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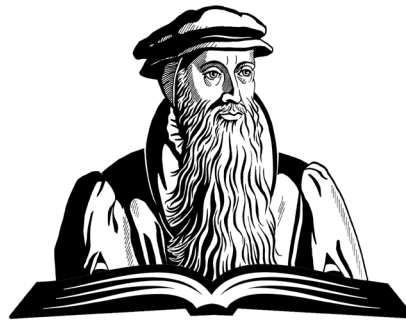
VIDEO LECTURE SERIES

by Rev. Jonathan Mattull

Lecture #4

The Holy Trinity

Catechism Questions 5 and 6



The John Knox Institute
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The Shorter CATECHISM

VIDEO LECTURE SERIES

by Rev. Jonathan Mattull

1. The Chief End of Man - *Catechism Question 1*
2. God's Word and What It Teaches - *Questions 2 & 3*
3. What is God? - *Question 4*
- 4. The Holy Trinity - *Questions 5 & 6***
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The Shorter CATECHISM

VIDEO LECTURE SERIES

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Lecture #4

The Holy Trinity

Question 5: *Are there more Gods than one?*

Answer: *There is but one only, the living and true God.*

Question 3: *How many persons are there in the Godhead?*

Answer: *There are three persons in the Godhead: the Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost; and these three are one God, the same in substance, equal in power and glory.*

In the space of only four Questions, you have been presented with some of the greatest truths one can encounter. Today's lesson is no different. We take up another truth worthy of our attention, our meditation, our trust, and our delight. This lesson focuses on two questions from the Shorter Catechism—Questions 5 and 6. Both of these questions deal with God. Question 5 asks, “Are there more Gods than one?” The Answer: “There is but one only, the living and true God.” Question 6 asks: “How many persons are there in the Godhead?” The Answer: “There are three persons in the Godhead: the Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost; and these three are one God, the same in substance, equal in power and glory.”

As we do in our lessons, let's begin with making sure we understand the main words that are found in these Answers. Consider the words of the 5th Question and Answer: “There is but one only, the living and true God.” The words “one only” join together to emphasize that there is absolutely only one God. The word “living” indicates that he is not a mere imagination, or just something that we dream up—he is the real God. Likewise, the word “true” reminds us that he's not an idol or a false God—he is true.

We have many important words as well in the Answer to the 6th Question. Listen again to the Answer: “There are three persons in the Godhead: the Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost; and these three are one God, the same in substance, equal in power and glory.” Let's look at some of these words briefly now, and this will help prepare us for the rest of our lesson.

The word “persons” is probably the most difficult word to define. It is carefully chosen to represent the Bible's teaching, as well as hundreds of years of theological thought. Here, the word “person” does not refer to a human person—it refers to a divine person. You are one person with one nature. So it is hard for us to understand the difference between the ideas of “person” and

“nature.” But the word “person” refers to something different than the word “nature,” or the word “substance.” The words “nature” and “substance” tell us what something is. “Person” refers to an individual instance of a whole nature. Additionally, it carries the idea of consciousness and thought, as a person is an individual and thinking instance of a whole nature. There’s a lot in that, but we trust as we search the Scriptures, this idea will come clearly to us.

Another word, “substance,” does not refer to something physical that we touch, but rather, it is referring to something that exists instead of something that is merely an idea. It’s related to the word “essence,” what something is. And the word “Godhead” refers to the divine nature. It refers back to what we covered in the Question, “What is God?” The word “equal” tells us that each of the divine persons, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, each of these is fully and truly God, possessing the same perfections, and worthy of the same worship.

The Answers combine to set before us what is known as the Biblical teaching of the Trinity. Now, “Trinity” is a word that does not occur in the Bible. Instead, it represents the teachings of the Bible. It simply reminds us that there are three persons in the unity of the Godhead. Thus, “tri” refers to three. And a shortened form of “unity” refers to one. Trinity is a word that connects these two ideas—three and one—not three Gods, but three persons—not one person, but one God.

Well, we’ll work through this together, and let us remember that our understanding of God is to be taken from what he has revealed of himself in the Bible. The Bible is our only rule of faith and obedience. This doesn’t mean that everything in the Bible is easy to understand. However, it does mean that everything in the Bible is true and worthy of our study and our faith. We don’t believe something because it’s easy to explain. We believe something because the true God has truly revealed it.

Well, for the rest of our lesson, let’s look at two primary points to help us understand our glorious God better. First, there is only one God. Second, there are three persons in the Godhead.

Well, first then, there is only one God. This is a basic point throughout the Scriptures. However, there are many today who reject this truth. They may do so in one of two ways. They may assert there is no God. This is known as atheism. The word “theism” comes from a Greek word meaning “god.” Thus, a-theism means “no god.” Other may assert that there are many gods. This is known as polytheism. The word “poly” comes from a Greek word meaning “many.” And so, poly-theism is the belief in many gods. Now, depending on where you live, you may encounter either atheism, or polytheism, or you may encounter both.

Now, while this saddens us to see so many turning from the one true God, it shouldn’t scare us or overwhelm us. We should remember that believers both in the Old and New Testaments faced similar circumstances. We see this in ancient Egypt. The Israelites, who were the people of the one true God, were surrounded by the Egyptians and other nations, who were polytheists. We see this as well in the New Testament times. Paul, for instance, faced this in Acts, chapter 17, when he was in Athens, at Mars Hill, more commonly known today as the Areopagus. It’s not our purpose to answer the objections of these false views today. We are sufficiently satisfied with how Scripture states the matter. For instance, in Psalm 19, and verse 1, “The heavens declare the glory of God; and the firmament sheweth his handiwork.” That is, creation testifies and declares the glory of the one true God. Or as Paul states, in Romans 1, verses 19 and 20, “That which may be known of God is manifest in them; for God hath shewed it unto them. For the invisible things of him from the creation of the world are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made, even his eternal power and Godhead; so that they are without excuse.” Both of these passages, along with many others, remind us that the clear testimony of all creation is that there is one God. That some

men try to argue otherwise is only a display of the wickedness of a fallen and sinful heart. Man is wicked to argue against so clear a truth.

Now let's look more closely at the clear teaching of Scripture, namely, that there is but one God. In Deuteronomy, chapter 6, verses 4 and 5, we read, "Hear, O Israel: The LORD our God is one LORD: and thou shalt love the LORD thy God with all thine heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy might." So the one God is worthy of all of our love. If there would be more gods than one, our hearts would be divided. But that there is one God, well, then we should love him with all that we are.

We have another very clear testimony in Isaiah, chapter 45, verses 5 and 6: "I am the LORD, and there is none else, there is no God beside me: I girded thee, though thou hast not known me: that they may know from the rising of the sun, and from the west, that there is none beside me. I am the LORD, and there is none else." Notice how clear God is in this. It's not just that he's the God and the only God of Israel, as throughout all creation to the east, and all creation to the west, everywhere you can go, he's saying, I am the only God. Both of these passages join in harmony with the rest of the Bible, teaching us that there is one God. There aren't warring gods, there is one God to whom we must give our attention, our faith, and our obedience.

Now, let's look at our second point—there are three persons in the Godhead. At this point, we begin by emphasizing that this is a revealed truth. It's not something that you and I have come across. It's not something that you and I have discovered through our own philosophical study. Rather, it's something that God has revealed of himself. It's true they are technical and difficult terms, however, these terms are used to try and describe and represent what the Bible is teaching. Such terms are "persons" and "substance." These words are used to express what the Bible displays in many places.

Now, where in the Bible do we see the teaching that there are three persons in the Godhead—the Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost? Well, it doesn't say it so simply or explicitly in one verse. Instead, the Bible gives us large and full testimony of this truth. We can summarize this testimony of the Bible with five basic points that the Bible provides us. And when we put these together, we see the truth of this statement.

The first basic point is, there is only one God. We handled this truth above, but it is good to remember this when we are talking about the Trinity. The Bible does not teach that there are three Gods. The doctrine, or the teaching, of the Trinity does not teach that the Father is a different God than the Son, and the Son is a different God than the Spirit. There is only one God, the living and true God. But it does teach that there are three persons who are this one God. Remember Deuteronomy 6, verses 4 and 5, and Isaiah 45, verses 5 and 6. There is but one living and true God.

Well, the second basic point to remember is that the Bible teaches that the Father is fully God. We'll see this regarding the Son and the Spirit as well, but notice the Scriptures teach this. Christ regularly refers to the Father as God. You can pay attention as you read through the Gospels, and see this again and again. Additionally, notice how Paul refers to the Father as God, in Galatians 1, verses 1 through 3. He writes, "Paul, an apostle, (not of men, neither by man, but by Jesus Christ, and God the Father, who raised him from the dead;) and all the brethren which are with me, unto the churches of Galatia: grace be to you and peace from God the Father, and from our Lord Jesus Christ." It's clear, the Bible asserts that the Father is God.

Well, the third basic point is this—the Bible teaches that the Son is fully God, not a different God, but himself fully God. Well, to see this, remember these four categories: name, perfections, work, and honor.

First, the name—Jesus is called God. This happens in several places, but we don't have time to show all of them. Notice one very clear place, in John, chapter 1, verse 1, and through verse 14, but notice those two verses in particular—verse 1 and verse 14. We read, “In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.” And in verse 14, “And the Word was made 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.” The Word, who was God, refers to the Son. And you'll notice verse 14 tells us that he became flesh. And so, the wonder of the incarnation is before us, which we'll talk about, Lord willing, in another lesson. But simply note this, that he who is the Son of God, is himself called God.

Second, perfections —Jesus has the perfections of God. Again, we only have time for one example, but as you read the Bible, you'll see others come to your attention. Notice Hebrews, chapter 13, and verse 8. We read, “Jesus Christ the same yesterday, and to day, and for ever.” This verse tells us that Jesus Christ is unchangeable. This is a divine perfection. You and I change regularly, but Jesus is unchangeable.

The third, work—he does the work only God can do. Jesus made all things. He created all things. That's something that you or I, or for that matter, any mere human could never do. Not even the angels have such power as to create things out of nothing. But Jesus is God, and as God, he made all things. Notice Colossians, chapter 1, verse 16: “For by him were all things created, that are in heaven, and that are in earth, visible and invisible, whether they be thrones, or dominions, or principalities, or powers: all things were created by him, and for him.” Only God can make all things. And Jesus made all things.

Well, fourth, honor—Jesus receives honor only belonging to God. It would be idolatry to receive worship unless the one receiving it is God. In fact, the apostles, on several occasions, were given some degree of worship, and they said “No!” The angels were at time given some aspect of worship, and they said, “No! Only God is worthy of worship.” Well, notice in John, chapter 20, and verse 28, Thomas, who was doubting of Christ's resurrection, is brought to see the risen Savior, Jesus Christ. And notice his words, we read “And Thomas said unto him”—that is, unto Jesus—“My Lord and my God.” He worships Jesus as God.

Well, we move now to the fourth basic point, and it is that the Bible teaches that the Holy Spirit is fully God. So there's one God, the Father is fully God, the Son is fully God, and now the Spirit is fully God. And we can look at the same four categories that we considered with reference to the Son. We can think of those with reference to the Spirit—name, perfections, work, and honor.

First then, name—the Holy Spirit is called God. Notice how this is shown in Acts, chapter 5, verse 3 and 4. There was this incident where a disciple lied to Peter and to the church about certain things that they were offering. Notice what Peter says: “Peter said, Ananias, why hath Satan filled thine heart to lie to the Holy Ghost.” Later, he says, “Thou has not lied unto men, but unto God.” So lying to the Holy Spirit is the same as lying to God. The Spirit is called God.

Well, second, perfections—the Holy Spirit has the perfections belonging to God. Who but God can fully understand God himself? You can't, and I cannot. Not even the angels can fully comprehend all that is in God. To do so would require infinite knowledge. But notice what Paul says of the Spirit, in 1 Corinthians 2, and verse 10, we read, “But God hath revealed them unto us by his Spirit: for the Spirit searcheth all things, yea, the deep things of God.” The Holy Spirit has omniscience. He knows all things—all things about the world, all things about God.

Well, third, work—the Holy Spirit does the work only God can do. Who is it that saves sinners? Well, the Bible tells us again and again, only God saves sinners. Listen to 1 Corinthians, chapter 6,

and verse 11, we read, “And such were some of you: but ye are washed, but ye are sanctified, but ye are justified in the name of the Lord Jesus, and by the Spirit of our God.” The Holy Spirit saves us. That’s because the Holy Spirit is God.

Well fourth, honor—the Holy Spirit receives honor belonging to God. In Matthew, chapter 12, and verse 31, Christ is warning us against a very serious sin—blaspheming the Holy Ghost. He says, “Wherefore I say unto you, All manner of sin and blasphemy shall be forgiven unto men: but the blasphemy against the Holy Ghost shall not be forgiven unto men.” Notice how the Holy Spirit has the dignity and honor of God, so that to blaspheme his name is to commit such a sin as is worthy of damnation.

Well, the fifth and basic point to remember is that the Bible teaches that the Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost are distinct as persons, but united as God. The Father is not the Son or the Holy Spirit. Each is distinct from the other. However, they not different Gods. They are three persons who are the one God. Now this is a tremendously high and difficult thought. To help us think through this, we can consider a few passages from the Bible.

Have you read of Christ’s baptism? If you have, you have a clear indication that the three persons of the Godhead are distinct. We read of his baptism in Matthew 3, verses 16 and 17. We read, “And Jesus, when he was baptized, went up straightway out of the water: and, lo, the heavens were opened unto him, and he saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove, and lighting upon him: and lo a voice from heaven saying, This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased.” Well, who was baptized?—Jesus, the Son of God was baptized. Who descended?—the Holy Spirit descended. Who spoke from heaven?—the Father. We could not say that the Spirit was baptized. We could not say that the Son spoke from heaven. We could not say that the Father descended. Each person had his distinct part in this scene.

This doesn’t mean that they are different Gods. They are distinct as persons. But they are one as God, as we have seen the Scriptures teach. If you have seen someone baptized, you’ve likely heard the minister say, “I baptize you in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost.” These words are from Matthew, chapter 28. It’s there is verse 19, that Jesus commands his disciples, as he says, “Go ye therefore, and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost.” Now notice this verse. It shows the three persons distinctly—Father, Son, and Holy Ghost—but it indicates that they share a same name. It’s singular. He doesn’t say, “Baptize them in the names”—plural, but “name”—singular. This indicates that there is but one God who is Father, and Son, and Holy Ghost at one and the same time.

Let’s clarify this a bit more. The Bible does not teach that there is one God who became different persons over time. In other words, God did not begin as Father, and then become the Son, and then become the Spirit. God is eternally these three persons. Also, the Bible does not teach that there is a primary God and two lesser Gods. It is not that the Father is the real God, and then he made the Son and the Spirit. Again, God is eternally three persons.

Putting this all together, we see that our Catechism presents the teaching of the Bible. It’s not that it answers all of the questions that we might have, but it does well state the teaching of the Scriptures: “There are three persons in the Godhead; the Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost: and these three are one God, the same in substance, equal in power and glory.” We do not believe the Biblical teaching of the Trinity merely because great men and women before us had believed it and taught it, we believe it because it is what the Bible—the Word of God—teaches.

Well, let us finish our lesson today, by noticing two truths that flow from the Biblical teaching of the Trinity. First, rejoice, that all of salvation is a divine work. Every aspect of salvation is the

work of God. The Bible tells us that the Father chose his people before the world was. It tells us that the Son of God took to himself a true human nature and died on the cross for the sins of his people. And it tells us that the Holy Spirit gives us new life, and dwells in the believer. Every part of this wondrous salvation is a part of the work of God. We are loved by God, we are forgiven by God, we are sanctified by God. As we trust in Jesus Christ for our salvation, we trust in one who is truly and fully God, and there's tremendous comfort in this, because we're trusting in one who can never fail to do what he has promised to do.

This then should lead us to worship the Triune God. The Bible presents us a great teaching about God. However, his greatness is why we are led to worship him. The Bible teaches us that there is only one God, and in this God, are three divine, distinct, and equal persons—the Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost. Is it bigger than we can fully understand? Of course it is. However, instead of this frustrating us, we are to come and worship this God, who is far greater than we are. I hope that as you grow, you will continue to learn more about the truth of our Triune God, and by his grace, be brought to trust in him, and to worship him, and to serve him all of your life.