

Romans 8:12-17

So then, brothers and sisters, we are debtors, not to the flesh, to live according to the flesh— for if you live according to the flesh, you will die; but if by the Spirit you put to death the deeds of the body, you will live. For all who are led by the Spirit of God are children of God. For you did not receive a spirit of slavery to fall back into fear, but you have received a spirit of adoption. When we cry, ‘Abba! Father!’ it is that very Spirit bearing witness with our spirit that we are children of God, and if children, then heirs, heirs of God and joint heirs with Christ - if, in fact, we suffer with him so that we may also be glorified with him.

For seven hundred years, the western church has set aside this Sunday for reflection and discussion on the mystery of the Trinity. One day in the Christian year that affirms a reality and doctrine rather than a person or event. It falls on the Sunday after Pentecost. On Trinity Sunday we remember and honour the eternal God; the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit.

We sing the words of one of our best-loved hymns,

“...*God in three persons, blessed Trinity*” VU 315

You may have heard this story- After hearing a sermon on Trinity Sunday, a man was leaving the sanctuary and told the minister he hadn’t really appreciated the sermon that day, he said, “I come here for peace of mind, I don’t come here to think!” (forewarned)

Common wisdom says that if you discuss the Trinity for longer than a few minutes, you will slip into heresy, as you’re looking into the depths of God too deeply.

The Trinity is typically known as, “The Nicene Creed.” VU p. 920

The Trinity is the belief that God is One in essence (Greek *ousia*), but Distinct in person (Greek *hypo-stasis*) / that which stands on its own/ an individual reality. (It doesn’t mean the persons of the Trinity are three human beings.)

Christians believe that the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit are distinct from one another (though not divided), yet completely united in will and essence. How does this work? Think of a pair of eyes. Not really a good example. The eyes are distinct from each other, yet are undivided in their seeing.

Christian Doctrine has been the subject of discussion, conversation, debate, struggle and bitter name-calling through the centuries.

United Church Doctrine “The Basis of Union” - written June 10, 1925
by the Presbyterian, Congregational Churches, Methodist churches in Canada, and shall be called “The United Church of Canada” ...having all declared this as their Statement of Faith.

Article 2.3.7

“We believe in, and confess, the Lord Jesus Christ, the only Mediator between God and man, who, being the Eternal Son of God, for our salvation, became truly man, being conceived by the Holy Spirit and born of the Virgin Mary; without sin. For our redemption he fulfilled all righteousness offered himself, a perfect sacrifice on the cross, satisfied divine justice, and appeased the sins of the whole world.”

What is the Trinity, exactly?

Some would say ‘Father, Son, and Holy Spirit’

or ‘Father, Son, and Holy Ghost’ (if you remember your early church days)

Others would say something quite different. Some might say, $1+1+1 = 1$

In Romans (8: vs 17), Paul reminds the church in Rome, being led by the Spirit of God, they are children of God,

“...if children, then heirs of God, and *joint-heirs* with Christ.”

In Paul’s theology, there is an ‘even now’, just as there is an end to history.

They are not separate, but the ‘now’ is woven into the end, and in daily life where the faithful struggle with the flesh/being human and the Spirit.

We read in the Christian scripture that we are to be ‘one with Christ’ - a *joint-heir* with him, before God. How do we live every day and follow our theology?

What does it mean to live as a “*joint-heir*” with Christ? Something to do with inheritance? Yes.

Our conflict with being human is as old as creation. ‘Being of the flesh’...somehow seems more sinful than being human...but are we getting a good picture of the truth? Paul’s answer seems to be, “Are you of the flesh, or the Spirit?” But is being human (of the flesh) always a bad thing?

Do we all live, not quite fully in the flesh, and not quite fully in the Spirit?

What does that feel like?

Barney Hawkins writes, “Some of us, who try our very best to follow Christ, often live in fear and anxiety somewhere between the flesh and the Spirit.”

Some of the faithful have heard that if they live as good Christians, and somehow ignore/disregard the struggle with the flesh, they will be free to live in the Spirit, live a life of holiness and to become children of God.

It would be easy to feel defeated by Paul’s comparison between the flesh and the Spirit...the body and the mind....this world and God’s world.

Is there wiggle-room for both?

Paul offers hope, even though his ‘flesh equals death’ and ‘Spirit equals life,’ his all-or-nothing writing doesn’t help us much, it doesn’t leave any room for the tension (the humanity!) between the two.

Is this what being human is all about? The back-and-forth, yes-no, the maybe, maybe-not decisions we make every day? Some for the good, some for the not-so-good. If we do our best to live-in-the-Spirit, we can only hope to be *joint-heirs* with Christ.

Christian hermits are one community that separate themselves from the flesh and from the world. They hope to be pure and undefiled, one with Spirit of God.

A community similar to this was what Paul was talking about. Some Hermits feel this world is the consequence, or result of being human. Their choices are not ‘of the world.’

Reading Paul’s letters might be a challenge today, he always seems to be writing about the future based on the here-and-now.. don’t we all? His letter tells the Jews in Rome if they think they can determine human destiny by the choices they make, not so, he quickly reminds them of God’s first life-giving act of resurrecting Jesus. (v. 1-3)

It’s important to remember the truth that we are all children of God, not because of a decision we made about flesh or Spirit, but because we are God’s.

The question was whether Jesus Christ was the unique, fully divine, incarnate Son of God, (as it states in the Nicene Creed), or was he simply another person, a very good, even the very best person, but not ‘God became flesh?’ as the Arians believed.

The Apostle’s Creed was written approximately 70-80 years after the gospels and

letters were put down on parchment. It was an attempt to describe what the early church believed about the Trinity. Each of the twelve 'sentences' are said to have been written by the twelve apostles.

It was the church's answer to common heresies, a way to sort out who believed this and who did not. The people recognized it because it was based on the Sacrament of Baptism. It was important to state what you believed, as it is now.

The Nicene Creed written in 325 CE, by Constantine II (along with bishops and politicians), was a revised Apostle's Creed written to affirm the full divinity of Jesus Christ, but against the Arian belief that Jesus was human only, and lower than God the Creator. There are similarities between the two creeds, but the Nicene Creed, line 16, reads,

"...Lord Jesus Christ came down from heaven ...and became truly human..."
so there would be no mistake.

An interesting saying, "If you define Jesus as God....you limit God.
"If you define God as Jesus.....you limit Jesus.

John Jewell describes God in three ways:

First...God is personal. (God)

The first part that affects our lives is that God is Personal.

God is not unknown, or a strange power that can't be understood.

God is not an empty concept that we fill with our own imaginings.

(don't most of us do that?) God is a personal being. We relate to God in a personal way... God is love. And because we believe we are made in the image of God, our own person-hood is rooted in God. John Jewell says that because God is *personal*, we are *persons*. Our value or worth can't be decreased or increased by any human power or any life circumstances. Our value is rooted in God. We can think of many ways where humans have attempted to increase or decrease the value of another human being.

Second...God is Saviour. (Lord Jesus Christ)

is to say that God's love is a wonderful thing and that we can have a relationship of love with God. We're not always in touch with God's love and we are quite aware that we can never measure up to this amazing love. What can we do when we look at our lives and the world around us and realize that we're far from god-like? When we realize we have made quite a mess of our lives, and a mess of planet earth?

What can we do about it? The more important question is, “*What will God do?*” God became flesh and came to us in the person of Jesus Christ. Our Liberator and Redeemer, if we want. He came to teach and heal and show us the way to really know God. He was crucified and he rose on the third day to give us life. He was God-like.

If God had made the world a complete perfect creation-ness, there would be no need for the Imperfect to move to the Perfect....it would already be there. And if the human were not originally divided from God, there would be no need for humanity to be reunited with God. This ancient image becomes more real and immediately understood when it’s compared to our contemporary, new ideas of today. (confused yet?)

If Jesus is not God, he can’t be the Saviour.

If Jesus was just another person, he couldn’t be the Saviour.

Because God loves us,

God has come to us as the Saviour in the person of Jesus Christ.

And third...God is present. (Holy Spirit)

God allows imperfection, because without it there would be no creation end-of-times. The created order would be an eternal, perfect state of ‘created-ness’ ...with nowhere to go. Not only did God create us, but God is always and everywhere present. Present to encourage and empower, comfort and care for us, wherever our life’s journey takes us. Paul reminds the people of Rome they are led by the Spirit of God.

God the Holy Spirit is the giver of life. When Jesus was with the disciples in the upper room, he explained to them, God would “*..give them another Advocate to be with them forever; the Spirit of Truth.*” (John 14: 15-16)

In the United Church’s newest Statement of Faith, “A Song of Faith”, c2007

Trinity images are described: Creator - Redeemer - Sustainer

Mother - Friend - Comforter

Source of Life - Living word - Bond of Love

Holy Mystery - Holy Teacher - Wholly Love

Whatever names we use to describe the Trinity,
it’s more important that we recognize,
even if we don’t always understand-

“God in three persons, blessed Trinity.”