

Threefold Cord of Apostolic Identity - Holiness

Ecclesiastes 4:12 And if one prevail against him, two shall withstand him; and a threefold cord is not quickly broken.

Threefold Cord of Apostolic Identity – Oneness, New Birth, Holiness

The “holiness strand” is most likely to get pulled from the threefold cord – but a “twofold cord” won’t hold together, you need the third strand!

How important is holiness in this threefold cord? Just remember this: “History repeats itself” ... and ... “the only thing we learn from history is that we never learn anything from history!”

Nicolas, a proselyte of Antioch, was one of the first seven church deacons chosen to look after the business matters of the early church (Acts 6:5). However, his dedication to the Apostolic message was short-lived. According to early writings on heresy, Nicolas eventually backslid and introduced the **Doctrine of the Nicolaitanes** to the church. His doctrine came about as a “knee-jerk” reaction to the legalism of the Judaizers; it abused Paul’s doctrine of the grace of God and introduced a false freedom into the church. **Nicolas and his followers erred in combating one extreme teaching with another extreme teaching!**

In the book of Revelation, the Apostle John compared the Nicolaitanes to Balaam in the Old Testament who “cast a stumblingblock before the children of Israel” (Revelation 2:14). Balaam was unsuccessful in cursing Israel from without, but he taught them to mix godliness and worldliness (Numbers 31:16) and they cursed themselves from within! This same spirit was behind Nicolas’ doctrine, which was based on Greek dualism. **He declared that Christians - since they were “sinners saved by grace” - could live like the world on the outside and still remain saved on the inside.** His teaching would later be the basis of the doctrine of eternal security (once saved, always saved) and even the practice of the confessional (confessing to a priest while living in sin!).

Since his teaching required no outward (or inward!) change to be saved, he and his followers attracted large numbers of converts - both from the pagan religions and from a lukewarm church. Nicolas taught that the “externals” of holiness were not important. God, however, had a different opinion. **Twice in Revelation (2:6 and 2:15), God said that He “hated” the teaching of the Nicolaitanes. And He still hates it!** In his brilliant work, “Against Heresies,” the Greek theologian Irenaeus (AD 125 – AD 202) lets us know how far this worldliness eventually reached: “The Nicolaitanes are the followers of that Nicolas who was one of the seven first ordained [as deacons] by the apostles. They lead lives of unrestrained indulgence.” (Book 1, Chapter 26, Section 3)

An outward “standard of holiness” was the first thing to go in the Great Falling Away of the latter first century, but the tide of change did not stop there. The loss of holiness was soon followed by the loss of real repentance, water baptism by immersion in Jesus’ name, speaking in tongues and the gifts of the Spirit, and the doctrine of the Oneness of God. As the elder Apostles died one by one, leaders with smaller vision and weaker conviction stepped in and subtly altered their message. Only much later, as gross doctrinal errors took root in the church and propelled her into the Dark Ages, did it become apparent just how much was lost when the holiness lifestyle was abandoned.

WARNING! The Nicolaitanes are once again rising among the Apostolics! They are compromising the non-negotiable principles of Scripture for personal convenience and societal acceptance. They are surrendering holiness because it is too burdensome and laying truth to rest in the cold grave of tolerance because it is too exclusive and inflammatory. They have massacred the Scripture, maligned the Apostles and mortified their Creator with their shoddy scholarship and their loose living. But the modern Nicolaitanes do not deceive me; I know the damage they did the last time around. **Their new freedom is nothing less than the old bondage in another cloak.** Observe them long enough and you will see that holiness is only the first item on their agenda of change, for the slope to ecumenicalism is steep and slippery.

Let’s not repeat the first century in the twenty-first century!

1 Peter 1:15-16 But as he which hath called you is holy, so be ye holy in all manner of conversation; Because it is written, Be ye holy; for I am holy.

Holiness is absolutely EXPECTED by God. We are commanded to live holy in a way that affects every part (“all manner”) of our lifestyle (“conversation”) – this is nonnegotiable to God! **But couldn’t this idea of holiness just be an “inward” work of God?** Does the Holy Ghost really affect the outward actions and appearance of the vessel He chooses to dwell in? Do the standards of conduct and appearance given in Scripture apply to us today? Couldn’t they be discarded in favour of a lifestyle that is less conspicuous and offensive in modern society? **Does God really want us to be that different?**

Titus 2:14 Who gave himself for us, that he might redeem us from all iniquity, and purify unto himself a peculiar people, zealous of good works.

1 Peter 2:9 But ye are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, an holy nation, a peculiar people; that ye should shew forth the praises of him who hath called you out of darkness into his marvellous light:

“**shew forth**” = “publish abroad, proclaim completely”

“**praises**” = “virtues” / Vines – “properly denotes whatever procures preeminent estimation for a person or thing” (with God? Holiness!)

1 Peter 2:9 (AMP) But you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a dedicated nation, [God's] own purchased, special people, that you may set forth the wonderful deeds and display the virtues and perfections of Him Who called you out of darkness into His marvelous light.

“chastening” = “the training of a child, including instruction; education”
GROWING IN HOLINESS IS NOT PUNISHMENT!

Hebrews 12:1-17 Wherefore seeing we also are compassed about with so great a cloud of witnesses, let us lay aside every weight, and the sin which doth so easily beset us, and let us run with patience the race that is set before us, Looking unto Jesus the author and finisher of our faith; who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is set down at the right hand of the throne of God. For consider him that endured such contradiction of sinners against himself, lest ye be wearied and faint in your minds. Ye have not yet resisted unto blood, striving against sin. And ye have forgotten the exhortation which speaketh unto you as unto children, My son, despise not thou the **chastening** of the Lord, nor faint when thou art rebuked of him: For whom the Lord loveth he **chasteneth**, and scourgeth every son whom he receiveth. If ye endure **chastening**, God dealeth with you as with sons; for what son is he whom the father **chasteneth** not? But if ye be without **chastisement**, whereof all are partakers, then are ye bastards, and not sons. Furthermore we have had fathers of our flesh which **corrected** us, and we gave them reverence: shall we not much rather be in subjection unto the Father of spirits, and live? For they verily for a few days **chastened** us after their own pleasure; but he for our profit, that we might be partakers of his holiness. Now no **chastening** for the present seemeth to be joyous, but grievous: nevertheless afterward it yieldeth the peaceable fruit of righteousness unto them which are exercised thereby. Wherefore lift up the hands which hang down, and the feeble knees; And make straight paths for your feet, lest that which is lame be turned out of the way; but let it rather be healed. **Follow peace with all men, and holiness, without which no man shall see the Lord:** Looking diligently lest any man fail of the grace of God; lest any root of **bitterness (POISON)** springing up trouble you, and thereby many be defiled; Lest there be any fornicator, or profane person, as Esau, who for one morsel of meat sold his **birthright (AUTHORITY, DOUBLE PORTION)**. For ye know how that afterward, when he would have inherited the blessing, he was rejected: for he found no place of repentance, though he sought it carefully with tears. *(THERE ARE CONSEQUENCES TO REJECTING THE “INSTRUCTION” OF GOD’S SPIRIT IN MATTERS OF HOLINESS!)*

Living a holy lifestyle is the “new normal” when you become a child of God. You should think differently, talk differently, act differently, and dress differently. The POINT of the Apostolic lifestyle is to STAND OUT. This is not just for a few “deep” Christians – this is for ALL Christians! You don’t get “extra points” if you do this – HOLINESS IS THE POINT!

The Hebrew word “qodesh” and the Greek word “hagiosune” which are translated “holy” in the Bible literally mean “withdrawal,” “separation” or “apart.” **Being holy does not only mean withdrawing FROM something, it means withdrawing UNTO something.** We do not live holy merely to make others look unholy! Our original state of holiness was lost in the Fall of Man, and we live holy lives so that we can “withdraw” into man’s original state of communion with God.

We have no problem teaching baptism by immersion in water because the very word “baptism” means “to immerse.” In the same way, we have no problem teaching biblical standards of holiness because the very word “holy” means “to be withdrawn, to stand apart, to be separate.”

We do NOT teach that our lifestyle convictions save us, because the Bible teaches that “all our righteousnesses are as filthy rags” (Isaiah 64:6). But we DO teach that our lifestyle convictions are a RESULT of us being saved – not just because we are THANKFUL, but because we are TRANSFORMED. We now have a desire to please the Lord!

Romans 12:1-2 I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that ye present your **bodies** a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable unto God, which is your reasonable service. And be not **conformed** to this world: but be ye **transformed** by the renewing of your mind, that ye may prove what is that good, and acceptable, and perfect, will of God.

Paul tells us that our salvation is “not of works” ...

Ephesians 2:8-9 For by grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God: Not of works, lest any man should boast.

But then immediately tells us that our salvation is “unto good works” ...

Ephesians 2:10 For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus unto good works, which God hath before ordained that we should walk in them.

In other words, GOOD WORKS don’t have anything to do with GETTING saved, but they have everything to do with BEING saved and STAYING saved! Without holiness, no man shall see the Lord!

2 Corinthians 7:1 Having therefore these promises, dearly beloved, let us cleanse ourselves from all filthiness of the flesh and spirit, perfecting holiness in the fear of God.

1 Corinthians 6:19-20 What? know ye not that your body is the temple of the Holy Ghost which is in you, which ye have of God, and ye are not your own? For ye are bought with a price: therefore glorify God in your body, and in your spirit, which are God's.

If you have true righteousness in your SPIRIT, you will have true holiness in your BODY – because BOTH of them belong to God! Because God has done so much for me, I WANT to live a life that is separated from the world and separated unto Him in body AND spirit.

Immature Christians think in terms of “I HAVE TO, maturing Christians think in terms of “I WANT TO,” and mature Christians think in terms of “I GET TO” (i.e. it’s a privilege to live holy!). People only argue over the DETAILS of holiness because they have never received the SPIRIT of holiness.

Jude was preparing to write an epistle about “the common salvation” (i.e. the new birth experience that all Christians receive) when he was prompted by the Holy Ghost to tell us to “contend for the faith which was once delivered unto the saints.” He goes on to warn us that some ungodly people will creep in to the church and turn God’s grace into “lasciviousness” (“loose living”) – in other words, they will live any way they want and just presume that God will forgive them and overlook it. And then Jude warns us that God destroyed some of the people He once delivered (!), because they did not obey His commandments! (i.e. Israel)

Sometimes the Bible speaks simply of FAITH, but other times it speaks of THE FAITH. It is not just indicating individual belief, but the entire body of truth that we believe about Jesus Christ.

Galatians 1:23	Paul preached the faith which once he destroyed
1 Timothy 1:2	Timothy was Paul’s son in the faith
1 Timothy 4:1	You can depart from the faith
1 Timothy 5:8	You can deny the faith
1 Timothy 6:10	You can err from the faith
2 Timothy 3:8	You can be reprobate concerning the faith
1 Corinthians 16:13	Stand fast in the faith
2 Corinthians 13:5	Examine yourself, whether you are in the faith
Ephesians 4:13	Come to the unity of the faith
Colossians 1:23	Be grounded and settled in the faith
Colossians 2:7	Be established in the faith
Titus 1:13	Be sound in the faith
2 Timothy 4:7	Keep the faith

Jude 1:3-5 Beloved, when I gave all diligence to write unto you of the common salvation, it was needful for me to write unto you, and exhort you that ye should earnestly contend for the faith which was once delivered unto the saints. For there are certain men crept in unawares, who were before of old ordained to this condemnation, ungodly men, turning the grace of our God into lasciviousness (LOOSE LIVING), and denying the only Lord God, and our Lord Jesus Christ. I will therefore put you in remembrance, though ye once knew this, how that the Lord, having saved the people out of the land of Egypt, afterward destroyed them that believed not.

Paul gives us the major passage in the NT where the word “YIELD” is used multiple times. The Greek word means “to exhibit, to substantiate, to prove, or to show.” **If you’re YIELDED to God, IT WILL SHOW!**

Romans 6:12-19 Let not sin therefore reign in your mortal body, that ye should obey it in the lusts thereof. Neither yield ye your members as instruments of unrighteousness unto sin: but yield yourselves unto God, as those that are alive from the dead, and your members as instruments of righteousness unto God. For sin shall not have dominion over you: for ye are not under the law, but under grace. What then? shall we sin, because we are not under the law, but under grace? God forbid. Know ye not, that to whom ye yield yourselves servants to obey, his servants ye are to whom ye obey; whether of sin unto death, or of obedience unto righteousness? But God be thanked, that ye were the servants of sin, but ye have obeyed from the heart that form of doctrine which was delivered you. **Being then made free from sin, ye became the servants of righteousness.** I speak after the manner of men because of the infirmity of your flesh: for as ye have yielded your members servants to uncleanness and to iniquity unto iniquity; even so now yield your members **servants to righteousness unto holiness.**

Paul says it very plainly – you once were a SERVANT to SIN, and now you are a SERVANT to RIGHTEOUSNESS. And it is “righteousness unto holiness” – if the JUSTIFICATION you’ve experienced on the INSIDE is real, it will show up in SANCTIFICATION on the OUTSIDE! God is not the least bit interested in being made over in YOUR image. He refuses to conform to your culture or comfort zone. He is totally convinced that since He alone redeemed (“purchased”) you out of sin, He OWNS you. And with God that is non-negotiable.

God wants to make you over into HIS image – so if you have a Biblical salvation experience, it will CHANGE you in ways that you could not have previously imagined. Your DESIRES will change. Your PRIORITIES will change. Your THINKING will change. Your ACTIVITIES will change. Your DRESS CODE will change. In fact, your ENTIRE LIFESTYLE will change.

There are two major types of spiritual POWER in the New Testament ...

DUNAMIS is the ability to do things beyond your natural ability – it is supernatural might and strength – miraculous “DOING” power.

Acts 4:33 And with great power gave the apostles witness of the resurrection of the Lord Jesus: and great grace was upon them all.

Romans 1:16 For I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ: for it is the power of God unto salvation to every one that believeth; to the Jew first, and also to the Greek.

1 Corinthians 1:18 For the preaching of the cross is to them that perish foolishness; but unto us which are saved it is the power of God.

1 Corinthians 2:4-5 And my speech and my preaching was not with enticing words of man's wisdom, but in demonstration of the Spirit and of power: That your faith should not stand in the wisdom of men, but in the power of God.

1 Corinthians 4:20 For the kingdom of God is not in word, but in power.

2 Corinthians 4:7 But we have this treasure in earthen vessels, that the excellency of the power may be of God, and not of us.

2 Corinthians 12:9 And he said unto me, My grace is sufficient for thee: for my strength is made perfect in weakness. Most gladly therefore will I rather glory in my infirmities, that the power of Christ may rest upon me.

Ephesians 3:20 Now unto him that is able to do exceeding abundantly above all that we ask or think, according to the power that worketh in us,

1 Thessalonians 1:5 For our gospel came not unto you in word only, but also in power, and in the Holy Ghost, and in much assurance; as ye know what manner of men we were among you for your sake.

2 Timothy 1:7 For God hath not given us the spirit of fear; but of power, and of love, and of a sound mind.

2 Timothy 3:5 Having a form of godliness, but denying the power thereof: from such turn away.

EXOUSIA is the ability to NOT do things you have the ability to do – or to make others NOT do things they have the ability to do (i.e. Satan) – it is AUTHORITY, or RESTRAINING POWER.

The cross is the ultimate example of this kind of power ...

John 10:18 No man taketh it from me, but I lay it down of myself. I have power (EXOUSIA) to lay it down, and I have power (EXOUSIA) to take it again. This commandment have I received of my Father.

I'M IMPRESSED WITH THE DUNAMIS OF JESUS, BUT I'M EVEN MORE IMPRESSED WITH THE EXOUSIA OF JESUS!

Mark 3:14-15 And he ordained twelve, that they should be with him, and that he might send them forth to preach, And to have power to heal sicknesses, and to cast out devils:

Luke 4:32 And they were astonished at his doctrine: for his word was with power.

John 1:12 But as many as received him, to them gave he power to become the sons of God, even to them that believe on his name:

Colossians 1:13 Who hath delivered us from the power of darkness, and hath translated us into the kingdom of his dear Son:

Revelation 20:6 Blessed and holy is he that hath part in the first resurrection: on such the second death hath no power, but they shall be priests of God and of Christ, and shall reign with him a thousand years.

Ephesians 6:12 For we wrestle not against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this world, against spiritual wickedness in high places.

TO LIVE A HOLY LIFE, IT IS NOT DUNAMIS (“DOING”) POWER YOU NEED, AS MUCH AS IT IS EXOUSIA (“RESTRAINING”) POWER!

1 Corinthians 6:12 All things are lawful unto me, but all things are not expedient: all things are lawful for me, but I will not be brought under the power of any.

1 Corinthians 11:10 For this cause ought the woman to have power on her head because of the angels.

Because of her unique place in God's creation, a submitted woman has “restraining power” on her head. This word “exousia” means “liberty of action (permission), authority (influence), delegated power (jurisdiction)” and pictures the woman exercising her God-given right to guard her home, her husband, her children and her church.

MEN'S STANDARDS – “ACT HOLY” – OFFENSIVE POWER

WOMEN'S STANDARDS – “APPEAR HOLY” – DEFENSIVE POWER

1 Timothy 2:8-10 I will therefore that men pray every where, lifting up holy hands, without wrath and doubting. **In like manner also**, that women adorn themselves in modest apparel, with shamefacedness and sobriety; not with broided hair, or gold, or pearls, or costly array; But (which becometh women professing godliness) with good works.

I understand that many times, the generations before us did a good job of telling us WHAT to do, but sometimes not a very good job teaching us WHY we do it. We're working diligently to correct that in this generation. But hear me well ... just because they may have overlooked the WHY doesn't mean that they were wrong on the WHAT! Culture and churches may have become more liberal, but God has never changed His mind on what an Apostolic believer should act like, talk like, or dress like.

We are now “servants of righteousness” – and servants don't ARGUE, they YIELD.

Because we are a church where EVERYONE is welcome to “belong before they believe,” and because we are a church that is patient with young believers while they GROW, we always run the risk of being misinterpreted. Jesus and Paul were misinterpreted, and we will be also! That means people will come from time to time with an AGENDA ... to enjoy fellowship but not discipleship, to get all the benefits without any of the responsibility, to experience salvation but reject sanctification. We will let them come, and we will love them – but they will not change us!

Because the reason every one of us is here instead of somewhere else is the power of God that is in our midst – and a holy God only manifests Himself only among a holy people who are YIELDED to Him. We will NEVER change our stand on HOLINESS, because it is BIBLICAL. AND WE WILL NEVER CHANGE OUR STAND ON HOLINESS, BECAUSE THAT WOULD CHANGE EVERYTHING ELSE!

HOLINESS IS ALWAYS JUST THE FIRST THING TO GO!

We didn't start out with as much “class” as we think we have today! First, it was 120 people about 2000 years ago who worshipped so intensely that they appeared drunk to onlookers! We are their descendents!

Acts 2:15-16 For these are not drunken, as ye suppose, seeing it is but the third hour of the day. But this is that which was spoken by the prophet Joel;

Next, it was 60 people about 100 years ago in a decrepit old building at 312 Azusa Street in the industrial part of Los Angeles. The revival they had ran non-stop in day and night prayer meetings for over three years!

105 years ago this month, anywhere from 300 to 1,500 people would be attempting to fit into that building. People from a diversity of backgrounds came together to worship: men, women, children, black, white, Hispanic, Asian, rich, poor, illiterate, and educated. The worship at 312 Azusa Street was frequent and spontaneous, with services going around the clock. And the Los Angeles Times was not at all kind in their description:

“Meetings are held in a tumble-down shack on Azusa Street, and the devotees of the weird doctrine practice the most fanatical rites, preach the wildest theories and work themselves into a state of mad excitement in their peculiar zeal. The night is made hideous in the neighborhood by the howlings of the worshippers, who spend hours swaying forth and back in a nerve racking attitude of prayer and supplication. They claim to have the “gift of tongues” and be able to understand the babel.”

“There is a disgraceful intermingling of the races ... they cry and make howling noises all day and into the night. They run, jump, shake all over, shout to the top of their voice, spin around in circles, fall out on the sawdust blanketed floor jerking, kicking and rolling all over it. Some of them pass out and do not move for hours as though they were dead. These people appear to be mad, mentally deranged or under a spell. They claim to be filled with the spirit. They have a one eyed, illiterate, Negro as their preacher who stays on his knees much of the time with his head hidden between the wooden milk crates. He doesn't talk very much but at times he can be heard shouting, ‘Repent,’ and he's supposed to be running the thing ... They repeatedly sing the same song, ‘The Comforter Has Come.’”

Little could the subscribers of the Los Angeles Times have guessed that in years to come, historians would say that the Azusa Street revival gave birth to modern Pentecostalism and became the most significant revival of the twentieth century in terms of world evangelism.

A prophecy was given during this revival, at some unknown point by some unknown person. Nearly a hundred years later, it sounds a warning for us in the Apostolic movement ...

“In the last days three things will happen in the great Pentecostal Movement ... there will be an overemphasis on power, rather than on righteousness; there will be an overemphasis on the gifts of the Spirit, rather than on the Lordship of Christ; there will be an overemphasis on praise, to a God they no longer pray to.”

Are we going to be a different church than the one of Acts? Are we going to be a different church than Azusa Street? Or are we going to be the same kind of church? We have the DOCTRINE they preached – and it still works! But we are in desperate need of the DISCIPLESHIP they had!