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A Letter to Dear Children, Part 17

Three to Life

Text: 1 John 5:6-13

We like threes, don’t we? In writing, there is a principle called the rule of three. It suggests that characters or events are more pleasant when they fall on the ear in threes.

* In literature: Blood, sweat and tears. Life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness. Government *of* the people, *by* the people and *for* the people.
* In music: Earth Wind and Fire. Peter, Paul and Mary. Shake, rattle and roll.
* In food: Bacon, lettuce, tomato
* In real estate: Location, location, location
* In cinema: Sex, Lies and Videotape. Planes, Trains and Automobiles. The Good, the Bad and the Ugly.
* In comedy, this is sometimes called the comic triple. An Englishman, a Scotsman and an Irishman walk into a bar... A brunette, a redhead and a blonde are in the airport... A rabbi, a priest and a Baptist pastor are deserted on an island...
* In legal jargon: I give, devise and bequeath to my son... I promise to tell the truth, the whole truth and nothing but the truth.
* In the Bible: Peter, James and John. Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. Faith, Hope and Love.

Here, in our text “there are three that bear witness in heaven” (v.7). The word *trinity* is not in the Bible. However, God has revealed Himself, clearly, in three distinct persons and these three are one (v.7) These three bear witness in heaven. Then there are three that bear witness on earth (v.8). What is the difference between these two bearings of witness? The second witness is a bit problematic. How should we interpret these elements in verse 8?

While there are several ways it has been understood by scholars across the ages, I offer the interpretation that seems most faithful to the text and the context.

1. Some say the water and the blood take us to Christ’s death in John 19:34-35:

**34**But one of the soldiers pierced His side with a spear, and immediately blood and water came out. **35**And he who has seen has testified, and his testimony is true; and he knows that he is telling the truth, so that you may believe.

1. Some would say that the water and blood point to Christ’s birth, as he was born a human and came through the birth canal of Mary with the blood and water that attends all our births.
2. Martin Luther and others would say that the water and the blood refer to the sacraments of baptism and communion.

The text and the context suggest that the best way to understand this eighth verse is to see it as a reference to Christ’s person and the credibility of that person. That is, God has sent us Jesus, born as a human baby (with blood and water surrounding his birth). This baby grew and then died (with blood and water flowing) so that we could know God. God bore witness to the credibility of His son through two acts, one involving water, the other involving water and blood. On the occasion of Jesus’ baptism, as Jesus came out of the water, God declared, “This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased” (Matthew 3:17). At Jesus’ death, as we saw in John 19:34-35, both water and blood flowed out of Jesus.

John reminds us that we who give credence to human witnesses should remember that God’s witness is even *more* credible (v.9). Here, John argues from the lesser to the greater. If you could trust *humans*, you could surely trust *God*! *God is* greater than our hearts (3:20). The One who is in us is greater than the one in the world (4:4).

The ultimate witness of our great God is His son, Jesus the Christ. In fact, it is this embracing of the triune God that gives life. God the Father, has given Himself in God the Son. God the Holy Spirit, resides in those who have embraced Christ so that we may live out the life to which we have been called. These three, Father, Son and Spirit, lead to life. Three to life. John is so adamant about this, so unmovable about this, so not-open-to-negotiation on this that he will say, “He/she who has the Son has *life*; he/she that does *not* have the Son of God does *not* have life.” Period. End of statement. Do you have the Son? I did not ask if you were a good person. Nor did I ask if you were religious. The question is much more specific. Do you have the Son? Do you? John Stott writes in his *The* *Epistles of John* (p. 182), “Unbelief is not a misfortune to be pitied; it is a sin to be deplored. Its sinfulness lies in the fact that it contradicts the word of the one true God and thus attributes falsehood to Him.”

John tells us why he has bothered to write (13). John wants these first century believers to have assurance. The ending of this epistle is similar to the ending of John’s gospel (20:30-31).

John wants his beloved spiritual children to go through life with a confidence that comes from knowing where they stand with God. He wants them to believe in Christ and continue to believe. He wants them to embrace the Father, the Son and be open to the ongoing work of the Holy Spirit in them. Father, Son, Holy Spirit. Three to life. It’s not a sentence...it’s a trinitarian celebration.

Amen