

There are a lot of ways you can go wrong with our Triune God.

Today is Trinity Sunday. Every year we dedicate one weekend to talking about who the one true God in this world is – what he says about himself. We have a Triune God (Triune, Latin for 3-in-1). We have and worship only one God. That one God is made up of three distinct persons – God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit.

This is an important teaching to wrap your mind around because this is the God of the Bible – and if you are going to worship the God of the Bible who the God of the Bible is. You need to know what he says about himself. He is Triune.

And there are a lot of ways you can go wrong as you try and wrap your mind around your Triune God.

Maybe you've heard that the Trinity is like water. Water, H₂O is one thing, yet it can be found in three forms – solid ice, liquid, or gas. Maybe you've heard that before as a way to understand the Trinity, but did you know that's a heresy we call *modalism*. Modalism is the heresy or false-teaching that says that God is not three distinct persons but only one person who reveals himself in three different ways – like water. For the water analogy to work you would have to have three cups of water sitting in front of you that you call one cup of water.

Maybe you've heard that the Trinity is like the sun. There's the star itself, then there's the light the star gives off, and the heat of that fiery star. Maybe you've heard that one before as a way to understand the Trinity, but did you know that's a heresy we call *Arianism*. Arianism is the heresy or false-teaching that says that Jesus Christ and the Holy Spirit are creations of the Father and not completely equal and one with Him – like the heat and light of the sun are not the sun itself, but creations of the sun. For the sun analogy to work you would have to have three suns that you call one sun.

Or maybe you've heard that the Trinity is like a 3-leaf clover. There are the three distinct leaves that make up one clover. Maybe you've heard that one before as a way to understand the Trinity, but did you know that's a heresy we call *partialism*? Partialism is the heresy or false-teaching that says the three persons are not distinct persons, each fully God, but only a part, 1/3 of God. For the 3-leaf clover analogy to work you would have to have three distinct clovers that you call one clover.

Are you starting to wrap your mind around the Trinity a little bit?

From subtle hints like the repetition of “Holy” three times and God saying “Whom shall *I* send? And who will go for *us*?” in the first lesson today, to the more explicit listing of each distinct person (Father, Son, and Holy Spirit) in the other two lessons for today, the Bible makes clear that there is one God and three distinct persons – the Bible rules out mixing the persons or dividing the one God. Each person is fully God – eternal, uncreated, infinite, and equal in every way – and yet the Bible makes clear we worship not three gods, but one God.

There are a lot of ways to go wrong with our Triune God because God as he reveals himself in the Bible doesn't make sense to the human mind. In the world of human reason three distinct things cannot be one thing. If you think you've made rational sense of it – you have slipped into a false teaching. Our Triune God is simply unlike anything we know or experience in this world.

So, the Bible makes clear that when it comes to worshiping and wrapping our minds around our Triune God it is a matter of *faith* – trust that God, and the writers he used, didn't make a mistake when they wrote the Bible; trust that God is infinitely bigger and better than us, so if he says something that doesn't make sense to our human reason, we trust him because he is bigger and better than our human reason.

The Bible, including our sermon lesson for today in Romans, make clear that our God is Triune and we need to trust him.

And his “three-in-one-ness” is not the only thing that we are encouraged to trust today. So let's dig in to see how we can go wrong with our Triune God and the need for trust.

One biblical scholar I read this last week called Romans 8:14-17 “one of the most beautiful pictures of the believer's joy and security anywhere in Scripture.”

And yet if I asked all of you here today to list your top 3 favorite Bible sections, I'd be willing to bet that none of you would have chosen Romans 8:14-17. What is so beautiful about this section that one man who knows his Bible very well would call it one of the most beautiful sections anywhere in Scripture, and what does it have to do with trust?

First, let's tackle the beauty.

This section lays out the simple, yet profoundly beautiful argument that our Triune God takes slaves and makes them children and heirs.

You and I, we were born into slavery. Yes, even we Americans who did away with institutionalized slavery over 150 years ago, are born slaves. Jesus once said, “**Anyone who sins is a slave to sin.**”

And I'm guessing that on a daily basis your consciences verify Jesus' statement. On a daily basis your consciences reminds you how your selfish/sinful heart made you do something you knew was wrong and didn't want to do – a pretty accurate definition of slavery, when something has control over you and forces you to do things even if you don't want to do them. Our sinful hearts prove Jesus' statement true every day.

And because of it, the Bible says we should be afraid. Our Triune God is very clear about what sinners deserve. There are a lot of ways we can go wrong with our Triune God, and using a bad analogy to describe the Trinity is just one many ways to go wrong

with God. On a daily basis, because of our slavery to sin, we find ourselves at odds with the God who is infinitely bigger and better than us.

And slaves should be afraid. We should be filled with dread before our Triune God, the righteous judge... if not for words like Romans 8.

Did you catch what God the Holy Spirit does with slaves? **Those of you who are led by the Spirit of God are the children of God. The Spirit you received does not make you slaves, so that you live in fear again; rather, the Spirit you received brought about your adoption to sonship. And by him we cry, "Abba, Father."**

There are a lot of ways to go wrong with our Triune God... and yet this section of the Bible reminds us that our Triune God went out of his way to make it right.

He takes slaves and makes them sons. He takes people who should rightfully tremble in fear before him and give us – what were the words that scholar used again? – he gives us *joy* and *security*.

There are a lot of ways to go wrong with our Triune God, and yet because of God the Holy Spirit you and I get to call God **"Abba, Father."** Abba is an Aramaic word for Father but is more endearing, it is more personal than just "Father". It is a pretty close equivalent to when my little girl calls me "daddy."

Do you get what your Triune God is saying to you today? Do you see the beauty in it?

It's kind of like this: I'm sure that, unlike me, you were all perfect teenagers back in the, but even if you were a perfect teen, you probably can picture this scenario.

Teenage you pulls in the drive way. You put the car in park, and the butterflies erupt in your stomach. There's a light on in the house and the clock in your car says I AM. Your parents were very clear that you were to be home by 11. Not only that, this is the third time you've gotten home late this week.

You consider throwing the car in reverse to go sleep at your friends, but you are going to have to face dad sometime so you turn off the car and begin to prep yourself for what is to come.

You get out of the car and try to close the door quietly because there is always the chance that dad fell asleep on the couch and you can sneak to your room without a confrontation.

You open the door, step in, and there's dad, sitting on the couch, wide awake, reading a book. He stops reading, looks you right in the eye, takes a deep breath, and says, "I'm glad you made it back safely. Did you have a good evening?"

At a loss for words, terrified, expecting him to erupt at any second you squeeze out a "yeah," and make a beeline for the stairs and your bed... half way up you stop, there was no anger, no eruption, no shouting match, no discipline, not even a mention of what you did wrong – it is so opposite of what your fear expected when you pulled into the driveway. Your conscience tells you it shouldn't be this easy, you shouldn't get off this way. Maybe this is just a ruse, maybe dad is going to get you back some other way, so you stop and say, "Dad are we good?"

"Yeah, we're good. I love you. Good night."

That is what your Triune God wants to communicate with you today. There are a lot of ways we go wrong with our Triune God – and all of those ways should inspire fear - but our God goes out of his way to make it right so that we can call him Dad, Abba, and he can look at us and say, "We're good. I love you."

Do you see the beauty? When slaves are made children, fear is replaced with joy and security.

And it doesn't even stop there!

God reminds us here in Romans that we are not only children of God, as Children we are also heirs. If God is our Father, then not only are we not going to get in trouble right now for ignoring curfew, but everything that belongs to God will one day be ours. If we are God's children, if he has adopted us into his family, then everything good, everything lovely, everything great that God has and is, is ours by virtue of our adoption.

It may never make it on your personal list of top three sections of the Bible, but this is the beauty. Romans 8:14-17 offers us this beautiful contrast between the inner sense of dread we should have before God, the righteous judge, and the intense peace and security that comes before God, our Abba, our Father. The dread is what we deserve. The peace and security is what God the Holy Spirit gives.

That's the beauty. Now, what about the trust?

Well, this section would be nothing but beauty if not for that little word in the last phrase of the last verse... **if...** **"Now if we are children, then we are heirs – heirs of God and co-heirs with Christ, if indeed we share in his sufferings in order that we may also share in his glory."**

Just like the teaching of the Trinity, there is a truth in this section that will force us to take God at his word – to trust him even if, especially if, our senses and reason don't understand it.

God promises that we have been adopted, that we are heirs of glory, but what comes first? Suffering...

The Bible makes abundantly clear that this side of eternity – before you get to heaven and claim your inheritance – your life will be, to a large degree, defined by suffering.

Our lives will be defined by suffering because this world has been ruined by the same sin that enslaved our hearts. The Bible says this present age is passing away and us with it because sin kills, that's what it does – and an inescapable part of living in a world that is passing away is suffering.

But the suffering doesn't end there – Jesus promises not only will we suffer because of sin in general, but many times he promises that if we live the way he has called us to live, we will suffer even more as the world hates and attacks Jesus' followers just like they hated and attacked him – and if you don't feel persecuted for your faith in America it probably has more to do with you not living the way he wants you to live, than with his promise not coming true.

We are children of God which means one day we inherit glory, but first we suffer, and that requires trust – trust that even when the world is falling apart around me my God is still my Father who is doing what is best for me; trust that even when the world hates me for loving and sharing the truth of God's word that I am still a child of God; trust that even when I feel my body decaying while I'm still in it, I am an heir of glory.

It comes down to trust – trust that my Triune God is bigger and better than my human reason and my experiences in this world; trust that though there are many ways to go wrong with the Trinity, he has done what it takes to make it right again.

And he has. Did you catch who shares in our suffering? Jesus Christ... The Son of God suffered in this world with you. The Son of God suffered in this world for you so that you could be adopted into his family. The Son of God shared in suffering with you so that you could share glory with him. And that again is the beauty – the beauty of the Gospel (Good news), the beauty of God's word, the beauty of our Triune God – a beauty that creates and inspires trust.

Friends, we, former slaves, are children of the Triune God. As children we are heirs. Trust your Triune God who has and will make all things right. God grant it. Amen.