



The Fundamentals: A Testimony to the Truth Chapter 9: Internal Evidence for the Fourth Gospel

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The whole Bible is stamped with the Divine “Hall-Mark”; but the Gospel according to St. John is primus inter pares. Through it, as through a transparency, we gaze entranced into the very holy of holies, where shines in unearthly glory “the great vision of the face of Christ.” Yet man’s perversity has made it the “storm center” of New Testament criticism, doubtless for the very reason that it bears such unwavering testimony both to the deity of our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ, and to His perfect humanity. The Christ of the Fourth Gospel is no unhistorical, idealized vision of the later, dreaming church, but is, as it practically claims to be, the picture drawn by “the disciple whom Jesus loved”, an eye-witness of the blood and water that flowed from His pierced side. These may appear to be mere unsupported statements, and as such will at once be dismissed by a scientific reader. Nevertheless the appeal of this article is to the instinct of the “one flock” of the “one Shepherd.” “They know His voice” ...a stranger will they not follow.”

1. There is one passage in this Gospel that flashes like lightning — it dazzles our eyes by its very glory. To the broken-hearted Martha the Lord Jesus says with startling suddenness, “I am the resurrection and the life; he that believeth on Me, though he die, yet shall he live; and whosoever liveth and believeth in Me, shall never die.”

It is humbly but confidently submitted that these words are utterly beyond the reach of human invention. It could never have entered the heart of man to say, “I am the resurrection and the life.” “There is a resurrection and a life,” would have been a great and notable saying, but this Speaker identifies Himself with the resurrection and with life eternal. The words can only be born from above, and He who utters them is worthy of the utmost adoration of the surrendered soul.

In an earlier chapter John records a certain question addressed to and answered by our Lord in a manner which has no counterpart in the world’s literature. “What shall we do,” the eager people cry; “What shall we do that we might work the works of God?” “This is the work of God”,

our Lord replies, “that ye believe on Him whom He hath sent” (John 6:28,29). I venture to say that such an answer to such a question has no parallel. This is the work of God that ye accept ME. I am the Root of the tree which bears the only, fruit pleasing to God. Our Lord states the converse of this in chapter 16, when He says that the Holy Spirit will “convict the world of sin ... because they believe not on ME.” The root of all evil is unbelief in Christ. The condemning sin of the world lies in the rejection of the Redeemer. Here we have the root of righteousness and the root of sin in the acceptance or rejection of His wondrous personality. This is unique, and proclaims the Speaker to be “separate from sinners” though “the Lord hath laid on Him the iniquity of us all.” Truly, “He is His own best evidence, His witness is within.”

2. Pass on to the fourteenth chapter, so loved of all Christians. Listen to that Voice, which is as the voice of many waters, as it sounds in the ears of the troubled disciples:

“Let not your heart be troubled; ye believe in God, believe also in ME. In My Father’s house are many mansions: if it were not so, I would have told you. I go to prepare a place for you. And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again, and receive you unto Myself; that where I am, there ye may be also.”

Who is he who dares to say: “Ye believe in God, believe also in Me”? He ventures thus to speak because He is the Father’s Son. Man’s son is man can God’s Son be anything less than God? Elsewhere in this Gospel He says: “I and the Father are one”. The fourteenth chapter reveals the Lord Jesus as completely at home in the heavenly company. He speaks of His Father and of the Holy Spirit as Himself being one of the utterly holy Family. He knows all about His Father’s house with its many mansions. He was familiar with it before the world was. Mark well, too, the exquisite touch of transparent truthfulness: “If it were not so, I would have told you.” An ear-witness alone could have caught and preserved that touching parenthesis, and who more likely than the disciple whom Jesus loved?

As we leave this famous chapter let us not forget to note the wondrous words in verse 23:

“If a man love Me, he will keep My words; and My Father will love him, and WE will come unto him and make our abode with him.”

This saying can only be characterized as blasphemous, if it be not the true utterance of one equal with God. On the other hand, does any reasonable man seriously think that such words originated in the mind of a forger?

“Every one that is of the truth heareth My Voice”, and surely that voice is here.

3. When we come to chapter 17 we pass indeed into the very inner chamber of the King of kings. It records the high-priestly prayer of our Lord, when He “lifted up His eyes to heaven and said, Father, the hour is come, glorify Thy Son that Thy Son may also glorify Thee.” Let any man propose to himself the awful task of forging such a prayer, and putting it into the mouth of an imaginary Christ. The brain reels at the very thought of it. It is, however, perfectly natural that St. John should record it. It must have fallen upon the ears of himself and his fellow-disciples amidst an awestricken silence in which they could hear the very throbbing of their listening hearts. For their very hearts were listening through their ears as the Son poured out His soul unto the Father. It is a rare privilege, and one from which most men would sensitively shrink, to listen even to a fellowman alone with God. Yet the Lord Jesus in the midst of His disciples laid bare His very soul before His Father, as really as if He had been alone with Him. He prayed with the cross and its awful death full in view, but in the prayer there is no slightest hint of failure or regret, and there is no trace of confession of sin or need of forgiveness. These are all indelible marks of genuineness. It would have been impossible for a sinful man to conceive such a prayer. But all is consistent with the character of Him who “spake as never man spake”, and could challenge the world to convict Him of sin.

With such thoughts in mind let us now look more closely into the words of the prayer itself.

“Father, the hour is come; glorify Thy Son, that Thy Son also may glorify Thee: As Thou hast given Him power over all flesh, that He should give eternal life to as many as Thou hast given Him. And this is life eternal, that they might know Thee, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom Thou hast sent.”

Here we have again the calm placing of Himself on a level with the Father in connection with eternal life. And it is not out of place to recall the consistency of this utterance with that often-called “Johannine” saying recorded in Matthew and Luke: “All things are delivered unto Me of My Father: and no man knoweth the Son, but the Father; neither knoweth any man the Father, save the Son, and he to whomsoever the Son willeth to reveal Him.” We read also in St. John 14:6: “No man cometh unto the Father but by Me”. And as we reverently proceed further in the prayer we find Him saying: “And now, O Father, glorify Thou Me with Thine own self, with the glory which I had with Thee before the world was.” These words are natural to the Father’s Son as we know and worship Him, but they are beyond the reach of an uninspired man, and who Can imagine a forger inspired of the Holy Ghost? Such words would, however, be graven upon the very heart of an ear-witness such as the disciple whom Jesus loved.

We have in this prayer also the fuller revelation of the “one flock” and “one Shepherd” pictured in chapter ten:

“Neither pray I for these alone, but for them also which shall believe on Me through their word; that they all may be one; as Thou, Father, art in Me, and I in Thee, that they also may be one in us: That the world may believe that Thou hast sent Me. And the glory which Thou gavest Me I have given them; that they may be one, even as we are one: I in them, and Thou in Me, that they may be perfected into one; and that the world may know that Thou hast sent Me, and hast loved them, as Thou hast loved Me.”

In these holy words there breathes a cry for such a unity as never entered into the heart of mortal man to dream of. It is no cold and formal ecclesiastical unity, such as that suggested by the curious and unhappy mistranslation of “one fold” for “one flock” in St. John 10:16. It is the living unity of the living flock with the living Shepherd of the living God. It is actually the same as the unity subsisting between the Father and the Son. And according to St. Paul in Romans 8:19, the creation is waiting for its revelation. The one Shepherd has from the beginning had His one flock in answer to His prayer, but the world has not yet seen it, and is therefore still unconvinced that our Jesus is indeed the Sent of God. The world has seen the Catholic Church and the Roman Catholic Church, but the Holy Catholic Church no eye as yet has seen but God’s. For the Holy

Catholic Church and the Shepherd's one flock are one and the same, and the world will not see either "till He come." The Holy Catholic Church is an object of faith and not of sight, and so is the one flock. In spite of all attempts at elimination and organization wheat and tares together grow, and sheep and wolves-in-sheep's-clothing are found together in the earthly pasture grounds. But when the Good Shepherd returns He will bring His beautiful flock with Him, and eventually the world will see and believe. "O the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are His judgments, and His ways past finding out!"

The mystery of this spiritual unity lies hidden in the high-priestly prayer, but we may feel sure that no forger could ever discover it, for many of those who profess and call themselves Christians are blind to it even yet.

4. The "Christ before Pilate" of St. John is also stamped with every mark of sincerity and truth. What mere human imagination could evolve the noble words: "My kingdom is not of this world; if My kingdom were of this world, then would My servants fight, that I should not be delivered to the Jews: but now is My kingdom not from hence. To this end was I born, and for this cause came I into the world, that I should bear witness unto the truth. Every one that is of the truth heareth My voice"?

The whole wondrous story of the betrayal, the denial, the trial, the condemnation and crucifixion of the Lord Jesus, as given through St. John, breathes with the living sympathy of an eye-witness. The account, moreover, is as wonderful in the delicacy of its reserve as in the simplicity of its recital. It is entirely free from sensationalism and every form of exaggeration. It is calm and judicial in the highest degree. If it is written by the inspired disciple whom Jesus loved, all is natural and easily "understood of the people"; while on any other supposition, it is fraught with difficulties that cannot be explained away. "I am not credulous enough to be an unbeliever," is a wise saying in this as in many similar connections.

5. The Gospel opens and closes with surpassing grandeur. With Divine dignity it links itself with the opening words of Genesis: "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. ... And the Word became flesh, and dwelt among us, and we beheld

His glory, the glory as of the Only Begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth."

What a lifelike contrast with this sublime description is found in the introduction of John the Baptist: "There came a man sent from God whose name was John". In the incarnation Christ did not become a man but man. Moreover in this Paul and John are in entire agreement. "There is one God", says St. Paul to Timothy; "one Mediator also between God and man Himself Man — Christ Jesus." The reality of the Divine Redeemer's human nature is beautifully manifested in the touching interview between the weary Savior and the guilty Samaritan woman at the well; as also in His perfect human friendship with Mary and Martha and their brother Lazarus, culminating in the priceless words, "Jesus wept".

And so by the bitter way of the Cross the grandeur of the incarnation passes into the glory of the resurrection. The last two chapters are alive with thrilling incident. If any one wishes to form a true conception of what those brief chapters contain, let him read "Jesus and the Resurrection," by the saintly Bishop of Durham (Dr. Handley Moule) and his cup of holy joy will fill to overflowing. At the empty tomb we breathe the air of the unseen kingdom, and presently we gaze enraptured on the face of the Crucified but risen and ever living King. Mary Magdalene, standing in her broken-hearted despair, is all unconscious of the wondrous fact that holy angels are right in front of her and standing behind her is her living Lord and Master. Slowly but surely the glad story spreads from lip to lip and heart to heart, until even the honest but stubborn Thomas is brought to his knees, crying in a burst of remorseful, adoring joy, "My Lord and my God!"

Then comes the lovely story of the fruitless all-night toil of the seven fishermen, the appearance at dawn of the Stranger on the beach, the miraculous draught of fishes, the glad cry of recognition, "It is the Lord? the never-to-be-forgotten breakfast with the risen Savior, and His searching interview with Peter, passing into the mystery of St. John's old age.

In all these swiftly-drawn outlines we feel ourselves instinctively in the presence of the truth. We are crowned with the Savior's beatitude:

“Blessed are they that have not seen, and yet have believed,” and we are ready to yield a glad assent to the statement which closes chapter twenty:

“Many other signs truly did Jesus in the presence of His disciples, which are not written in this book; but these are written that ye might believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God; and that believing ye might have life in His Name.”

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