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*"The Entrance of THY WORDS Giveth Light"*

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*Editor:* A. McDONALD REDWOOD

# The Bible Student

Editor: A. McDONALD REDWOOD

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## SOME NEW TESTAMENT TRIADS

BY THE EDITOR

The grouping together in threes of related themes or subjects is a well-recognized feature of the New Testament. The subject of the Holy Trinity is a sublime example. There are other Examples: Paul in 1 Thess. 5:23 refers to man's tripartite nature as consisting of spirit, soul, and body. John summarises the trinity of evil principles in the familiar terms: "The lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life"; and there is the related triad of the world, the flesh and the Devil. There can be little doubt that such grouping is designed, and has for its chief object the emphasising of the subjects so joined. That is, the relation between the three members of the triad is not superficial but fundamental.

Our present study is confined to the four chosen examples because of their direct bearing on the daily life of the Christian. What is more, they reflect in practical application the inner meaning of the revelation of the Holy Trinity for our daily life.

The scope of the subject is shown as follows:

- I. "*Life, Light, and Love*"—The Essential Revelation of the Divine nature of the Trinity.
- II. "*The Way, the Truth, the Life*"—The Experimental Knowledge of the Divine nature (The Father: Jn. 14).
- III. "*Faith, Hope, Love*"—The Enduring Principles of the Divine nature operative within the Church (The Ascended Lord: Heb. 10:19-25).
- IV. "*Grace, Mercy and Peace*"—The Expressive Benediction of the Triune God.

The revelation of the eternal being of the Godhead consisting of three Persons, the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit, is the

most sublime Christian doctrine conceivable.\* Yet, because of this, if it is to be effective in Christian experience it must 'come' to us in understandable form, and be translated into actual experience through simple means without being evacuated of its essential content. That this might become possible was one of the great purposes of the Incarnation. And what Christ began to reveal the Holy Spirit continues to expand, concerning the "life that is LIFE indeed": "This is life eternal", said Christ, "that they should *know thee* the only true God, and Him whom thou didst send, even Jesus Christ" (Jn. 17:3).

If we examine these four triads carefully we shall find that they 'bring' to us, in understandable terms, the knowledge of the Triune God Himself. They enable us to enter into the experimental enjoyment of the Father's love as revealed in Christ. Also they contain the essential elements of the comforting and blessed ministry of the indwelling Holy Spirit.

It is reasonable to suggest that, in the *first* triad the whole Godhead is in view; Father, Son and Holy Spirit.

The *next* in order places particular emphasis on the revelation of the Father; but the Spirit is there also, and active.

The *third* directs attention to the Body (the Church) of which Christ is the Head and therefore central; yet the Spirit is not absent.

The *fourth* brings us back to the Trinity, reflecting the great benediction of Paul the Apostle: "The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all."

I. "LIFE, LIGHT, AND LOVE"—The Essential Revelation of the Divine Nature of the Godhead.

These three closely related concepts are employed by the Holy Spirit in the writings of the Apostle John to express the being and nature of God in His self-revelation to man. (a) God is *Spirit* (or *Life*), John 4:24. (b) God is *Light*, 1 John 1:5. (c) God is *Love*, 1 Jn. 4:8.

These are the only three direct and absolute statements regarding the Divine nature; we know nothing of the mystery of His being that is not included in these terms. Life is the essence of

\* The doctrine of the Holy Trinity was dealt with in the series of three articles, by Mr. R. H. C. Hill, which appeared in the Jan., April, and Oct., 1948, issues of the 'B.S.', to which the reader is referred.

all being. Light is the sum of all wisdom and knowledge. Love is the manifestation of His affections, the outgoings of His holiness. Together they express, as far as such mystery can be put into human words, Perfection in the Absolute.

But that man might *know* God He has been pleased to manifest the plenitude of the divine nature in the person of His Son. The divine Life "became flesh and dwelt among us" (Jn. 1:14). The divine Light "hath shined forth in our hearts, to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ" (2 Cor. 4:6; Jn. 8:12). The divine Love revealed itself in the Cross of Calvary (Rom. 5:8; 1 Jn. 4:9, 10).

"Life, Light, Love, are the 'glory' of the Word Incarnate", says H. P. Liddon, "which His disciples 'beheld', pouring its rays through the veil of His human tabernacle. Each discourse, each miracle, nay, each separate word and act, is a fresh ray from the Person of the Word."

Yet the revelation is not finally complete without the work of the Holy Spirit, through whom the divine nature is communicated to us in redemption. That this communication might become perfected He becomes "the Spirit of Life" for our regeneration (Jn. 3:5, 8; Rom. 8:2); the "Spirit of Wisdom" for our enlightenment (Eph. 1:17, 18); and the "Spirit of sonship" for our adoption—the culmination of Love's "perfect work" (Rom. 8:15; Gal. 4:6). Well may Bickersteth exclaim in song—

O Life, Light, Love the great I AM  
Triune, who changest never!  
The throne of God and of the Lamb  
Is Thine, and Thine for ever!

In this triad, therefore, we have the foundations upon which Christianity rests. On this the believer builds his faith in the living God. To vary the thought, these are the elements which constitute the life and character of the Christian. If the apostle's assertion (in 2 Peter 1:4) is true that the believer is to become "partaker of the divine nature", it follows that he is sharer in this Life, Light and Love. And thus at last is fulfilled the Saviour's prayer: "As thou, Father, art in me, and I in thee, that they also may be *one in us*."

Then the outward and practical manifestation of this to the world is expressed in the daily walk or life which the world can see. Hence the threefold apostolic command: "Walk in newness of *life*" (Rom. 6:4); "walk in the *light* as He is in the light"

(1 Jn. 1:7; Eph. 5:8 R.V.); "walk in *love*" (Eph. 5:2) and comprehensively, "*if we live by the Spirit*, by the Spirit let us also walk" (Gal. 5:25; also v. 16).

II. "I AM THE WAY, THE TRUTH, AND THE LIFE"—The Experimental Knowledge of the Divine nature. (Read John 14: 4-7, 16-20, 25-26.)

When knowledge of the Divine is revealed it is ours to apprehend it. That is the purpose of revelation. And this apprehension leads to and sustains the Christian *walk*—referred to above. Knowing is walking—in the Way, the Truth, the Life.

Here then is the leading idea of the whole passage: The knowledge of the FATHER. And Christ teaches His disciples that this is impossible except through the Son, and the coming and indwelling of the Spirit. We cannot know the One except in unity with the others. The Holy Trinity is One, yet each Person has a specific function in the life of the believer.

The three terms, the Way, the Truth, the Life, are not independent ideas; neither can they be fused into one phrase—"I am the true way of life"—which entirely misses the real point. They are separate, yet one in pointing the way to the Father (v. 7), and to possession of the Spirit (vs. 16, 17). They were uttered to meet the felt need of the disciples as they listened to the Lord's words when He was about to leave them: "Lord, we know not whither thou goest; how know we the way?" (v. 6). "Lord, shew us the Father" (v. 8). Separation implied in their minds loss; they failed to realize it would be spiritual gain, for they would then learn to walk *by faith* and not by sight. They would come to know their Master in a profounder sense than ever. This deeper spiritual apprehension would become dynamic, whereas it was now merely static.

Jesus' statement is wonderful in fulness and brevity. It directs the heart not to a creed but to the Christ, the only Way to God. He, the eternal Word, became flesh so that He might become the Way from the Father *to us*. And now *for us* He is the Way back to God. He can now assert: "henceforth ye know (the Father) and have seen Him"—seen Him in the Incarnate One (v. 7). "Walk, therefore, in Him who is Man", says Augustine, "that you may come to Him who is GOD."

But Christ is also "the Truth" and "the Life". Not merely the true way and the living way, but His very nature is Truth

and Life. It is characteristic of the apostle's writings to stress this: God is revealed in Christ as "the only *true* God" (ch. 17:3); the "*truth* came (*egeneto*, 'was realized') through Jesus Christ" (ch. 1:14, 17); Christ's permanent mission is to "bear witness to *the Truth*" (ch. 18:37); Himself *is* the Truth, that is, the sum total of that knowledge which alone can be called "eternal" and "absolute".

Finally, Christ is the Life, without which fellowship with God is impossible. "This is the eternal life that they may learn to know thee the only true God. . ." (so it may be rendered literally). "The 'life' is that state in which we are introduced to the knowledge of the Father and the Son, the state in which, when life is perfected in us, we come to know Them as they are, to 'see' Them, and to 'be like' Them (Cp. 1 Jn. 3:2)" (Moulton and Milligan's *Com.* in loc.).

III. "NOW ABIDETH FAITH, HOPE, LOVE—these three": The Enduring Principles of the divine nature operative within the Church.

Of all the triads this occurs the most frequently. It contains the living principles of the Christian life. We use the word 'principle' in preference to any other oft-used terms, e.g. graces, endowments, virtues, etc., all of which may be applicable separately in certain contexts. 'Principle' is distinctive. It is that which actuates the life, directing conduct and building character; a 'rule of life'.

The several occurrences of this triad indicate the supreme importance attached to their combination. Used together, almost invariably they apply to the collective witness of the Church, and are expressive of its *community* life and testimony. The individual believer is addressed as *in* the Body. It is instructive to study the passages in which the triad occurs; all we can attempt now is to glance at one or two. We shall deal, (A) with the *exposition* of the principles. Then (B) with two or three actual *illustrations* of their essentiality in the life of the church.

A. We turn first to that comprehensive exhortation in Hebrews 10:19-25 R.V. It is a finely set miniature of a model church spiritually active. This activity is threefold: (1) Worship (vs. 19-22); (2) Witness (v. 23); (3) and practical Works (v. 24). The first is Godward; the second is manward, to the world; the third is within the spiritual fellowship of the church. In each

aspect of the collective manifestation of the church's life it is shown that faith, hope, and love—"these three"—are the essential dynamics for effective testimony. Apart from these all testimony is fruitless, however great the activity outwardly. This we shall see, but first we must examine some details of this passage.

The primary function of the church is worship: That may not be an accepted truth today, but the New Testament is clear. God claims the worship of His people before He looks for any other activities. And the church expresses its highest privilege and truest character when it "enters within the sanctuary" in adoring worship. But it must be in the manner and spirit in which alone worship is acceptable: "With a *true heart, in fulness of faith*, having hearts sprinkled from an evil conscience." *Faith* is central; for "without faith it is impossible to please God" (ch. 11:6, R.V.). Living faith rules out all mere outward form and ritual, which in themselves are lifeless. This is made evident in that classic indictment of His people by God Himself speaking through His prophet Isaiah (ch. 29:13, q.v.\*). In contrast, God looks for the outflowing love of the whole redeemed personality objectively focussed upon Himself, not for a merely subjective emotionalism. It is such worshippers "the Father seeks to worship Him in spirit and in truth" (Jn. 4:23).

Secondly, there follows the unwavering witness of a *living hope*† to a world buried deep in shattered hopes. This hope is the subject of the *church's* public confession, the sign of its true "other-worldliness". "Christianity knows nothing of a hope of immortality for the individual alone, but only of a glorious hope for the individual in the Body, in the eternal Society of the Church triumphant" (Mozley, *Univ. Sermons*). The passage recalls the similar exhortation of ch. 3:6, "hold fast our boldness (in belief and confession) and the glorying of our *hope* firm unto the end." The world lives all for the present and the seen, the church "looks not at the things which are seen, but the things which are not seen; for the things which are seen are temporal (and fading); but the things which are not seen are *eternal*" (2 Cor. 4:18). Moreover,

\* "The Lord said . . . this people draw near me with their mouth, and with their lips do honour me, but have removed their *heart* far from me, and their fear toward me is taught by *the precept of men*."

† The accuracy of the R.V. rendering should be noted; the word is *hope* not faith as in A.V. Furthermore, the Gk. *homologia* in N.T. usage almost always has the sense of public profession or confession as in R.V. of this verse—cf. also R.V. of 2 Cor. 9: 13; 1 Tim. 6: 12, 13; Heb. 3: 1; 4: 14.



it is "Christ Himself who is our hope" (1 Tim. 1:1)—the "Christ *in you* the hope of glory" (Col. 1:27). This hope of glory lights the future with radiant confidence and patience when all else is shading off into abysmal darkness. "Wherefore, girding up the loins of your mind, be sober and *set your hope perfectly* on the grace that is being brought unto you at the revelation of Jesus Christ" (1 Pet. 1:13).

Thirdly, the picture is completed by the appeal, "*Consider* one another to provoke unto *love and good works*" (vs. 24, 25). "The greatest of these is *love*"! But primarily this love is *objective*, as may be seen by reference to the correlative exhortation in ch. 3:1—"consider the Apostle and High Priest of our confession, even Jesus." The latter is essential to the former. Love binds us all to Him first, and then to one another: "Seeing ye have purified your souls in your obedience to the truth *unto unfeigned love of the brethren*, love one another from the heart ('a clean heart'—R.V. margin) fervently" (1 Pet. 1:22). "Unfeigned love" strikes deep into the false heart of dissimulation and deceit. To carry out the injunction entails a continual cleansing of the heart and mind from all manner of evil. This principle of love overrides every other consideration if we are to worship acceptably the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ.

B. We remarked above on the supreme essentiality of these three principles to the church. A brief comparison of the records of two N.T. churches in this connection will repay study.

The church in Thessalonica would seem to be a model run on the principles found in the passage in Hebrews just considered. (See, e.g. 1 Thess. 7:7 and 2:19, 20). As the apostle took stock of its flourishing witness to the truth he could thank God for its "work of faith, and labour of love, and patience of hope." A similar thanksgiving is offered for the church in Colossae (Col. 1:3-5). In both instances the three principles are named in the order of practical experience: Faith prompts action; Love sustains labour; Hope inspires perseverance. Or, as Lightfoot gives it, they occur in the order of temporal sequence: "Faith rests on the past; Love works in the present; Hope looks to the future".

Turn now to the picture of the church in Ephesus, as portrayed in Rev. 2:1-5. Here again is a similar model community to the eyes of all but Christ's. It has an enviable record. There was obviously a punctilious rectitude in outward ritual, a painstaking

toiling in rightful deeds, a patient witness to the truth against all false doctrine. "I know", says the Hidden Watcher, "thy works and labour, and patience." Here are the same features that characterized the church in Colossae and in Thessalonica. Yet they are *not* the same—there is something missing in each feature. The 'works' were there, but faith is not mentioned; 'labour', but not love; 'patience', but not hope. The Head of the Church Universal, whose "eyes were as a flame of fire", marked the omissions and summed the verdict into one word, "thou hast *left thy first love*": Bereft of Love, Faith had sickened, Hope died. The church had forsaken her Lord!

Outwardly splendid, as of old—  
Inwardly sparkless, void and cold—  
Her force, her fire, all spent and gone,  
Like the dead moon, still shines on\*

The same indictment is true of many a life and church today whose 'activities' are lauded by the world but mourned by the Master Himself.

There was (and is) only one way back: "*Remember . . . Repent. . . Do the first works*" (v. 5). The "first works" were those conditioned and motivated by "the first love"—that inclusive and vital principle of all work and witness and worship to the Loving Christ. There must be a return to the starting point, where Love was full, Hope blazed far and Faith *lived* in Him who was Lord *and* Master. Those are the only true sources of divine power and fruitfulness. Let us get back to the *essentials*; "I AM thy exceeding great Reward"† is still the secret of blessedness for us as for Abraham of old.

IV. "GRACE, MERCY AND PEACE"—The Expressive Benediction of the Triune God.

This triad occurs in 1 and 2 Timothy; 2 John;‡ and in modified form in Jude's epistle, where 'love' is substituted for 'grace.'

\* So wrote the English poet William Watson nigh half a century ago of the church to which he was supposed to belong. Possibly the words are more applicable to the Church of Laodicea than of Ephesus, some may think: And yet *are* they?

† Genesis 15: 1.

‡ The epistle to Titus also has it in the A.V. but the R.V., following the best, MSS rightly omits 'mercy'. At least it is interesting that *some* MSS have 'grace, mercy and peace.'

It is more than a salutation merely; we might call it a pastoral invocation for blessing. Both Paul and John were nearing the end of their earthly ministry. They would appear to be thinking alike of the spiritual needs of those younger brethren who would care for the Flock when the elder shepherds had gone. What could be more adequate and expressive than these divine resources?—"Grace, Mercy, Peace, from God the Father and Christ Jesus our Lord"; or the fuller request, "The Grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the Love of God, and the Communion of the Holy Spirit be with you all."

The similarity of the two petitions or invocations is obvious: Both are benedictory in style; both reveal the only true Source and Supply of all spiritual blessings. If there is a difference it is the logical one of their respective setting and occasion. One is doctrinal, the other pastoral; the one views the whole church as the object of divine bestowments; the other is concerned with the needs of its scattered units in a world of struggle and conflict. In either setting every member is blessed by God *the Father*, in God *the Son*—"Who through *the Eternal Spirit* offered Himself without blemish"\* for the salvation of the Body of Christ.

(a) *Grace*: Volumes have been written in the attempt to unfold the many-sided meaning of this one word. It is the word which reveals the "coming down of the Most High with help to the helpless." It is descriptive of the energy of divine holiness and the activity of divine love working in fulfilment of the divine purpose to bless sin-ridden humanity with a completed salvation.

Thus the word grace, coming first in both benedictions, directs our thoughts to the Fountain-head of all blessing. Jude's phrasing puts love instead of grace: Grace is just love in action. "God is love" connotes "God is grace and gracious", inevitably and eternally. It is the "grace of God" (Titus 2:11); the "grace of the Lord Jesus Christ" (2 Cor. 2:13); and no less of the Holy Spirit, who is called "the Spirit of grace" (Heb. 10:29), whom we are solemnly warned not to refuse.

"The Incarnation itself was the perfect expression of what was meant by 'grace', and in its light and power *all* God's good gifts were become new" (Hort, *First Peter*).

(b) *Mercy*: Trench points out in his *N. T. Synonyms* that the freeness of God's love towards the guilty is the central point in

\* Hebrews 9: 14.

*charis* (grace), whilst *eleos* (mercy) has in view the *misery* of the sinful and its relief. In Titus 3:5 (R.V.) the apostle relates it to the "kindness of our Saviour God and His love to man (Gk. *philanthrōpía*)\* which appeared" so that "according to *His mercy He saved us.*"

Mercy is specially spoken of God the Father, who "delights in mercy" (Micah 7:18, 20); He is "the Father of mercies" (2 Cor. 1:3); "rich in mercy" (Eph. 2:4); and "His tender mercies are over all His works" (Ps. 145:9). Hence Christ's own injunction to His disciples, "Be ye merciful, even as your Father is merciful" (Luke 6:36), an injunction which calls for practical demonstration on our part of "mercy triumphing over vindictiveness" (James 2:13) in all our dealings.

It is particularly interesting to note how Paul "the aged" (as he calls himself) in his advancing years reveals his deep sense of sinfulness when, as "the chief of sinners", he became the object of God's pardoning grace, and exclaims by way of explanation, "I obtained mercy" (1 Tim. 1:13, 15, 16; cf. 2 Cor. 4:1).

(c) *Peace*: A logical order is observed in the benediction. Peace is only possible when grace has done its utmost and mercy has triumphed in pardon. Even grace will not give peace unless mercy accompany it; for man needs pardon for the past no less than strength for the future.

"Peace (*eirēnē*) is the antithesis of every kind of conflict and war and molestation, to enmity without and distraction within" (Hort). Peace is the result of justification and reconciliation (Rom. 5:1). Peace implies *fellowship* with the triune God and with all His people, "God will speak peace unto His saints" (Ps. 119:165). Here we find one of the links with the "doctrinal benediction", which includes "*the communion* of the Holy Spirit". The word means fellowship not only *with* the Spirit but *in* the Spirit with every true child of God. In fact, peace (and its correlative fellowship) is "the fruit" of the Spirit's operations within (Gal. 5:22). And only as He is allowed fullest sway in our lives can it be practical "to follow peace with all men" (Heb. 12:14; also Rom. 14:19).

Finally, God is called "the God of peace", a phrase used in several settings, indicating the nearness of God to His people (Rom. 15:33; 2 Thess. 3:16; Phil. 4:9, etc).

\* The Greek word *philanthropia* generally means kindness to those *in distress* (cf. 'kindness' in Acts 27:3; 28:2).