

A Threefold Cord

Ecclesiastes 4: 12

"A threefold cord is not quickly broken"

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It is desired, in this paper, to trace some instances of the threefold cord in the Gospel of John.

Off necessity we commence with the revelation of the Triune God, for distinctive of this gospel is the revelation of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Hence, our Lord is immediately presented as the Word. As such He is the expression of God and according to John 8: 25 when asked, "Who art thou?" He answered, "Altogether that which I also say to you."

In the light of verse 1 of chapter 1 we understand this apparently strange statement that what He said was the expression of who He is — for there we are told distinctly that the Word is God. So in this first evidence of a threefold cord we read, "In (the) beginning was the Word" — the eternity of His being. "The Word was with God" — His distinct Personality. "The Word was God" — His Deity.

In this chapter we have a wonderful revelation of triple character, for we read of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit — a tri-unity of Persons in the Godhead. Also the revelation of divine relationships — Father and Son — and the affections proper to those relationships, for we have the Father's bosom, and the Only-Begotten Son. Let us just refer, at this point, to John 17: 24. There the Son in prayer to the Father says, "Thou lovedst Me before the foundation of the world."

These divine relationships and affections are timeless, though manifested in time. The Persons in their relationships and the exercise of their affections were there before the world began. It is true then to say that this threefold cord is Eternal. Whatever the assaults of the devil through deluded men we rejoice that this cord is not quickly broken. That which existed before time shall outlast time.

We have a reference in John 1: 29 to the Sacrificial glory of our Lord as "The Lamb of God, which taketh away the sin of the world." Earlier, in v. 3 we have His Creatorial glory, for "all things were made by Him." Creatorial, Sacrificial, and Official glories are all here. Is He not the King of Israel and the Son of Man? We can rightly speak in this chapter of Personal, Moral and Official glories, in regard to the Son of God. Personal glory refers to *who He is*; Moral glory refers to the grace and beauty of His character and conduct — *What He is*; Official glory has to do with the various positions or offices which He fills — *what He does*. His moral glory is suggested to us in verse 36, John Baptist "looking on Jesus *as He walked*, he saith, Behold the Lamb of God."

In Exodus 12, the Passover chapter, the Lamb which was to be taken for an house, its blood shed and sprinkled, had to be a fit Lamb. Our Lord, viewed in the moral perfection of His walk here, was manifestly fit to undertake the supreme sacrificial work of the cross which not only would remove sin judicially, but would also glorify God in the removal of it. John, looking upon Him as He walked, was ecstatically moved to cry out, "*Behold* the Lamb of God." Lord, fill *our* hearts with the attractive grace of Thy moral worth!

In verse 38 He is the Teacher, while in verse 42 He acts as the *Head* of a new and divinely established system. Just as Adam exercised his headship over the lower creation in naming the cattle, the fowl of the air, and the beasts of the field (Genesis 2: 20), so our Lord gave a new name to Simon, "thou shalt be called Cephas, which is by interpretation, A stone."

He is the *Lord* of the Universe in verse 51, for as Son of Man universal authority and power are His; everything in heaven and in earth shall be subject to Him. In this connection He said, "henceforth ye shall see the heaven opened, and the angels of God ascending and descending on the Son of Man;" in the world to come He will be the link between the heavens and the earth. Note — the angels *ascend* first. The reason for this is that in the glory of His deity and the exaltation of His Manhood He is superior to them. Though positionally, in assuming Manhood, He came down below them (Hebrews 2: 9), He is ever above them. Though having stooped so low in His incarnation, lower still in the suffering of death, in virtue of His eternal Sonship He is, "so much better than the angels" (Hebrews 1: 4).

Then we read of *three* days in John 1: 29-35, 43; and John 2: 1. The first two verses refer to the first of the three days. This is characterised by the unique presentation of our Lord as the Lamb of God. On the basis of His death the new system of blessing and glory would be established, and in the glory of His Headship He administers all for the blessing of His own to the glory of God. The light of the full revelation of God is shed by Him upon those, who by divine love, are brought into that circle, "where love's treasures are displayed." The second day, verse 43, is suggestive of the call of the remnant of Israel — the prelude to the regathering of the people to Christ as their acknowledged centre. "To Him will be the obedience of peoples" (Genesis 49: 10).

In the third day there shall be the bringing in of marital festivity and joy. The wonderful thing is that while Jesus was there by invitation — a guest — He took His place as Host, for *He* provided what had been deficient in other hands. Mary said, "Whatsoever He saith unto you do it." He must have the pre-eminence in all things. Thus, as Host, He changed the water into wine — indicative of the joy and festivity of the Kingdom of God. All is dependent upon Him in the truth of who He is, and on the exercise of His authority and glorious power. How great will be the world-wide joy when *His* word is bowed to in that coming day.

It will be of interest to consider now the end of this gospel — John 20 and John 21. On the first day of the week, risen from amongst the dead, Jesus appears in the midst of His own, prefiguring Him in the midst of the Assembly as the Dispenser of peace, and Communicator of life in the power of the Spirit, and the Commissioner of His disciples in their mission of forgiveness, as heralds of the gospel of the grace of God. Eight days later He appears again, with Thomas especially in view. Thomas is figurative of Israel who will repent and believe when they *see* the Christ in the day of His glorious manifestation. His word to Thomas was, "Because thou hast seen Me thou hast believed."

In Isaiah we are told that the Lord, having taken up His rights, "shall reign in Mount Zion, and in Jerusalem, and before His ancients gloriously" (Isaiah 24: 23). "He will destroy . . . the covering cast over all people, and the vail that is spread over all nations . . . And it shall be said in that day, Lo, this is our God; we have waited for Him, and He will save us; this is the LORD; we have waited for Him, we will be glad and rejoice in His salvation" (Isaiah 25: 7-9).

How significant that Thomas, when the Lord showed him His hands and His side, answered, "My Lord and my God" (John 20: 26-29).

The day is certainly coming when the nation of Israel will see, receive and believe in their once crucified Lord, then manifested as the glorified One. In chapter 21 our Lord appears for a third time, and with this is connected the haul of great fishes. Suggestively, the net of the gospel of the Kingdom, cast into the sea of nations, shall bring in a great yield.

The first appearing (John 20: 19-23) is indicative of this present day, during which the Lord is gathering His own to His Name in assembly character; the second is illustrative of the bringing in of Israel, a willing people in the day of His power; the third suggests the gathering to Him of the nations.

How wonderful that day when Israel and the nations shall own His rightful and righteous sway; how wonderful is the day in which *our* lot is cast, for the Spirit of God through the teaching of the Word of God is gathering to Christ as the alone gathering centre for the Assembly; soon He will be the manifested centre of gathering for the universe of bliss and glory. Lord haste *that* day and give us grace to rise to the height of Thy calling in *this* day!

It has been noted that in John's gospel there is a threefold division — John 1-7; John 8-12; and John 13-17 — Light, Life and Love. We remark that the condition of natural life requires Water, Light and Bread. In John 4 we have the Living Water; In John 5 the voice of the Lord quickens and the subjects of His life giving are made to live in the Light of the revelation of the Father which He has given. Light shone in the witness of John the Baptist; also in the threefold witness of the works of the Son; the witness of the Father; and the witness of the Scriptures. These three were one in focusing their Light upon the glory of the Son of God. In John 6 we have the Living Bread. He is the "true Bread out of heaven;" He is the Bread of God; He is the Bread of Life. Thus there is divine sustenance for spiritual life — water, light and bread.

A matter of greatest interest in the gospel is that of "the lifting up of the Son of Man." Three times is this holy theme presented to us — John 3: 14; John 8: 28; John 12: 32. John 3 obviously connects with the teaching of the first day in John 1, and the first appearing of our Lord in John 20. The new, heavenly family, gathering to him in the light of the revelation of the Father and the manifestation of eternal life, owes this richest blessing to the Son of Man who was lifted up that, instead of perishing, they might have eternal life. The reference in John 8 connects more with His testimony to Israel. "When ye have lifted up the Son of Man, then ye shall know that I am (He)." Obviously, their learning that He is the "I AM" of the Old Testament is dependent upon His lifting up. The day is coming when Israel shall confess, as we have already intimated, the glory of their Lord. Note the language, "When ye have lifted up the Son of Man."

In John 3 His lifting up is a divine necessity in order that the floodgates of the love of God might be opened righteously. Here in John 8 there is an emphasis on their guilt in crucifying Him. In John 12: 32 — "and I, if I be lifted up out of the earth, will draw all to Me." What an answer to the shame and ignominy of the cross! He who was the spectacle of all, shall be the acknowledged rallying Centre of all in the glory of His Kingdom. So then, the Assembly, Israel and the nations, all shall attribute their blessing to His having been lifted up at Calvary.

While we long for the day of His glory, we recall that thrice over men divided because of Him. John 7: 43 — "so there was a division among the people because of Him;" John 9: 16, on the occasion of His opening the eyes of one born blind, "there was a division among them;" John 10: 19, having presented Himself as the Shepherd of the sheep and having spoken of His intimacy with the Father, "There was a division therefore again among the Jews for these sayings." They divided on account of His Person; His work; and His Word. These three blessed considerations are the touchstone for all today.

"What think ye of Christ is the test,
To try both your state and your scheme.
You cannot be right in the rest,
Unless you think rightly of Him"

His glory as the resurrection, life giving Son of God is attested in John 11: 4, 25, 26; He rides into Jerusalem as the King of Israel — great David's greater Son (John 12: 15); then in answer to the

plea of the Greeks, "Sir, we would see Jesus," He said, "The hour is come, that the Son of Man should be glorified."

He speaks of three doors in John 10: 1-9 — the door into the fold; the door of the sheep (out of the fold); and then the door into salvation, liberty and pasture. He is the Shepherd of the sheep (v. 2); He is the Good Shepherd (v. 11); and He is the One Shepherd (v. 16). In John 10 He is the giver of eternal life; in John 11 He is the Raiser of the Dead; yet in John 12 He is the Corn of Wheat that falls into the ground and dies. This, praise His Name, that He might secure a company to share with Him the blessedness of His knowledge of the Father — a company which would, in responsive affection for Him, treasure these all-varied features of His glory which thrill our souls as we feast in the green pastures of this gospel. In John 13 He is the Feetwasher, enabling His own, without any defiling hindrance to have part with Himself in the place He now occupies with the Father. In John 14 He is the Preparer of a place for His own with Himself, and He is also the Coming One whose loving desire is to have them with and like Himself, where He is.

"All like Thee, for Thy glory like Thee Lord,
Object supreme of all, by all adored"

He is the Giver of the other Comforter, the Holy Spirit, as the living link with Himself in the Father's presence and as the power for witness in the world from which He has gone. In this connection He says of the Spirit (John 14: 26), "He shall teach you all things, and bring all things to your remembrance, whatsoever I have said unto you."

This covers the gospels. John 15: 26, "He shall testify of Me."

This covers also the epistles. John 16: 13, "He will show you things to come."

This covers the Book of Revelation. There are three distinct features of the Spirit's ministry; John 16: 8, "He will reprove the world of SIN and of RIGHTEOUSNESS, and of JUDGMENT."

The three reasons are — "They believe not on me;" "I go to My Father," and "the prince of this world is judged." Space forbids further details but there is sufficient in these suggestions of the threefold cord to meditate upon with resultant great spoil.

Turning to our Lord's wonderful prayer in John 17 we read of a glory which He had with the Father before the world was, v. 5; a glory given to Him which He shares with His own, v. 22; and a glory which, though it cannot be shared, shall be witnessed by His own, v. 24. Then there are three unities in this prayer of our Lord; Unity in witness, v. 11; Unity in communion, v. 21; Unity in glory, v. 22.

As we have travelled through this soul-entrancing gospel of John we have observed many instances of the threefold cord. now in John 19: 18 we reach that scene beyond all scenes, a sight that, reverentially, we hesitate to speak of. But even here man unwittingly gives Him the pre-eminence that He MUST have — "they crucified Him, and two others with Him, on either side one, and Jesus in the midst." Soon we shall see Him in the midst of the throne, "a Lamb newly slain" then to be the Object of universal acclamation.

Reaching the close of the gospel we notice in John 21 the threefold searching of the once bold Peter. He who had protested that if all failed their Lord yet he would not; he who denied His Lord with oaths and curses, now stood in the presence of that blessed Person. Three times He asked, "Simon . . . lovest thou Me?" Twice the Lord used the general word for love; twice Peter replied, "Yea Lord; thou knowest that I love Thee," using the word for attachment or "I dearly love thee." The third time Jesus

said, "Lovest thou me?" using Peter's word. Peter is grieved at this and said, "Lord; thou knowest all things; thou knowest that I am attached to Thee."

It was as though he said, "it takes Omniscience to discern it but Thou knowest that *I dearly love Thee.*" Blessed searching; blessed Searcher of hearts! He, who in John 2 was said not to commit Himself to certain because he knew all men, now commits His chief interest, the sheep of His pasture, to the care of a restored Peter.

The Lord grant that everyone of us may be responsive to the love of the Shepherd which led Him to give His life for His sheep. In adoring and appreciative worship may we dedicate ourselves in His Name to the worship-service of the Father, in the power of the Spirit, thankful that, "a threefold cord is not quickly broken," and that the divine bond can *never* be broken.