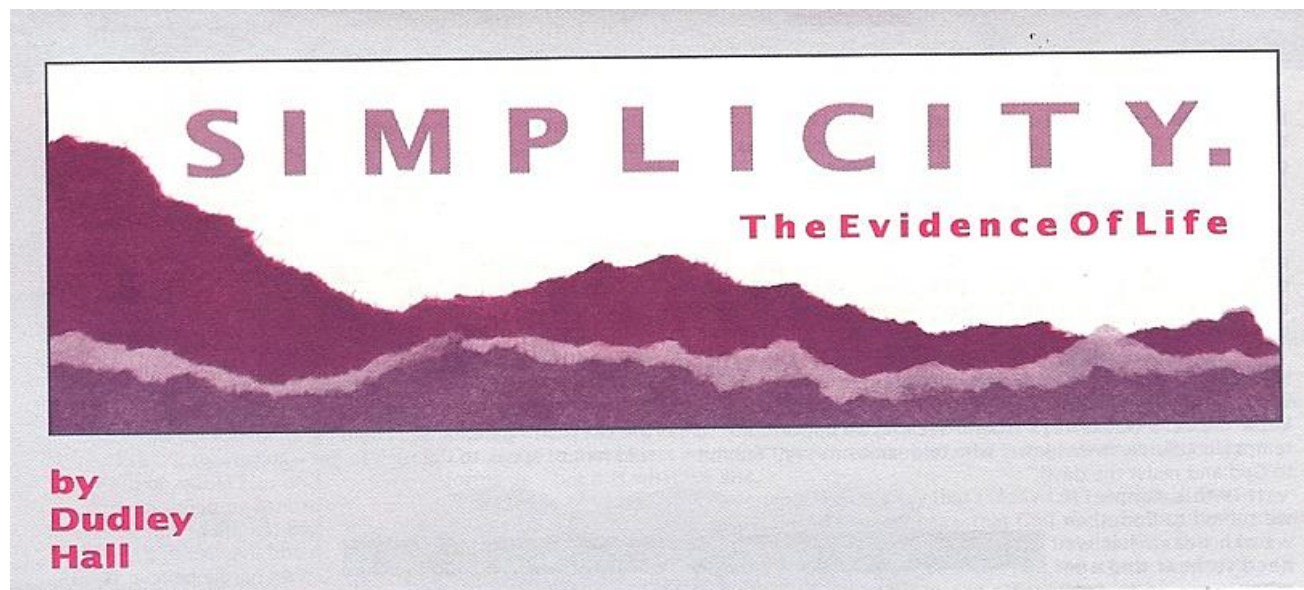


# Simplicity—The Evidence of Life

By Dudley Hall



What was the greatest gift that God gave to us in Jesus Christ? Was it not that beautiful life? *"In Him was life, and the life was the light of men."* (John 1:4) I am so thrilled that God did not give us religion when He decided to give us His greatest gift. I am also pleased that He did not give us another book of formulas, another set of requirements, or volumes of knowledge about the working of the world - but rather He gave us life.

There is something wonderfully mysterious about that word. Some have reduced it to subsistence and security. Others seem to find it necessary to spend their days on the earth examining and analyzing it. Yet, God gave us this life to experience and enjoy. Before He gave it to us, however, He wanted to define it and demonstrate it for us.

## How To Use The Gift

I can remember when I was in the second grade, one of my heroes was a custodian of the consolidated grammar school that I attended. He always seemed to have time for all of the kids and he was an excellent "whittler." He could make a whittling knife seem as though it had life. In a matter of moments, he could take a simple stick and turn it into a beautiful horse's head, or an alligator. No matter what kind of knife he used, it always seemed to have magic in its blade. I can remember thinking, "If only I had a knife like that, I could produce those wonderful carvings and I could reduce a stick to 'whittlings' in a matter of moments."

One day this custodian called me aside and spent an extra bit of time showing me how to hold the knife, how to sharpen it, and some of the intricacies of whittling and carving. Then after he had demonstrated with it sufficiently, he handed the knife to me and said, "This is my gift to you." Needless to say, I was unable to produce with it what he had, but I have often thought what a wise giver he was because before he gave me the gift, he showed me how it was really to be used.

This is exactly what God did in Jesus Christ. He didn't just toss life out to us and say, "Do the best you can." Rather, He lived it out *in front of us* so that we could see the essence of eternal life lived out in a day-to-day fashion.

It is interesting to note that the people of Jesus' day were totally perplexed by His behavior, ascribing all kinds of motives to what He did. Nobody seemed to understand what He was doing - or why. They were always trying to get Him to explain what seemed to them to be a very complex mission on earth. Jesus' explanation was simple: *"I do not seek My own will,*

*but the will of Him who sent Me.... The things which I heard from Him, these I speak to the world.... I always do the things that are pleasing to Him." (John 5:30, 8:26,28,29)*

## Life Is A Response

It is in these statements that we find the simplicity of eternal life. Jesus said He only did what He saw, and He only said what He heard. On the surface that may not seem too profound. Yet, you will soon discover that Jesus was saying that all of life is a *response*. He did not initiate anything on His own. He did not feel under responsibility to produce or to be successful. All He had to do was say what He heard and do what He saw. Every detail of His life was initiated by God the Father. He simply responded.

How wonderful it would be if today's disciples of Jesus could learn the beauty of this kind of simplicity. Wouldn't it be wonderful if we had no role models that we had to live up to and no kingdoms we had to establish? If all we had to do was *listen* and *look*? Could it really be that simple?

How have we made it so complicated? Complications arise when we *can't* see and hear. One of the big theological discussions that is going around in evangelical circles today is, "Does God still speak?" We are afraid if we answer "yes" we will have to deal with the issue of additional revelation added to the Holy Scriptures.

But the fact is, if God doesn't still speak, then it is impossible to live life the same way Jesus did.

If God no longer speaks, then Jesus is no longer an adequate role model. Consequently, we have no New Testament example to follow in living the Christian life. In the New Testament each of the disciples had a relationship with the Father whereby he was able to hear the Father speak and to see the Father act.

Is God speaking today? I believe the average Christian today lives under the illusion that God doesn't speak very often. What if that misunderstanding were to be coupled with the reasonable thought that a man should only speak when he hears the Father speak? The result would reduce a man's oral communication to a few statements every ten years or so.

The truth is, God is *continually revealing* Himself. He is speaking volumes to those who are willing to tune their ears to Him. One of our problems is we are so accustomed to tuning in to other channels that we don't recognize the voice of God as He does speak. Many are expecting Him to speak in tones of judgment and condemnation when actually He is speaking the good news. When you are expecting to hear bad news and you hear good news, many times you are unable to receive it.

## The Capacity To Hear

If we are ever going to successfully live the life God has given to us, however, we must believe that we *do* have the capacity to hear. One day when Jesus was talking to the disciples, He said to them, in effect, "There are kings and princes who would give anything in the world to see what you see and to hear what you hear, but they have not the capacity." But looking at the disciples in a private moment, He said, "*But you do hear and you can see.*" (Matt. 13:11-17) That is good news to all the recipients of eternal life. You do have the capacity to hear and you do have the capacity to see.

Walking in the spiritual realm is not any more complicated than physical walking when you are healthy. Physical walking is picking up a foot, stretching out a leg, and putting it down; picking up the other foot, stretching out a leg, and putting it down.

Spiritual walking is hearing and responding, hearing and responding, hearing and responding. Someone might think it becomes boring. But every word is a fresh work and every response is an expression of divine life flowing through us as we walk with Jesus.

## Transformed By Seeing

It is absolutely impossible to overestimate the value of what one sees with the eyes of his heart. The Bible tells us, "*But we all, with unveiled face beholding as in a mirror the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image from glory to glory...*" (2 Cor. 3:18) It is not what we *know* that transforms us, nor is it what we *do* that transforms us - but it is what we **see**.

A couple of years ago, I experienced a mystery that I really can't explain. I saw in my inner man a glimpse of the glory of God's grace. I saw that God was so much better than I had ever thought He was. He was so much more in charge of the universe than I had ever contemplated. I saw that the gospel was better than I had the words to express.

I am still groping and stumbling, trying to express to others what I saw in my spirit. I can't draw a picture of it on paper. When I sit down to write it, the words never seem adequate. I always feel as if I have failed in my attempts. Some have heard me and accused me of preaching license. Others just think I am confused. But the fact is, I saw a small glimpse of the glory of God's goodness.

I came to feel that one of these days when I see Him as He really is, I am going to conclude that if I had known His goodness was that good, I would have enjoyed it more while I was here. So there is something in me that says, "If it is going to be that good, then why not just go ahead and enjoy it now, even though you can't explain it." I can testify to you that as I focus on that revelation of God's goodness, my life is being transformed I have been changed more by that small glimpse of God's glory than by all of the diligence and discipline and work and effort that I have ever done in my life.

I can remember a time when truth and technical language to express the truth were important to me. I can remember being so concerned about the Christian Church being ignorant of the basic doctrines of faith. I was concerned that people uphold the holy reputation of God. I was concerned that God's character was not being protected because of a frivolous attitude toward sin.

But as I have viewed the glory of God in my inner man, I have noticed that without my even trying, I have been transformed into a more compassionate Christian. I don't feel any obligation to protect God's character anymore. I feel that He is perfectly capable of defending and protecting Himself. But I see needy people hurting and I want to somehow offer assistance.

I am nowhere near having been transformed as much as I am going to be, but I see a transformation taking place in my life. It is all because of what I have seen. I would do a disservice to every friend of mine if I sat down and said, "My growth over the past ten years is because of a three-point formula or a seven-step lesson." The fact is I am being transformed from one degree of glory to another because I have *seen* something of the glory of God and His goodness.

## Eyes To See, Ears To Hear

I think of Isaiah when he went to the temple. (*Is. 6:1-5*) He was transformed in that experience, not because of more knowledge that he received, or because of a deeper commitment, but rather because he *saw* the Lord in His glory and that vision of God transformed Isaiah.

When we were born again in the Spirit by the grace of God, we were given spiritual eyes to see and ears to hear. Using those two faculties, Jesus said, we can live the life He gave us. Life is too big to put in any man's mental box. Life is too mystical to put into a formula; religion will always destroy it. When we try to systematize it breaks the systems. When we try to reduce it to a dogma, it escapes and goes somewhere else, only leaving us with dead words. When we define it in terms of requirements and standards, it defies us and mocks us. It is life. It is a gift of God, and all of God's gifts have been baptized into grace.

## Don't "Overcomplicate"

It makes me tired as I watch people come up with complicated formulas of how to deal with God's world. I see people writing volumes of books on second and third causes of troubles and trials and where the devil fits into God's overall purpose.

Is God responsible or is the devil responsible for all of our troubles and trials? In Jesus' demonstration of life, we never see Him blaming the devil for any of His troubles. Yet, we know the devil was always around seeking an opportunity to tempt Him. Surely it was Jesus who told James to say, "Submit to God and resist the devil."

It is this simple. If we submit to God, then we can hear what we need to hear and see what we need to see. As a result of our hearing and seeing, we can know clearly how to resist the devil. We must not be caught up with who and what are the second and third causes of the events in our lives.

It is also amusing to watch the conformation that has come upon us even as we are trying to discover God's order for church life today. We are aware that God is doing something new. He is not only pouring out new wine, but forming new wineskins. And yet, so many of the brethren are chasing new terminology and concepts of church leadership.

People are trying to figure out who is an apostle. What is the role of the pastor and the teacher? Some are simply forcing artificial definitions of these role models back on the Church and once again depriving it of its divine life.

Church life cannot be as complicated as we are making it. *It is* nothing more - or less - than groups of people living out the life of Jesus that was given to them by God. If it is going to be lived out His way, it is lived out by hearing and seeing.

Maybe one simple phrase could help us a lot in church life:

*Follow the leader.* The leader is Jesus. He is the head of the Church. He is not just the head symbolically, but He is the head in reality. He is committed to being the source of life and wisdom for the Church. He is ready to show us what we need to see and tell us what we need to hear.

If we as groups of Christians can get together and listen to Him and watch Him while loving one another, we can have church life. As we do this, we will notice that certain gifts will rise to the top of the group like cream to the top of milk. All we have to do is *recognize* what God is doing.

Remember, life is not something we initiate - it is a response. It is when we begin to feel the false responsibility to build the Church, to be successful, to evangelize the world and eradicate evil, that we begin to work complexity into our lives. It is absolutely essential that we trust God to be at least as concerned about His Kingdom being established and His gospel taken to the ends of the earth as we are.

## God's Simplicity

Remember, it has always been the simplicity of God's ways that has confounded and astounded man. Moses could hardly believe it when God said to simply hold his rod out over the Red Sea. (*Ex. 14:16*) That certainly was a strange way to make the sea part. Again, Moses could hardly believe it when God told him to speak to the rock to get water. (*Num. 20:8*) Then God told Moses to put the bronze serpent on a pole and tell the people to look at it and live. (*Num. 21:8*) They could hardly believe it - it was much too simple.

When He who was the epitome of divine life came to earth and walked the dusty roads of Galilee, teaching the poor, healing the sick, and doing the mighty works of God, *He did not fit into the mold of any of the smart men of His day.* To the wise, intellectual Greeks, His simplicity was an enigma. To the Jews, He was an embarrassment.

All of humanity since the days of Adam and Eve has spent its time sitting at the roots of the tree of knowledge of both good and evil. It is that tree that trains us to be complicated and independent in our living. Jesus, the second Adam, was willing

to live by the tree of life and live a life of dependency - the life of "response," if you will - "I do only what I see and I say only what I hear."

## Focusing On His Glory

Space will not permit us in this particular article to deal with all the ways we can see and hear Him. One giant step in that direction would be to simply believe that the standard equipment that comes with eternal life are ears to hear and eyes to see. Many of us are like the young man who asked the older, wiser man if he would help him to see God in the universe. "For," the young man told him, "I cannot see God." The older man replied, "I don't know if I can help you, for I can't *not* see Him."

By choice your eyes are focused to see His glory everywhere. *"The heavens are telling of the glory of God; and their expanse is declaring the work of His hands. Day to day pours forth speech, and night to night reveals knowledge."* (Ps. 19:1,2) He walks on the pages of the Bible as Life, not just as dogma. He flashes His glory in the smiles of every Christian. He shouts out of silence. He speaks peace in the midst of the storm. He is everywhere. He is the God of Light, always revealing Himself. He cannot be explained, but He can be seen.

When our vision of Him is beyond our explanation, we can always find a comfortable place to bow and worship. It is life we are talking about. It is profound and yet it is simple. Men need not worry that they might get so caught up in worship and loving one another that they forget that God wants the Church to grow. Keep in mind that one of the most profound things about healthy life is that it will eventually grow. The organism that concentrates on growth rather than health, however, will always wind up with a deformed image. Growth will come in its natural place and rightful time as we cooperate with the divine life within us.

## Receive The Gift Of Life

Holiness is a word that has brought much complexity into the "Christian lifestyle." Everyone knows we should be holy. Everyone has an idea of how everyone could be holy. It is most often described in terms of do's and don'ts, requirements and standards. Jesus defined it simply: "I am holy." He not only is the definition of holiness, but is also the source of it. (Gal. 2:20)

So with Christ living in me, I not only have the pattern of holiness but the power. Since Jesus is the ultimate example, can holiness be anything other than a natural response to God? When I see His majesty, I bow in worship. When I see mighty works, I praise. When I see His grace, I break forth in thanksgiving. When I see His Kingdom, I want to serve. When I see His love, I want to love. When He gives gifts, I use them. That is good behavior: worship, praise, thanksgiving, service, love, ministry. If my goal is to be holy, my holiness will be just the natural by-product of looking and listening to Jesus, who is not only the Lord of life, but who is Life Himself.

In a "simple" conclusion, what am I saying? Life is God's gift. Let us receive it, embrace it, and enjoy it. How? Let us concentrate on our fellowship with God. As we see Him more clearly, we will know what to do. As we hear Him more clearly, we will know what to say.

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