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"The Scripture cannot be broken." John 10:35.

"Thy Word is a Lamp unto my feet, and a Light unto my path." Psalm 119:105.

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“... in the name of
the Father, and of
the Son, and of
the Holy Ghost ”

Matthew 28:19b



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"My Word is a Lamp unto my feet, and a Light unto my path." Psalm 119:105.*

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STATEMENT OF PURPOSE:

To set forth in simple and plain language the pure doctrine of God's Word as taught by the true Lutheran Church in full accordance with the **Book of Concord of 1580** and the **Brief Statement of 1932.**

To show, **on the basis of Scripture**, what true Christians are to believe and how, out of love for their Savior Jesus Christ, they are to lead Godly lives.

To furnish aids for Bible study and articles for Scriptural devotion and meditation.

To demonstrate, by our Scriptural stand, that our **Concordia Lutheran Conference** is not a sect or false church body, but that the congregations which form it confess, teach, and practice the Word of God in its full truth and purity and use the Sacraments according to Christ's institution. All who do this are the true visible Church on earth.

To seek out all who truly share our Scriptural position in doctrine and practice, and to urge the mutual public acknowledgment of such God-given unity. Thus we shall be able thereafter to practice a God-pleasing fellowship with them.

To show that we do not have among us a mixture of divergent teachings but that we are "*perfectly joined together in the same mind and in the same judgment.*"

To set forth pertinent historical information which has a bearing upon the Church and to expose modern philosophical thought and the so-called scientific theories which contradict the Word of God.

To expose particularly the false teaching and practice of the various so-called "Lutheran" church bodies by comparing their teachings and practices with what is plainly recorded in the Word of God, in the Lutheran Confessions, and in the old orthodox Lutheran writings.

To expose false teaching and practice wherever it makes its appearance and to keep abreast of the current happenings in the church and among the nations as signs of the times.

To be truthful and factual in our reporting and freely to correct any misinformation of which we are not aware and which has been called to our attention. Also to clarify any information or statement of doctrine or practice which may be unclear to our readers or which may create a wrong impression.

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What Is the Sin Against the Holy Ghost?

“All manner of sin and blasphemy shall be forgiven unto men; but the blasphemy against the Holy Ghost shall not be forgiven unto men.”

—Matthew 12:31

It often comes as quite a shock when Christians hear of a sin that is *unpardonable*. After all, they learned, most of them since childhood already, confidently to declare with the Apostle John in his first epistle (1:7), *“The blood of Jesus Christ, His Son, cleanseth us from all sin.”* There *seems* at first glance to be a contradiction here, even though this descriptive adjective, *“unpardonable”*, is consistently applied to ONE sin and one sin ONLY, namely, to *“The sin against the Holy Ghost”* as it is also called. There is, of course, *no contradiction whatsoever in the Holy Scriptures*. A misunderstanding sometimes arises, however, when we attempt *with only one word* of human language to describe a somewhat complex concept or issue. Jesus uses the expressions, *“...shall not be forgiven”* and *“hath never forgiveness”*.

When we use the word *“unpardonable”*, this is not to suggest that God, on His part, is **not able** to pardon any sin committed against Him in thoughts, desires, words or deeds; for such an idea flies in the face of God Himself, His divine attributes, His objective justification of the world for Jesus’ sake, and His holy will, as if **He** were in this instance “defective”. On the contrary, this *Sin against the Holy Ghost* is **UN-PARDONABLE**...

...**not** because God does not desire the sinner’s salvation (I Timothy 2:4; Ezekiel 33:11; II Peter 3:9);

...**not** because this particular sin is greater than the grace of God is able to cover (Romans 5:20);

...**not** because the sacrifice of Christ was insufficient to atone for it (I John 1:7);

...**but rather** because *the very nature of the sin* is such that the person who commits it *persistently rejects and blasphemes the saving operation of the Holy Ghost*

through the Means of Grace whereby he could otherwise be brought to true repentance and faith. Thus he keeps forgiveness *from himself* forever.

By definition, *the Sin against the Holy Ghost* is a *conscious, malicious, and unrelenting opposition* to the **work** of the Holy Spirit of God, including *bold and openly hostile blasphemy* against God's saving truth, on the part of a person who himself was once *converted*, was personally *convinced* of the truth, or who at least *experienced* the influence of the Holy Ghost in his heart. This definition, a composite of those offered over the years by sound Lutheran theologians, has been derived from what the various passages have to say which treat of this grievous sin.

Besides the Savior's words in Matthew's Gospel, quoted in part above (**Matthew 12:22-32**, especially verses 31-32), other passages specifically refer to this heinous sin and describe both its characteristics and its eventual result, namely, **Mark 3:22-30** (very pointedly verses 28 and 29); **Luke 12:10**; **I John 5:16**; **Hebrews 6:4-8**; and **Hebrews 10:26-31**. Based on these clear words of God, the following details should be noted:

—This sin is not committed against the **person** of the Holy Ghost (who is a person no more glorious, majestic, or important than is either the Father or the Son, but is co-equal with them). Rather, it is deliberate opposition to the Holy Spirit's **office**, to His **work** of calling sinners by the Gospel, enlightening them with His gifts, sanctifying and keeping them in the one true and saving faith through the Means of Grace (*Sanctification in the wider sense*).

—Only such a person can commit this sin who was once **enlightened** by the operation of the Holy Spirit (Hebrews 6:4), who became **convinced in his heart of the Truth** (Hebrews 10:26), and who **tasted the sweetness of the Gospel** (Hebrews 6:5), but who subsequently and deliberately **rejects** the Truth contrary to such better knowledge and personal conviction (Hebrews 10:26).

—According to the passages, the person committing this sin **blasphemes** the work of the Holy Ghost, that

is, he willfully mocks and ridicules it, not merely in his *heart*; but he “*speaketh against the Holy Ghost*” (Matthew 12:32), openly and contemptuously vilifying and reviling the Spirit’s work with wicked abandon!

—A person who commits this sin will **persist in it even unto death**. He cannot and will not repent; he has no desire for forgiveness; and he rejects all pardon because he consciously despises the grace of God proclaimed in the Gospel, puts the Lord Jesus and His vicarious atonement to an open shame, and stubbornly resists every effort of the Holy Spirit to convert him.

—While this sin **IS identifiable** (I John 5:16), we should never be **hasty** in charging someone with committing it! A rash and unfounded charge may destroy in one who is truly penitent for the sin of blasphemy, for example, any hope of forgiveness! Should a person, who to all *appearances* has committed this sin against the Holy Ghost, repent upon his deathbed, it is certain that he has NOT committed it.

—We are **not to pray** for those who have committed the Sin against the Holy Ghost, the “sin unto death” (I John 5:16). The judgment of eternal damnation for this sin has already been pronounced upon them by God in this present life already!

—Nevertheless, if a person commits this sin, persisting in it unto death with irrecoverable hardness of heart (*obduration*), **it is not GOD who put him into that condition**, but it is entirely **the sinner’s OWN FAULT** who **first** despised God’s grace, resisted the Holy Spirit, and hardened his OWN heart! (I Timothy 2:4; Matthew 23:37; Acts 7:51; Hosea 13:9; etc.)

—On the other hand, if a person is **kept from** this sin, this is due not in the least to his own better conduct, receptiveness, diligence and faithfulness and therefore to his OWN glory, but alone **to the glory of God’s grace in Christ Jesus**. (Ephesians 2:8-9; Romans 11:6; I Peter 1:5)

The Unpardonable Sin or *The Sin Against the Holy Ghost* must not be identified with or in any way confused with *other* sins committed against God's Holy Spirit, from which it should be carefully distinguished. *The Sin Against the Holy Ghost* is...

...**NOT to be applied to one who has been *excommunicated*** from the Christian congregation as “an heathen man and a publican” (Matthew 18:17) because of persistent impenitence for manifest sins. The purpose of excommunication (after all other efforts to gain a brother have been exhausted) is that the sinner see the gravity of his sins and repent. Such an outcome cannot be expected in one who has committed *The Sin Against the Holy Ghost*.

...**NOT the same as *mere unbelief***; for the Savior directs us, “*Preach the Gospel to every creature*” (Mark 16:15) to the end that unbelievers may come unto the knowledge of the truth and be saved. (I Timothy 2:4) This will not happen in those who have committed *The Sin Against the Holy Ghost*.

...**NOT identical to *final impenitence***. Not all those who die in unbelief and thus perish in everlasting damnation have necessarily committed *The Sin Against the Holy Ghost* with all of its attendant features.

...**NOT every *blasphemy against the Holy Spirit or against the Truth of His Word***, particularly such blasphemy as comes from the mouth of “*the natural man*” (I Corinthians 2:14) in his spiritual blindness. Such a person has never become personally convinced of the Truth in his own heart. (We have a poignant example in the Apostle Paul, who, before his conversion, was “*a blasphemer, and a persecutor, and injurious.*” - I Timothy 1:13)

...**NOT every *denial or blasphemy of the Truth on the part of one who IS convinced***, when such sins are motivated by self-righteousness and pride, by the love of this present world, by selfishness, or by the fear of one's earthly enemies. While he is certainly *in danger*

of doing so, he may not yet have committed *the Unpardonable Sin*. (An example of this is Peter, who by God's grace *repented* of his denial and blasphemy and was restored to his apostleship. --John 21:15-19)

...NOT every resistance against the Holy Spirit and His sincere efforts to convert the sinner. By nature, all men are spiritually blind, dead and enemies of God, oppose His good and gracious will, and resist His Holy Spirit. Such resistance is *pardonable*, however; and the sinner receives that pardon by faith when the Holy Spirit through the Means of Grace changes his heart in *conversion*. (Jeremiah 31:18; I Corinthians 12:3; Acts 3:19; Romans 5:1; etc.)

...NOT every case of spiritual obduracy or hardening of the heart. There are *degrees of obduracy*, all of which place the soul in jeopardy of a *punitive* or *judicial hardening* by God (Romans 9:18). But not every case of hardening is beyond recovery, with an obvious exception being *The Sin Against the Holy Ghost*, which persists unto death.

g A **word of comfort** is in order here for those who are troubled in their minds about the possibility that they might have committed *the Unpardonable Sin* by an earlier apostasy or blasphemy: Those who are at all concerned about their sins have *not* committed *The Sin Against the Holy Ghost*. On the contrary, those who *have* committed it are not in the least worried about it or in any way contrite; nor is there in their hearts the slightest longing for God's gracious forgiveness in Christ Jesus.

The passages which speak of and describe in detail *The Sin Against the Holy Ghost* were "*written for our learning*" (Romans 15:4), chiefly as a **earnest warning** to us "*who were once enlightened, and have tasted of the heavenly gift, and were made partakers of the Holy Ghost, and have tasted the good work of God, and the powers of the world to come,*" namely, to us who are, by the Spirit's operation in our hearts through the Gospel, true believers in Christ and heirs of eternal life. (Hebrews 6:4-5) We ourselves in these last evil days of sore distress are targets of Satan, who "*as a roaring lion walketh about seeking whom he may devour.*" (I Peter 5:8-9) Let us therefore be warned

against taking the manifold grace of God for granted (Romans 6:1; II Corinthians 6:1), against following after the world with its disdain for God's precious Word and doctrine pure (II Timothy 4:3), against minimizing or making light of the work of the Holy Ghost (Matthew 12:31-32, etc.), and against the trend among so many who call themselves Christians not to be seriously concerned about the welfare of their eternal souls (Mark 13:33-37; II Peter 3:17)! Luther aptly exhorts us in his sermon on our title-text, Matthew 12:31-32, "***For this let us pray that we do not fall into this sin that will not endure the plain truth; for in that case there is no counsel, or help, or excuse; but the final wrath of God has set in!***" (Luther: *Sämmtliche Schriften*, St. Louis Ed., X, p. 1206, 14)

Only by having our hearts and minds and thoughts turned completely to the absolutely universal and absolutely free grace of God in Christ Jesus, our Savior, as this is so clearly and so comfortingly revealed to us in the Gospel, can we be truly relieved of any personal apprehension or anxiety that we might have committed this heinous sin. To that end, may "*the God of all grace, who hath called us unto His eternal glory by Christ Jesus...stablish, strengthen, settle*" us all by the effectual working of His Holy Spirit through His Word, unto life everlasting! "*To Him be glory and dominion for ever and ever. Amen.*" (I Peter 5:10-11)

—D. T. M.



Sermon preached by Seminarian Jason A. Mabe on May 26, 2013

The Feast of the Holy Trinity

Matthew 3:16-17

In the Name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost, the only true and living God, dearly-beloved hearers of His precious Word:

Today we celebrate the Feast of the Holy Trinity, the fourth major festival in the Church Year. The doctrine of the Trinity is a primary fundamental doctrine of the Christian faith, one which dare not be denied as is done flagrantly by the anti-Trinitarian cults — the Unitarians, the Universalists, the false Witnesses of Jehovah, and the Mormons, to name a few — by all so-called “modernists” of our day and time, who reject the Holy Scriptures as the only source and norm of the Christian faith and deny almost all fundamental teachings of the Bible; and the doctrine of the Trinity is also rejected by the Lodges and the Scouting organizations. We confess in our *Small Catechism* that “the only true God is the Triune God, Father, Son, and Holy Ghost, three distinct persons in one divine being or essence” (Q/A #26). This doctrine is admittedly a mystery of the highest order, impossible for the human mind fully to comprehend; for in this Trinity, as we confessed before in the Athanasian Creed, “the glory [is] equal, the majesty [is] co-eternal... and yet they are not three gods, but one God.” The Apostle Paul says in his first letter to the church at Corinth, chapter 8, “*There is but one God*” (v. 6), and “*There is none other God but one*” (v. 4). One God in Trinity and Trinity in unity is the universal Christian faith, “which faith,” we confess further in the Athanasian Creed, “except everyone do keep whole and undefiled, without doubt he shall perish everlastingly.” Why? Because he does not believe in the Father or in the Son or in the Holy Spirit. He does not believe in the true God at all! In the Gospel of John, chapter 5, Jesus says to the Jews, “*All men should honor the Son even as they honor the Father. He that honoreth not the Son honoreth not the Father, which hath sent Him*” (v. 23). Though the words “Trinity” and “Triune” are not specifically stated as terms in the Bible, the concept and the doctrine is taught throughout the Scriptures and is particularly evident in our text before us wherein we

Behold the Triune God at the Baptism of the Lord Jesus

— (I) The Son, manifested as the obedient substitute for sinful mankind; (II) the Holy Spirit, in the form of a dove as He descended upon Jesus; and (III) the Father, heard voicing His approval of His Son as the Redeemer of the world.

I.

Earlier in this chapter of Matthew's Gospel, we read that John the Baptist, whose coming was foretold already in the Old Testament (Isaiah 40:3), had been sent to "*prepare...the way of the Lord*" (Matthew 3:3); and this he did by preaching the message of repentance (v. 2) and by baptizing those who "*confess[ed] their sins*" (v. 6). John baptized "*with water unto repentance*;" however, One "*mightier than [he]*" would come and baptize "*with the Holy Ghost*," he said (v. 11). Imagine John's surprise, therefore, when Jesus, the Lord, came "*to be baptized*" by him (v. 13). John said to Jesus, "*I have need to be baptized of Thee, and comest Thou to me?*" (v. 14).

So then why did Jesus, "*who did no sin, neither was guile found in His mouth*," as St. Peter records in his first epistle chapter 2, verse 25, come to John to be baptized? The sinless Son of God, who needed no repentance, came to John's baptism, "*to fulfill all righteousness*," as we read of Him saying to John in verse 15 just preceding our text. In His lowly state of humiliation, Jesus had been "*made under the Law*," as St. Paul writes in Galatians chapter 4, verse 4, to fulfill the Law of God in the place of all mankind as their substitute "*to redeem them that were under the Law*" (v. 5). It was God's will that the people be baptized of John "*unto repentance*" (Matthew 3:11). However, Jesus, having and knowing no sin in His divine person as the Son of God (I Peter 2:25a), had no personal sin of which to repent, but God had "*made Him, who knew no sin, to be sin for us*" (II Corinthians 5:21); He had imputed the world's sins to His sinless Son. Jesus was baptized, therefore, not for His own sins but for the people's (cf. Hebrews 7:26–27). John himself testified of this when he identified Jesus to his own disciples in John chapter 1, verse 29, saying, "*Behold the Lamb of God, which taketh away the sin of the world!*" Submitting to John's baptism belonged to Christ's active obedience, by which Jesus obeyed His Father's will, the work that He Himself delighted to do and to finish (John 4:34), and thereby, as "*the Lord, our Righteousness*" (Jeremiah 23:6), to earn, for every *disobedient sinner*, the only righteousness that avails before God (Romans 5:18–19).

"It is necessary to salvation," we confessed earlier in the Athanasian Creed, that we know, accept as true, trust in and rely on with firm confi-

dence the person and work of our Lord Jesus Christ. “Neither is there salvation in any other,” St. Peter declared in Acts chapter 4, verse 12, “for there is none other name under heaven, given among men, whereby we must be saved.” This Jesus, “the only-begotten Son of God, begotten of His Father before all worlds” (Nicene Creed; cf. Psalm 2:7), the long promised Messiah, John himself beheld at His baptism. And we behold for ourselves this same “Jesus,” the Son of God, the vicarious Redeemer of all mankind, “when He was baptized, [going] up straight-way out of the water” (v. 16a).

II.

Now secondly, in our text, we behold the Holy Spirit in the form of a dove descending upon Jesus. We read, “And, lo, the heavens were opened unto Him, and He saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove and lighting upon Him” (v. 16b). This was the Holy Ghost, “who proceedeth from the Father and the Son,” as we confess in the Nicene Creed. In John chapter 15, verse 26, Jesus, before His glorious ascension into heaven, promised the disciples this same Spirit, calling Him “*the Comforter... , whom [He would] send unto [them] from the Father.*” Jesus said that this Holy Ghost, “*the Spirit of Truth, ... shall testify of [Him].*”

What testimony of Jesus at His baptism was the Spirit giving? We learn in John chapter 1, verses 32 to 34, that God Himself had told John the Baptist in advance that this very descent of the Spirit upon Jesus would occur for the specific purpose of identifying to John who Jesus was, namely, “*that this [was] the Son of God.*” This descending “*Spirit of God*” had been specialy active thirty years earlier not only in the conception of the baby Jesus but also in divine revelations to Elisabeth, to Zacharias, and to Simeon that He was “*the Lord’s Christ*,” as we learn in Luke’s Gospel, chapters 1 (vv. 35, 41, 67) and 2 (vv. 25–26). In fact, this was the same “*Spirit of God*,” who breathed into His holy penmen the prophecies of the Savior’s coming —prophecies “*which have been since the world began*” (Luke 1:70; cf. II Peter 1:21).

Now while the “*Spirit of God*” comes upon us by the Word of the Gospel and by our baptism to “*[save] us by the washing of regeneration and renewing of the Holy Ghost, which [God] shed on us abundantly through Jesus Christ our Savior*” (Titus 3:5–7), the Spirit’s coming to Jesus at His baptism, however, was not to regenerate Him. No! From heaven the Holy Spirit came and “*light[ed] upon*,” that is, landed upon, Jesus (v. 16b), in testimony that He had anointed Him for His Messianic office, as we learn in Acts chapter 10, verse 38 — for the office to

which He had been chosen in God's eternal decree of redemption (cf. Hebrews 10:7; II Peter 1:20).

Thus, the Spirit, in His descent upon Jesus at His baptism, identified Him to John as the Chosen One of God, who would complete in time the work of redeeming all mankind. And still today, in the Holy Scriptures, the "*Spirit of God*" continues to bear testimony to Jesus, our Savior, that we too might see Him and believe in Him as OUR Redeemer. Behold the Holy Spirit descending upon Jesus, testifying to "*Jesus [as] the Christ, the Son of God, ...that believing [we] might have life through His name!*" (John 20:31).

III.

Now in the third place, we behold at Jesus' baptism the Father voicing His approval of His Son as the Redeemer of the world. "*And, lo, a voice from heaven, saying, 'This is My beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased'*" (v. 17).

Whose voice from heaven was speaking? This was the voice of the Father, who, as we confess in the Athanasian Creed, "is made of none, neither created nor begotten," but who had begotten the Son from eternity. Only a father can say, "This is my son." In John chapter 1, verse 18, the evangelist states by inspiration of God Himself, "*No man hath seen God at any time. The only begotten Son, which is in the bosom of the Father, He hath declared Him.*"

The Father, who, in Christ, loved all fallen mankind already in eternity, sent His Son in the fullness of time (cf. Galatians 4:4) to be their Savior. The Apostle John teaches us in his first epistle, chapter 4, "*In this was manifested the love of God toward us, because that God sent His only begotten Son into the world, that we might live through Him. Herein is love, not that we loved God, but that He loved us and sent His Son to be the propitiation for our sins*" (vv. 10–11) — "*and not for ours only, but also for the sins of the whole world*" (I John 2:2). We know that God loves us because He sent Jesus to be our Savior by perfectly satisfying the demands of God's justice in our place.

Exactly what was the Father's testimony of His Son at His baptism? First, the Father declared His Son's person. He said: "*This is My beloved Son*" (v. 16), echoing the words of Old Testament prophecy in Psalm 2, verse 7, where we read the Father's own declaration of His kingly Messiah, His "*Anointed*," (v. 2): "*Thou art My Son; this day have*

I begotten Thee.” His words: “*This is My beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased*” (v. 16), echo also the prophecy of Isaiah, chapter 42, verse 1, where the Father testifies about His chosen Servant, the Messiah: “*Behold My Servant, whom I uphold, Mine Elect, in whom My soul delighteth.*” Jesus, during His public ministry, pointed out to the Jews this prophetic voice of testimony in John chapter 5, verse 37, saying: “*The Father Himself, which hath sent Me, hath borne witness of Me.*” Later in Matthew chapter 17, verse 5, in the account of the miraculous transfiguration of Jesus, we see again that the Father for the second time in Matthew’s Gospel bore the same witness to Jesus as He did at His baptism: “*This is My beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased. Hear ye Him.*”

In our text, the Father also declared His good pleasure in His Son’s work. Jesus says in John chapter 8, verse 29, “*He that sent Me is with Me...I do always those things that please Him.*” The works done by Jesus, pleasing to the Father, included all the Savior’s acts to fulfill perfectly the Law of God in the stead of all poor, wretched, helpless sinners, including you and me; for “*by the obedience of One shall [the] many be made righteous,*” St. Paul writes in Romans chapter 5, verse 19. But those works also included His suffering and death to atone completely for the sins of all mankind, including yours and mine; for “*Christ also hath once suffered for sins, the Just for the unjust, that He might bring us to God,*” St. Peter tells us in his first epistle, chapter 3, verse 18. The blessed result, yea, the wonderful fruit, of the Son’s work of redemption was that “*in [Him],*” God “*reconcil[ed] the world unto Himself, not imputing their trespasses unto them” (II Corinthians 5:19), including you, including me, who otherwise would be judged according to His justice and subject to His wrath (cf. Ezekiel 18:4; Romans 1:18; 3:19; 6:23). By faith in this objective reconciliation, this gracious amnesty, we are the beneficiaries of Christ’s vicarious atonement and have for ourselves the blessings of the forgiveness of our sins, eternal life and salvation as the “*children of God by faith in Christ Jesus*” (Galatians 3:26).*

My fellow hearers of His Word, behold the Triune God at the baptism of your Lord Jesus: The “Son” of God, “*[coming] up out of the water;*” “*the Spirit of God,*” descending upon Him in the form of a dove; and the “*voice*” of the Father, testifying to “Jesus” as the One who is pleasing to Him on the basis of His perfect work as our Redeemer. “This is the catholic (or universal) faith,” we confessed earlier in the Athanasian Creed, “*which except a man believe faithfully and firmly, he cannot be saved.*”

Behold your Triune God and your redemption, wrought in Christ, who, as St. Peter says in his first epistle, chapter 1, verse 20, was “foreordained” in eternity, “before the foundation of the world,” and who was “manifest” in time “for you” as the propitiation for your sins (I John 2:2). What He accomplished for you and for all mankind is God’s free gift of grace, the forgiveness of sins, made known in the Gospel (cf. Luke 24:47), announced in the “Word of reconciliation” (II Corinthians 5:19). That Gospel is “the power of God unto salvation” (Romans 1:16), the means whereby the Holy Ghost converts men to saving faith (Romans 10:17; II Thessalonians 2:14) and also preserves them in the same unto final salvation (I Peter 1:5, 9). Let us, therefore, by faith lay hold on the preeminent work and blessing of the Triune God for our salvation: God’s eternal decree of redemption (I Peter 1:18–19); the vicarious satisfaction of God’s justice by Christ (Isaiah 53; Romans 3:25–26); God’s reconciliation of His “enemies” unto Himself (Romans 5:10; II Corinthians 5:19); His justification of “the ungodly” (Romans 4:5; 5:19b); His earnest desire that all men be saved and come to the knowledge of these blessed truths (I Timothy 2:4); yea, all of these benefits from your loving Triune God, received by all true believers.

*Glory to God, the Father, Son,
and Holy Spirit, Three in One!
To Thee, O blessed Trinity,
be praise now and eternally! (TLH 245, 6)*

God grant us such steadfast faith in the Triune God, for Jesus’ sake!
Amen.

Soli Deo gloria!



The Sure and Certain Testimony of the Gospel to the Triune God

*“If we receive the witness of men, the witness of God is greater.
For this is the witness of God which He hath testified of His Son.”*

— I John 5:9

Without controversy or question, the Scripture doctrine of the **Holy Trinity** is absolutely incomprehensible to the human mind. On the one hand, in both the Old and the New Testaments, the Bible teaches that God is **one** in essence or being. In Deuteronomy 6 verse 4, for example, Moses declared as the Lord’s spokesman: “*Hear, O Israel, the Lord, our God, is **one** Lord.*” And, as if in echo of this testimony of God’s unity, St. Paul writes in I Corinthians 8 verse 4: “*There is none other God but **one**.*” And Holy Scripture rings throughout, from Genesis to Revelation, with this very same theme, according to which we profess **one undivided** and **indivisible** God.

At the same time, we confess that there are **three** distinct **persons** in God: The **Father**, the **Son**, and the **Holy Ghost**—existing co-equally and co-eternally without dividing the substance, so that each person is the entire God with *all* of God’s attributes, as St. Paul says of Jesus, for example, in Colossians 2 verse 9: “*In Him dwelleth **all** the **fullness** of the Godhead bodily.*” This doctrine of the **three persons** is also taught in Scripture from beginning to end in both the Old and New Testaments. The simplest reference in the Old Testament to this plurality of persons we find in Genesis 1:26 where “**God** said [“God” being a *plural* noun in Hebrew and the verb “said” a *singular* form], ‘Let **US** make man in **OUR** image, after **OUR** likeness.’” And the simplest reference in the New Testament is the Savior’s words in His “Great Commission,” “*baptizing them in the **name** [singular] of the **Father**, and of the **Son**, and of the **Holy Ghost***” (Matthew 28:19).

Moreover, the same holy, inerrant, verbally-inspired Word of God teaches that those three persons are not to be “confounded” or mixed together, as if they were just three different “energies” or manifestations of the same person (Unitarianism)! For when the Son became incarnate and was “*born of the Virgin Mary*,” **He alone** became man, not the Father nor the Holy Ghost; and when the Son suffered and died, **He alone**

suffered and died, not the Father nor the Holy Ghost. The Son was **be-gotten** of the Father in eternity —not the other way around; and the Holy Ghost **proceeds** from both the Father and the Son from all eternity. And yet no one person is inferior to nor superior to any other (Cf. *Athanasian Creed*, TLH, p. 53).

This doctrine is truly *beyond* reason —beyond human capability to understand; for human reason cannot accept both the **Trinity** and the **unity** of God; they seem to be **contradictory** concepts. And yet we know that there is no contradiction in God OR in God’s precious Word. “*God is not a man that He should lie!*” (Numbers 23:19). Consequently, we confess in the *Athanasian Creed*: “The catholic [that is, the universal Christian] faith is this, that we worship one God in Trinity, and Trinity in unity, neither confounding the persons nor dividing the substance...which faith, except everyone do keep whole and undefiled, without doubt he shall perish everlastingly.”

Now we might rightfully ask in connection with this statement in the *Athanasian Creed*: “What does the doctrine of the Trinity have to do with **eternal salvation**? Can’t a person deny the Trinity and still believe in Jesus as his Savior?? Does **antitrinitarianism** really militate against the **Gospel**?” The title-text above, including the apostle’s entire discussion concerning the Trinity (vv. 7-11) answers these questions with crystal clarity, as it presents “**the sure and certain testimony of the Gospel**” as a matter of **eternal record** in heaven in the **Holy Trinity**, as **attested to** here on earth through the **Means of Grace**, and as **confirmed** to every believer by the **internal testimony** of the **Holy Spirit**.

What is “*the record that God gave of His Son*” —the record that we are to believe in order to be saved? Verse 11 of John’s God-inspired testimony is really its **summary**: “*This is the record: That God hath given to us eternal life, and this life is in His Son.*” “**This is the record,**” namely, the precious **Gospel** (or “good news”) of our salvation in Jesus Christ, that everlasting life in heaven is “*the gift of God*” (Ephesians 2:8) to unworthy, wretched and miserable sinners; that salvation was purchased and won by Christ for all mankind, when, as man’s Substitute, He perfectly kept God’s Law to earn righteousness for every soul of man and paid the penalty of every sinner’s guilt (Romans 5:19; Isaiah 53; Hebrews 10:14); and that this salvation is **received by faith** in this precious Gospel (Mark 1:15), in God’s “*Word of Reconciliation*” (II Corinthians 5:19), by childlike confidence only in God’s mercy for Christ’s sake, totally apart from the works of the Law (Romans 3:28).

This sure and certain testimony of the Gospel is a **matter of divine record in heaven**, John tells us, as the Triune God devised and decreed it in *eternity*. “There are **three** that bear record in **heaven**: The Father, the Word [that is the eternal Son of God (cf. John 1:1)], and the Holy Ghost. And these **three** are **one**” (I John 5:7). The Scriptures teach that, in eternity already, “before the foundation of the world,” Peter writes in his First Epistle (1:20), the only-begotten Son of God “was foreordained” to be a sacrificial “lamb without blemish and without spot” (v. 19), whose holy, precious blood would purchase salvation for sinful mankind. This “decree of redemption” was the eternal act of God, in which all three persons of the Trinity concurred—an act of divine **goodness, grace** and **mercy** toward the whole human race (which God had not yet created), whose **fall into sin** He had *foreseen* in His omniscience, but whose **disobedience** He had neither *desired* nor *willed*.

The Father “**gave His only-begotten Son**,” we read in John 3 verse 16, and, “when the fullness of the time was come... **sent [Him] forth**...to redeem them that were under the Law,” Paul writes in Galatians 4:4-5. The Son “**humbled Himself and became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross**” (Philippians 2:8) and thus “**gave Himself a ransom for all, to be testified in due time**” (I Timothy 2:6). And the Holy Ghost is the “*Oil of Gladness*” with which Christ was “*anointed*” by God to be the bonafide Savior of mankind (Psalm 45:7; Hebrews 1:9) —not anointed “*by measure*,” in a *limited* way as we are, but **without** measure (John 3:34) as the Spirit’s own testimony to the **surety** of this wonderful “decree of redemption”! “*And these three [...the Father, the Word, and the Holy Ghost...] are one*,” John says in verse 7. Their unanimous, divine “**record in heaven**” is sure and certain **for our sakes**, as sure and certain as God is God; as sure and certain as “the Father is God, the Son is God, and the Holy Ghost is God; and yet they are not **three** Gods but **one** God,” as we confess in our *Athanasian Creed*.

“*And there are three that bear witness in earth: The Spirit, and the water, and the blood; and these three agree in one*,” John continues in verse 8. “*Witness*” is **testimony**, the communication of **fact** from mouth to ear, from act to eye. This is the divine testimony of the **Means of Grace**, of the **Gospel** and the **Sacraments**, whereby what is already from eternity “on the record” “*in heaven*” is communicated to our sinful mortals “[on] earth” for our comfort and assurance.

“*The Spirit*” is the written and spoken **Word of God**, the **Gospel** specifically (John 6:63b), by which the Holy Ghost calls or invites men to

partake of the blessings of redemption, and through which He creates in us the faith to **accept** and **receive** the reconciliation won for us by Christ in His vicarious atonement, declared for all mankind by His Father, and proclaimed to all men as “*the Word of reconciliation*” by His Holy Spirit. “*We speak...in the Words ...which the **Holy Ghost** teacheth,*” Paul writes to the Corinthians. —And even the Gospel proclaimed in **Old Testament prophecy** was “*given by inspiration of God*” (II Timothy 3:16) as “*holy men of God spake as they were moved by the Holy Ghost*” (II Peter 1:21).

And the other two witnesses “[*on*] *earth,*” by which we have God’s own **sure and certain testimony** of the **Gospel**, are “*the water*”—Holy Baptism, through which we are “*buried into [Christ’s] death,*” the “*washing of regeneration and renewing of the Holy Ghost*” (Titus 3:5) which “*doth also now save us*” (I Peter 3:21) —“*and the blood,*” the precious blood of Christ, “*given and shed for [us] for the remission of sins*” (Matthew 28; Luke 22), received by us Christians in Holy Communion as a seal of our forgiveness and for strength to lead a holier life. “*And these three agree in one,*” John writes in our text. They all testify to **one and the same thing**: To the **sure** and **certain** “good news” of our salvation through the merits of Jesus Christ, our precious Redeemer!

Unfortunately, most people do not accept and believe the Gospel, thinking that it isn’t reliable; and yet they’ll believe what fallible men have to say about “unseen” things like atoms, radiation, electrical current, and lethal gases! And so John points out that “*if we receive the witness of men* [in such trivial earthly matters], *the witness of God is greater! For this is the witness of God, which He hath testified of His Son.*” This **Gospel** in the Holy Scriptures, together with the **Holy Sacraments**, is the “*witness of God*” **Himself!** And who would dare to call God a “liar” by not believing Him?? Yet, that is exactly what a person does, John says in verse 10, the verse right after our title-text, who “*believeth not God because he believeth not the record that God gave of His Son,*” the **sure and certain testimony of the Gospel!**

But we note yet briefly in the third place that this testimony is confirmed to every true believer by the **internal witness** of the **Spirit**. “*He that believeth on the Son of God hath the witness in HIMSELF,*” John writes in our expanded title-text, v. 10. The believer’s own **personal confidence** in the mercy and grace of God to himself, a poor, lost and condemned sinner, is the testimony of the Holy Spirit **within his heart** that, by faith in Jesus and in **His** merits **alone**, everlasting life is his in-

heritance as a child of God! For, as St. Paul writes in Romans 5 verse 1: “*Being justified by faith, we have **peace with God** through our Lord Jesus Christ.*”

“*This is the record*” to which we must hold fast as the **sure and certain testimony of good news** to our quaking hearts when Satan assails us, when he holds our sin and guilt before our eyes, and when he threatens to devour us in everlasting damnation: “*This is the record: That God hath **given to US eternal life; and this life is in His Son.***” “What comfort this sweet sentence gives!!” It is the **sure and certain testimony of the Gospel of salvation** —a matter of eternal record in heaven in the Holy Trinity, the **one true God**, Father, Son and Holy Ghost having decreed it as **one undivided Unity**; —a matter attested to here on earth in the **Means of Grace**, the Gospel and the Sacraments, through which the Holy Spirit works, strengthens, and keeps saving faith in our hearts; and —a matter confirmed to us by the **internal testimony** of the **Spirit**, as we cling to that Holy Record in simple, child-like and yet firm confidence.

— D. T. M.



The Athanasian Creed

(On the Doctrine of the Holy Trinity)

Whosoever will be saved, before all things it is necessary that he hold the catholic [*i. e.*, universal, Christian] faith.

Which faith except everyone do keep whole and undefiled, without doubt he shall perish everlastingly.

And the catholic faith is this, that we worship one God in Trinity and Trinity in Unity,

Neither confounding the Persons nor dividing the Substance.

For there is one Person of the Father, another of the Son, and another of the Holy Ghost.

But the Godhead of the Father, of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost is all one: the glory equal, the majesty coeternal.

Such as the Father is, such is the Son, and such is the Holy Ghost.

The Father uncreate, the Son uncreate, and the Holy Ghost uncreate.

The Father incomprehensible, the Son incomprehensible, and the Holy Ghost incomprehensible.

The Father eternal, the Son eternal, and the Holy Ghost eternal.

And yet they are not three Eternals, but one Eternal.

As there are not three Uncreated nor three Incomprehensibles, but one Uncreated and one Incomprehensible.

So likewise the Father is almighty, the Son almighty, and the Holy Ghost almighty.

And yet they are not three Almighty, but one Almighty.

So the Father is God, the Son is God, and the Holy Ghost is God.

And yet they are not three Gods, but one God.

So likewise the Father is Lord, the Son Lord, and the Holy Ghost Lord.

And yet not three Lords, but one Lord.

For like as we are compelled by the Christian verity to acknowledge every Person by Himself to be God and Lord,

So are we forbidden by the catholic religion to say, There be three Gods or three Lords.

The Father is made of none, neither created nor begotten.

The Son is of the Father alone, not made nor created, but begotten.

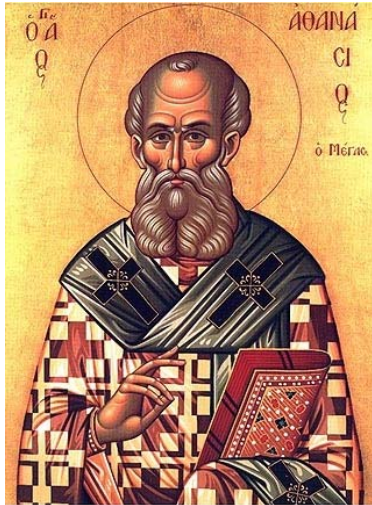
The Holy Ghost is of the Father and of the Son, neither made nor created nor begotten, but proceeding.

So there is one Father, not three Fathers; one Son, not three Sons; one Holy Ghost, not three Holy Ghosts.

And in this Trinity none is before or after other; none is greater or less than another;

But the whole three Persons are coeternal together and coequal, so that in all things, as is aforesaid, the Unity in Trinity and the Trinity in Unity is to be worshiped.

He, therefore, that will be saved must thus think of the Trinity.



Athanasius of Alexandria

...sometimes referred to as “The Father of Orthodoxy” because of his faithful stand at Nicaea in 325 A.D. for the deity of Jesus Christ. He is not the author of the creed named in his honor but of the *Nicene Creed* adopted to combat Arianism. The date of the *Athanasian Creed* is uncertain, though most historians acknowledge it to be of much later origin. —Ed.

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of the

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at

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Plenary Pastoral Conference

on June 25 and 26

and the

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Convention Motto:

The Perspicuity of Holy Scripture

Psalm 119:105, 130

The Friday Keynote Sermon is on **Psalm 119:105, 130**

The Sunday Convention Sermon is on **II Peter 1:19-21**

Doctrinal Essay:

The Perspicuity of Holy Scripture