

The Trinity Made You Family

Some things are too good to be true and it's important to be able to spot a scam when you see one. If suddenly you get an email that says you've inherited a million dollars from a long-lost relative who is a prince in Nigeria and all you need to do is put in your bank information so he can make a deposit, you should not, I repeat, should not put in your bank information. That Nigerian Prince is not your family, he probably doesn't exist, and he is not looking to make a deposit. Someone is looking to make a withdrawal. A million dollars falling from the clear blue sky is too good to be true.

On the other hand, some truths are too good to make up. The details of the truth fall in such a way that nobody in their wildest imagination could have sat down with a piece of scratch paper and drawn up something so bizarre, unless that person was God, and yet the story hangs together perfectly as it unwinds. So from hindsight we look at some crazy truth or string of events that has happened and say, "You couldn't make this up. This is too good to make up."

The Trinity is a prime example of such a truth. There are three distinct persons, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, in one God, but not three Gods, nor are they each just a third God, but each one is fully God. After the sermon we'll confess about 25 explanations all about that in the Athanasian Creed. As mysterious and complicated as the Trinity is to our human minds, there's a related truth that probably even tops it—a truth that seems far, far too good to be true, but actually is just too good to make up. It's not just about who the Trinity is, but about what the Trinity does. This is the truth—**THE TRINITY MADE YOU FAMILY**.

The Holy Trinity, Father, Son, and Spirit, fashioned, accomplished, signed, sealed and delivered to you a salvation so great it is beyond your wildest imagination. And today in our text, the way the Triune God expresses it to you is by using the gospel picture of a family, of a Father,

and brother, and children and an inheritance. But this picture is not just imagery, it's reality and it's truth. Dear believer, ***The Trinity Made You Family.*** 1) *The Holy Spirit signed your adoption papers.* 2) *so that God is your Father* 3) *and Jesus is your Brother.*

A little later on, we will dive in to explore each of those truths more deeply, but first let me show you the landscape of the chapter we're in, Romans 8. At the end of chapter 7, Paul had been describing the intense spiritual war being waged inside of him by his sinful flesh against his new creation. Finally, he cries out in pure desperation, **“What a wretched man I am! Who will rescue me from this body of death?” (7:24)** And he promptly remembers the answer, **“Thanks be to God, who delivers me through Jesus Christ our Lord!” (7:25)**

Chapter 8 then starts with the most beautiful, jaw-dropping verdict a judge could ever give. A second ago, Paul the defendant had just pled guilty to all his sins. And the judge walks in and renders the verdict. NOT GUILTY! **“There is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus!” (8:1)**

This great pronouncement of innocence kicks off what I've deemed to call a “Big Mac” sandwich of law and gospel. You're familiar with the sandwich method of giving somebody feedback and criticism, right? You lead with something good, in the middle you give a criticism or a negative, and then you finish with another positive. But like I said, this is the “Big Mac” version, where there's three buns, three positives, and two sections of law interspersed.

You heard the first part of gospel. There's no condemnation for us in Christ Jesus. Then comes a section of law aimed at the unbelievers. **“Those who are in the realm of the flesh cannot please God.” (8:8)** But then Paul redirects in the middle section of Gospel. That's not you I'm talking about, brothers and sisters in Christ. **“You, however, are not in the realm of the flesh but are in the realm of the Spirit.” (8:9)** You're alive and living in the realm of the

Holy Spirit because God gave you the Spirit to raise you from the dead, just like he raised Jesus from the dead.

Right there is where our sermon text verses picks up with the second layer of law in the law-gospel Big Mac, all built upon around the first. Because it is true that God put his Holy Spirit in us and gave us life, **“Therefore, brothers and sisters, we have an obligation—but it is not to the flesh, to live according to it.” (8:12)**. Paul is pointing out here one of the devil’s most effective lies. That you have an obligation to your flesh, that you owe it to yourself to do whatever evil thing it is that you want to do, whatever temptation comes alluring.

Then all he has to do is just turn up the pressure a little—a hard day at work, a fight with your spouse, not seeing eye to eye with your coworker, a sick kid. The flesh says, *“Don’t you see what I’m going through. I need relief. I need you to do this for me so that I can let off a little steam.”* And the devil is happy to offer us a host of temptations tailored to our every desire—a true pick your poison kind of buffet to try to fill in the blank that only God can fill. So what’s your poison? Alcohol to make you forget, pornography to help you escape, gossip to make you feel better about yourself? A binge on a bucket of ice cream? Do you make an idol of your flatscreen tv or the screen in your pocket and bow down to it for hours while your responsibilities suffer.

Our flesh loves for us to believe that we owe it to ourselves to live according to our desires. “The heart wants what it wants” is the lie that keeps on deceiving. And the devil loves to stand by like an internet scam artist, promising us things that are far too good to be true. It is all a scam. He cannot deliver. He cannot make deposits, only withdrawals, because he is the Father of lies and there is nothing good in him. If we let him run wild inside us, he will rob from our faith until it dies.

Paul states it as starkly as he can, **“For if you live according to the flesh, you will die;”** (7:13a). Your flesh cannot be given free rein to rule your life. Sin cannot be your master. These desires must be fought against and put to death, for to live with your mind dominated and governed by what the flesh desires is to grieve the Holy Spirit and be ruled by another in a realm outside of the Spirit.

On the other hand, **“if by the Spirit you put to death the misdeeds of the body, you will live.” (8:13)**. Here we might be tempted to misunderstand and think, *“My eternal life depends on how well I fight the battle against the flesh.”* No, we are careful to remember that it is not by the act of our doing repentance that we are gaining eternal life, but this fighting and crucifying the flesh is a demonstration of the fact that the Holy Spirit is living in us, is strengthening us to fight, and is leading us on the path to eternal life **“For those who are led by the Spirit of God are the children of God.” (8:14)**

With that verse, we’ve finally arrived at the last glorious gospel section of our law-gospel “Big Mac”. And this section is so densely packed with the fullness of the Trinity’s activity in our salvation. Here we learn about the relationship we now have with God since the *Trinity has made us family*. **“The Spirit you received brought about your adoption to sonship. And by him we cry, “Abba, Father.” (8:15)** We were not born as children of God, but we were born as slaves in the realm of the flesh. Like Jesus said in our Gospel lesson, **“You must be born again”** and he explained what being born again entails. **“No one can enter the kingdom of God unless they are born of water and the Spirit.” (John 3:5,7)** That connecting of water and the Holy Spirit is what takes place at our baptisms, when the Holy Spirit gives us a second birth, a rebirth in God’s family. At our baptisms, *1) the Holy Spirit signed our adoption papers to bring us into God’s family.*

And he not only was there to do it, but he continues to testify about that day of our rebirth and adoption. Like we designate a witness at a baptism to say, “I saw that this child was baptized with water in the name of the Father, Son, and Spirit,” God appoints the Spirit as the witness for us of our adoption, to testify to us. **“The Spirit himself testifies with our spirit that we are God’s children.” (8:16)**

Sometimes that testimony happens when we’re going through hardship, and the Spirit points us to God’s promises made to us on the day of our baptism, assuring us, *“I’m making sure that those promises are coming true, even when things are a mess.”* Sometimes the Spirit testifies to us through our fruits of faith, which serve as evidence that he can easily point at and say, *“Look here, you couldn’t do this without me. I am living in you, producing this fruit through you.”*

There’s another way that the Spirit testifies to us, and it often happens on the days we feel the guiltiest and the farthest away from God. It happens on the day we’ve given into the flesh, we’ve carried out its desires, and now it’s got us wondering whether the Spirit really lives in us anymore, whether we’re even a believer anymore. You know, it’s the hardest thing for a believer to believe that he actually believes. On that day riddled with guilt and doubt, the Spirit testifies with our Spirit even by convicting us of sin. He comes to us and says, *“I was there at your baptism. I made you God’s child, and right now you are not acting how a child of God acts. You’re acting like the devil’s slave again. Snap out of it! This is not you.”* And his voice speaking to our conscience through the word we’ve learned, making us loathe the sin we’ve committed, is the testimony that we are still the children of God. His voice is leading us still and God the Father has not cast his Holy Spirit away from us.

Maybe the Holy Spirit was the member of the Trinity you were a little hazy about, weren't as sure what he all does. Rest assured, he's no slouch. Coequal with the Father and Son, he's the one who brings the Father's redemptive plan, and the Son's life and death, to be our personal possession. At our adoption, 2) God became our true Father, and we get to cry out to him "*Abba*, Father." We get to approach our dear heavenly Father in the same personal and confident way that Jesus his perfect Son did. And as Professor Mark Paustian writes, "The Father has only one way of thinking about his Son, and so only one way of thinking about you"—the one in whom he is pleased.

We know this is true because the Spirit has made us true children, and **"if we are children, then we are heirs, heirs of God and coheirs with Christ."** (8:16). 3) Then Christ is our brother. As the writer to the Hebrews tells us, **"Both the one who makes people holy and those who are made holy are of the same family. So Jesus is not ashamed to call them brothers and sisters."** (Hebrews 2:11). Maybe all your life you've struggled to feel like you could live up to your earthly father's expectations or your brother's accolades. But your Father in heaven is well-pleased with you, and your Brother Jesus is not ashamed of you. The Holy Spirit has made it so. **The Trinity made you family.**

There's one last thing that comes with being true children of God. You have an inheritance coming, an inheritance of glory in heaven reserved for the co-heirs of Christ. Brothers and sisters in Christ, children of God, those are the words of Christ we are waiting and longing with all our heart to hear. **Come, you who are blessed by my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you since the creation of the world. (Matthew 25:34)** Amen.

How great is the love that the Father has lavished on us that we should be called children of God and that is what we are! Amen.