

The Revealed Mystery of the Trinity in the Old and New Testaments- Part 1
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In our last course of study, we began to learn about the Divine Attributes of God. These attributes are revealed to us in the Holy Bible which is the very word of God. These attributes tells us who God is and what God does. God acts lovingly because God is love, etc... These attributes are the very essence of God. There is only One True God. Thus, there is only One Divine Essence. God is One. We refer to this teaching as the Unity of God.

In addition to the revelation of the Divine Attributes, the God-breathed writings of the Old and New Testaments reveal to us the mystery of the Trinity. Thus, we confess that God is both Unity and Trinity. The Unity refers to the One Divine Essence of God. The Trinity refers to the Three Persons. There is only One True God who has revealed Himself to us as the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit.

In this course of study, we will begin to learn about the mystery of the Blessed Holy Trinity. As a mystery, that which is made known remains unknown perfectly. Likewise, that which is made comprehensible remains incomprehensible. We cannot fully grasp the depths of the Divine reality. We can only begin to know, to comprehend, and to believe. We cry out saying, "I do believe, help my unbelief."

Thus, we must be careful and reverent in our approach to delving into this mystery of the Faith. We worship the One True God as He has revealed Himself to us in the Holy Scriptures. Therefore, we worship one God in three persons and three persons in one God. We do not want to confuse the persons nor do we want to divide the substance. We look to the Scripture to anchor our hope. This revealed teaching is not unique to the New Testament only. The Trinity is revealed in both the Old and New Testaments.

To begin with, let us look at the first account in the Old Testament scriptures. In the book of Genesis, the first book of Moses, the mystery of the Holy Trinity is revealed from the beginning of creation. Starting at verse one we are taught the following, "***In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth. The earth was without form and void, and darkness was over the face of the deep. And the Spirit of God was hovering over the face of the waters. And God said, "Let there be light," and there was light.***" (Genesis 1:1-3, ESV) From this passage we learn that there is One God who created the heavens and the earth. Now the mystery of the Blessed Trinity is begun to be revealed right at this point.

First, the Hebrew word of God is "Elohim" which is a plural noun. There is only one Elohim, yet the word is a plurality. Later in verse twenty-six Elohim says, "***Let us make man in our image, after our likeness. And let them have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the heavens and over the livestock and over all the earth and over every creeping thing that creeps on the earth.***" (Genesis 1:26, ESV)

Once again, we have a reference to the plurality of God when He says, “Let “us” make man in “our” image.”

Second, relation between the three persons of the Holy Trinity is portrayed as follows: 1.) The Spirit of God was hovering over the face of the waters. 2.) God said. 3.) The Spoken Word. In this we see the Holy Spirit, the Father referred to as God, and the Son active as the spoken word declaring, “Let there be light.”

Over the course of our study we will look at more passages of the Old Testament that teach the Trinity. Today we just want to begin our understanding of the Holy Trinity. An example in the New Testament of the revealed knowledge of the Holy Trinity is seen in the institution of Holy Baptism. Christ our Lord says in the last chapter of the Gospel According to St. Matthew, ***“All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you. And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age.”*** (Matthew 28:18-20, ESV)

Again, the plurality in persons is made clear in the calling upon the Father, and the Son, and the Holy Spirit. All three are given equal standing. There are three names yet the Greek word for name “onoma” is singular. In other words, there is only one name that we are to be baptized into yet there are three persons named. We will look at more passages in the New Testament in the days to come. For now, take note of these two reference points.

At this point it would be beneficial to discuss the terminology that is used by the church for the purpose of teaching the mystery of the Blessed Trinity. To begin with the word

“Trinity” does not mean three gods. We confess that the Father is God, the Son is God, and the Holy Spirit is God; yet, there are not three gods. There is only one God. Trinity is a reference to the three persons of the one Godhead. The Christian Faith holds to the truth that there are three distinct persons in the One Divine Being.

The distinction is made in this way:

The Eternal Father is unbegotten. The Eternal Son is begotten of the Father. The Eternal Spirit proceeds from the Father and the Son. Thus, from eternity there has always been the unbegotten Father, the begotten Son, and the proceeding Spirit. Each person of the Holy Trinity is completely and fully God. The Divine essence is not divided among the three as if each contained a part. We reject the idea that the Father is one third, the Son is one third, and the Holy Spirit is one third of the Divine Being. All three have the complete substance of divinity.

So again, when we use the term Unity we are referring to the Divine Essence which is undivided. When we use the term Trinity we are referring to the Three Persons of the One Godhead.

The term “person” comes from the Latin word *persona*. Now when we say “person” we do not mean the idea of playing a role or character in a movie or story. It would be wrong to say that at one time God played the role of the Father, then He played the role of the Son, and now He plays the role of the Holy Spirit. God remains the same from all eternity.

Likewise, when we say, “persons” we do not mean human beings as if God consisted of three human beings who are created and unequal. All three persons of the Blessed Trinity are uncreated and coequal.

In common language, “person” is used to denote individuals who are of the same being yet unique. In this way, a “person” is understood to be a real rational individual who is not a part of the human nature but fully has the human nature. A person is undivided and intelligent who differ in time, will, power, and work.

However, in the church we use the word “person” in a different way. For the three persons of the Holy Trinity have one will, one power, and one activity. The Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit are coeternal meaning there never was a time when The Father was not Father and the Son was not Son and the Holy Spirit was not Spirit. They are also consubstantial meaning of the same substance.

When we use the term consubstantial we are referring to the undivided essence of God. The Greek word that we use is *homoousia* of which “homo” means the same and “ousia” means substance. This Divine substance is also called the essence or being of God. The Divine essence is not imaginary thought or concept. It is the reality of God that is communicated to all three persons of the Trinity. It is not divided into parts. It is one undivided substance. The Greek word *homoousia* captures the totality of this reality in that all three persons have the complete divine essence. It would be wrong to say that they have a different substance or a similar substance. They have the same substance. Thus we say, the three persons of the Holy Trinity are consubstantial.

Thus, to be clear on this language let us look at proper and improper ways to speak about the Unity and Trinity of God. When talking about the Unity Trinity and it would be wrong to say the following: There are three eternal, three uncreated, three immeasurables, three incomprehensibles, three almighties, three Gods, or three Lords. It would be wrong to say the essence is divided into the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. It would be wrong to say that there are greater and lesser persons of the Godhead. We reject all such incorrect language.

On the other hand we confess, teach and believe that God is one undivided essence. He is one and the same substance and being. There is One undivided Deity. There is a complete unity in essence. The three persons are consubstantial and coequal.

Now it is true that most of the terminology that we use in the church is not found specifically in the Holy Bible. It is the meaning that is found in Scripture. We use these terms to communicate clearly to the world what we believe, teach, and confess from the revealed knowledge of the word of God. Just the mere repetition of words found in the text does not guarantee the same meaning as the words found in the text. We want to say the same thing that God speaks to us in a clear undeniable manner. The words that the church has come to use have risen out of the correction of false teachings that were brought into the church. Therefore, we need to understand the terminology that the church uses to teach the Christian Faith in order to rightly understand the Christian Faith.

For example when the heretic Arius and his followers began to teach that Father and the Son were of a similar substance, the orthodox church began using phrases such as, God from God, Light from Light, Very God of Very God, begotten and not made. When the heretic Sabellius began to teach that the Father was born of the Virgin Mary, suffered, and died the church began to use the term impassible meaning incapable of suffering for the person of the Father. And the Father began to be referred to as the unbegotten to distinguish Him from the begotten Son. Terminology arises out of the necessity of clarifying what we are saying.

In our discussion on the revealed teaching of the Holy Trinity we should learn from the wisdom of the Church Fathers who have set us in the right direction for the proper understanding of the Trinity. From St. Jerome we learn that heresy rises up from the improper use of terms. From St. Athanasius we learn that we should be careful not to confuse the persons nor separate the essence. From St. Augustine we learn that the external works of the Trinity are undivided while the internal works are divided. We will keep these words of wisdom in mind as we move forward.

Last week we began our discussion on the revealed teaching of the Holy Trinity. We believe, teach, and confess that there is only One True God. The divine essence is undivided. At the same time we believe, teach, and confess that the One True God has revealed Himself as the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. The three persons of the Holy Trinity are coequal, coeternal, and consubstantial.

We worship one God in three persons and three persons in one God. We neither divide the divine essence nor confuse the persons. We hold to the Trinity in Unity and the Unity in Trinity. The teaching of the Holy Trinity is rightly called a mystery.

Now let's understand the word mystery correctly. To begin with, a mystery is something that is hidden and unrevealed. The mystery of the Trinity is not proved from natural knowledge, logic, or experience. The mystery of the Trinity is revealed in the written word of the Holy Bible. It is taught in both the Old and New Testaments.

Now there is a big difference between a mystery and a secret. A secret is something that is purposefully hidden so that it cannot be found. The mysteries of the Christian Faith are not hidden so that they cannot be found. Instead, the church is placed into the world for the very purpose of revealing these mysteries so that they can be found. Also, when a

secret is revealed it no longer remains a secret. Yet, when a mystery is revealed it still remains a mystery. A mystery has endless depths to it which encourage the believer to continue to grow in his or her understanding of it. As a mystery, it can never be fully understood in this life of ours.

As we dive into the depths of the mystery of the Trinity, we will keep in mind some guiding principles. First, we must understand that the mystery of the Trinity is one of those articles of Faith that we must know and believe in order to be saved. All things that are necessary to know and believe for salvation are revealed in the Bible. Second, we must understand that we are not talking about a perfect knowledge and comprehension. As mystery, we are continually growing in our understanding. On the other hand, we are excluding both those who deny this teaching and are ignorant of it.

If you do not know the One True God who has revealed Himself in the written Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments, you do not know the One True God. There is only One God. All other things are not God. If you believe in another god apart from the One True God, you do not have the One True God. Knowledge and faith are rooted in revelation. Moses writes in Deuteronomy chapter four saying, ***"To you it was shown, that you might know that the Lord is God; there is no other besides him."*** (Deuteronomy 4:35, ESV) How can you know of that which you have not heard about? How can you believe in that which you do not know about? If you do not know and believe in the One True God, you do not have the One True God. All you have is an idol.

Natural knowledge teaches that God exists. Revealed knowledge teaches who God is. We do not begin to understand this mystery by the reason of the mind, but rather through faith placed in our hearts by God Himself. Faith clings to what it cannot see nor understand perfectly from reason.

St. Paul writes in Galatians chapter four saying, ***" Formerly, when you did not know God, you were enslaved to those that by nature are not gods."*** (Galatians 4:8, ESV) The Apostle Paul is teaching Gentile converts who previously did not know the mystery of the Trinity. It was not revealed to these people in Galatia until Paul was sent by Christ to teach them. They could not discern the mysteries of the Christian Faith by natural knowledge or logical deduction or human understanding. In Second Corinthians, St. Paul writes, ***"We destroy arguments and every lofty opinion raised against the knowledge of God, and take every thought captive to obey Christ,"*** (2 Corinthians 10:5, ESV) The mind is transformed and the heart is renewed through the power of the word of God. Paul was sent to teach the word of truth.

In St. Matthew chapter sixteen, we hear these words,

Now when Jesus came into the district of Caesarea Philippi, he asked his disciples, "Who do people say that the Son of Man is?" And they said, "Some say John the Baptist, others say Elijah, and others Jeremiah or one of the

prophets.” He said to them, “But who do you say that I am?” Simon Peter replied, “You are the Christ, the Son of the living God.” And Jesus answered him, “Blessed are you, Simon Bar-Jonah! For flesh and blood has not revealed this to you, but my Father who is in heaven. (Matthew 16:13-17, ESV)

From this text, we learn that the knowledge of who Jesus is was revealed by the Father to Peter.

Earlier in Matthew’s Gospel, Jesus said in chapter eleven,

I thank you, Father, Lord of heaven and earth, that you have hidden these things from the wise and understanding and revealed them to little children; yes, Father, for such was your gracious will. All things have been handed over to me by my Father, and no one knows the Son except the Father, and no one knows the Father except the Son and anyone to whom the Son chooses to reveal him. Come to me, all who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light.” (Matthew 11:25-30, ESV)

From this text, we learn that the Son also reveals the knowledge of the truth. Likewise, in First Corinthians chapter two we hear these words,

these things God has revealed to us through the Spirit. For the Spirit searches everything, even the depths of God. For who knows a person’s thoughts except the spirit of that person, which is in him? So also no one comprehends the thoughts of God except the Spirit of God. Now we have received not the spirit of the world, but the Spirit who is from God, that we might understand the things freely given us by God. And we impart this in words not taught by human wisdom but taught by the Spirit, interpreting spiritual truths to those who are spiritual. The natural person does not accept the things of the Spirit of God, for they are folly to him, and he is not able to understand them because they are spiritually discerned. The spiritual person judges all things, but is himself to be judged by no one. “For who has understood the mind of the Lord so as to instruct him?” But we have the mind of Christ.” (1 Corinthians 2:10-16, ESV)

From this text we learn that the Holy Spirit also reveals the knowledge of the truth. From the Bible we are taught that revealed truth is common to the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. God is true and every man is a liar. Truth comes from God. As First Timothy chapter two states, “[God] *desires all people to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth.*” (1 Timothy 2:4, ESV)

The Apostles were sent out by Jesus to reveal the knowledge of the truth. In the Gospel According to St. John we are taught these same words in chapter one which states, “*No one has ever seen God; the only God, who is at the Father’s side, he has made him*

known." (John 1:18, ESV) From this text we learn that Jesus is the One who reveals the Father to us.

The Apostle John teaches us in his first epistle saying, "**No one who denies the Son has the Father. Whoever confesses the Son has the Father also.**" (1 John 2:23, ESV) From this text we learn that if we confess the Son we confess the Father. If we confess Christ, we confess the One True God. John goes on to teach us in the fifth chapter of this epistle saying,

Whoever believes in the Son of God has the testimony in himself. Whoever does not believe God has made him a liar, because he has not believed in the testimony that God has borne concerning his Son. And this is the testimony, that God gave us eternal life, and this life is in his Son. Whoever has the Son has life; whoever does not have the Son of God does not have life. (1 John 5:10-12, ESV)

Likewise, in John's Gospel we are taught in chapter three, "**Whoever believes in the Son has eternal life; whoever does not obey the Son shall not see life, but the wrath of God remains on him.**" (John 3:36, ESV)

The Apostle John teaches us in his second epistle saying, "**Everyone who goes on ahead and does not abide in the teaching of Christ, does not have God. Whoever abides in the teaching has both the Father and the Son.**" (2 John 9, ESV) From this text, we learn that in order to have the One True God, we must abide in the teaching of Christ. Therefore, we are taught to listen and hear the words of Jesus.

Jesus teaches us that we are to honor the Son the same way we are to honor the Father. Likewise, if we do not honor the Son, we do not honor the Father. Jesus says in John chapter five

For as the Father raises the dead and gives them life, so also the Son gives life to whom he will. The Father judges no one, but has given all judgment to the Son, that all may honor the Son, just as they honor the Father. Whoever does not honor the Son does not honor the Father who sent him. Truly, truly, I say to you, whoever hears my word and believes him who sent me has eternal life. He does not come into judgment, but has passed from death to life. (John 5:21-24, ESV)

Jesus teaches us that He is one with the Father. Jesus says in John chapter ten, "**I and the Father are one.**" (John 10:30, ESV) And again He says, "**If I am not doing the works of my Father, then do not believe me; but if I do them, even though you do not believe me, believe the works, that you may know and understand that the Father is in me and I am in the Father.**" (John 10:37-38, ESV)

Jesus teaches us that to see and know Jesus is to see and know the Father. Jesus says in John chapter fourteen, "**I am the way, and the truth, and the life. No one comes to the**

Father except through me. If you had known me, you would have known my Father also. From now on you do know him and have seen him." (John 14:6-7, ESV) And again,

Whoever has seen me has seen the Father. How can you say, 'Show us the Father'? Do you not believe that I am in the Father and the Father is in me? The words that I say to you I do not speak on my own authority, but the Father who dwells in me does his works. Believe me that I am in the Father and the Father is in me, or else believe on account of the works themselves." (John 14:9-11, ESV)

Jesus teaches that all that the Father has is belongs to Him and the Holy Spirit takes from that which belongs to Jesus and declares it to us. Jesus says in John chapter sixteen,

When the Spirit of truth comes, he will guide you into all the truth, for he will not speak on his own authority, but whatever he hears he will speak, and he will declare to you the things that are to come. He will glorify me, for he will take what is mine and declare it to you. All that the Father has is mine; therefore I said that he will take what is mine and declare it to you. (John 16:13-15, ESV)

The Father sends the Son who reveals the Father to us. The Father and the Son send the Holy Spirit to reveal the Son to us. We cannot know one of the persons of the Trinity without knowing the others. To know and believe Jesus is to know and believe the Father and the Spirit. To have the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit is to have the One True God.