

Trinitarian Gospel

Matthew 28:18 - Mark 1:1 ¹⁸ And Jesus came and spoke to them, saying, "All authority has been given to Me in heaven and on earth. ¹⁹ "Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, ²⁰ "teaching them to observe all things that I have commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, *even* to the end of the age." Amen.

One of the oldest Christian writings outside of the New Testament is a short document called the *Didache*, which is Greek for 'teaching'. It was written probably about the time that John died – the end of the first century or the very beginning of the second. It was almost certainly written by Jewish Christians as a kind of manual for new Christians. It covers a wide range of topics. In chapter 7, this is what it says about baptism:

7:1 But concerning baptism, thus baptize ye: having first recited all these precepts, baptize in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit,

That's really remarkable, when you consider that this was written by Jews. Before the year 100, Jewish Christians were baptising in the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. That's significant because there are people today who tell us that we should not baptise in the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, but only in the name of Jesus. There are people who tell us that the ending of Matthew could never have actually read 'baptise in the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit', it must have been changed and added later by people who believed in the Trinity. But here we have a document, not more than about 30 years older than the Gospel of Matthew which clearly calls for Trinitarian baptism.

Christian baptism is Trinitarian baptism. To testify that you have believed the biblical gospel is to testify belief in the Trinity. And any baptism which denies the truth that God is one God, consisting in the three Persons is not Christian baptism.

What do we mean by the Trinity? We mean that God has always existed as three Persons within His being. Each person, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit has all the properties and qualities of God but each person is not a God. Notice Jesus tells the disciples to baptise in the *name* of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit, not in the *names* thereof. One God – Yahweh – eternally existent as Father, Son, and Spirit.

When we baptise, we often focus on how it pictures death, burial and resurrection. We often mention that the person has identified with Christ, as co-crucified, co-buried, co-resurrected. We emphasise the aspect of it picturing a cleansing, a new life, being joined to the body of Christ. And all of this is true. But somehow, we give little attention to the one thing Jesus explicitly told us to do when baptising – to do so in the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. I can't tell you how many baptisms I have witnessed, but I can tell you that I do not remember hearing a message explaining why we baptise in the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

Why did Jesus instruct us to do this? What is the significance of Trinitarian baptism?

To answer that, I am going to ask you to turn to Ephesians chapter 1. Ephesians 1:-14 is actually one sentence in the Greek – the longest sentence in the New Testament. Packed into this sentence is a glorious statement of how the Trinity brought about our salvation.

In baptism, we are publicly identifying ourselves as Christians, saying that we have believed the gospel. And when we baptise in the name of the three Persons, we are saying that the gospel is a

Trinitarian gospel. So when we baptise in the name of the Trinity, we are saying that the Trinity saved this person. The gospel he or she believed involved each of the three Persons of the Trinity. Christian baptism is Trinitarian baptism, because the true gospel is Trinitarian. The true message of salvation is Trinitarian. If you subtract the Trinity, you no longer have the gospel. If you do not believe that there are three persons who together make up the one Being that is God, then you have not understood and believed the Christian gospel.

I confess that I love the doctrine of the Trinity, because in it I find almost my whole faith. I find the ultimate reason for existence: that God the Father loved the Son and wanted to give the universe as a gift to His Son, who would in turn give it to His Father. I find the love between the Persons explaining my reason for being- to become part of that love. I find the gospel explained in the Trinity: the Father sent the Son, the Son came in the power of the Spirit and offered Himself up to the Father, returned and then sent the Spirit to draw people to the Son who then reveals the Father. I find the explanation for prayer in the Trinity – praying to the Father, in the name of Jesus by the Spirit. I understand sanctification in the Trinity – the Spirit of God grows me to resemble the Son of God so that I might know and further please the Father. Here is an ocean to swim in, and if you are a born again Christian, you have no doubt already been swimming in it every time you pray, read your Bible, ask for growth.

Here in Ephesians 1:3-14, we find the three roles that each of the three Persons takes in our salvation. As we study it, we can be thrilled, awed, and rejoice in how each of the Persons was involved. We'll see the Father appointed our salvation, the Son accomplished our salvation, and the Spirit applied our salvation.

I. The Father Appointed Our Salvation

Ephesians 1:3-6 ³ Blessed *be* the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly *places* in Christ, ⁴ just as He chose us in Him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and without blame before Him in love, ⁵ having predestined us to adoption as sons by Jesus Christ to Himself, according to the good pleasure of His will, ⁶ to the praise of the glory of His grace, by which He has made us accepted in the Beloved.

According to these verses, God the Father appointed our salvation. He planned it, designed it and initiated it. Look at the action-words in verses 4 and 5. What did God do? He chose us in Jesus. What did He choose us for? Verse 5 – having predestined us to adoption as sons. God the Father made a plan and the plan was to select you, out of billions of people to be adopted into His family as a child with all the rights and privileges of a natural-born child. He planned to make believers sons to Himself. His grand plan was not simply saving people from sin, but bringing them into His own family, bringing us into union with Himself. And once we were His own children, what would we be like? Verse 4- we would be holy and without blame. This is God's grand plan: He planned that some would be saved, so that we could be His children, and be like Him.

When did God come up with this plan? Verse 3 tells us. He appointed us before the foundation of the world. Long before you or I had earned anything, proved ourselves or done something worthy, God chose.

How could He have done this? Knowing how sinful we would be, how could God the Father choose any of us to become His children? Look at verse 3. He chose us *in Him*. We were chosen by God in Christ. God chose us by looking at us through His Son, through His Son's work. You see that again in verse 5. We were predestined to adoption as sons *by Jesus Christ*. This was not anything we have done, but out of pure unearned, unmerited, grace. Verse 6 says this is all to the praise of His

glorious grace.

Why did He do this? The end of verse 4 and through verse 6 tells us. *In love He predestined us.* Verse 5 – according to the good pleasure of His will. It pleased Him to do so. Verse 6 to the praise of His glorious grace. He did it because He desired to glorify Himself and bless us. He loved us, and it pleased Him to gain praise for Himself and deliverance for us.

The Father is like a grand architect. He envisions the whole thing. He imagines how something will look at the end. He plans how it will take place. He designs how it is to be built. From there, He begins to appoint and send those who will build it. That's what the Father does in our salvation. He designed the whole plan. He lovingly, joyfully imagined it all. He then set the plan in motion by sending the Son, and sending the Spirit.

We are wrong when we think of the Father as only reluctantly involved in our salvation, as the angry One who is only placated by loving Jesus. The truth is, Jesus is just as angry about sin, and it is the Father who graciously, lovingly, kindly chose us, predestined us to adoption, and set the whole matter of salvation in motion.

When we reflect on our salvation, we should thank the Father for choosing us, for adopting us. He appointed the whole thing, and it is to Him that we owe our great gratitude.

Verse 6 serves as a bridge from the Father to the Son. In His grace, He has made us accepted, pleasing in the Beloved. Who is the Beloved? Of whom was it said, “You are My Son, the Beloved, in whom I am well pleased”? Jesus Christ. So from seeing the Father who appoints our salvation, we see secondly.

II. The Son Accomplished Our Salvation

Ephesians 1:7-12 ⁷ In Him we have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of sins, according to the riches of His grace ⁸ which He made to abound toward us in all wisdom and prudence, ⁹ having made known to us the mystery of His will, according to His good pleasure which He purposed in Himself, ¹⁰ that in the dispensation of the fullness of the times He might gather together in one all things in Christ, both which are in heaven and which are on earth -- in Him. ¹¹ In Him also we have obtained an inheritance, being predestined according to the purpose of Him who works all things according to the counsel of His will, ¹² that we who first trusted in Christ should be to the praise of His glory.

It is one thing for the Father to plan that we should become children who resemble Him, but how do you get sinners forgiven of their sins?

Verse 7 tells us. Christ redeemed us. What does that mean? It means He bought us out of slavery to sin, out of our indebtedness to sin, providing the forgiveness of sins. How did He do this? Through His blood. A small phrase, but a huge wealth of meaning in there. He had to take on human flesh, become one of us, so that He could be a substitute for us. He had to be among us, face our temptations, face our struggles, and resist them, perfectly obeying God, so that when He offered up Himself on the cross, His perfect life could pay for our sins. He took our punishment, His offering satisfying God, and being enough to forgive us and purchase us out of sin.

Why did He do this? Verse 7 tells us – because of grace. Riches of grace. In fact, this grace is so lavish, that He did not only save us, but He revealed sacred secrets to us – that all things are to be gathered up in Christ, and it is He that we have an inheritance in. This is more than delivering from

sin, this is lavishing on us the status of bride to the One who will be King over all.

A.W. Tozer helps us understand what it means to have this inheritance in Christ:

“[Christians] are safe forever by a covenant of blood and are dearer to God than the apple of His eye. No night can be dark enough to put out their light, no fire hot enough to burn them, no flood sever enough to drown them on their journey. The wind and waves are their friends and the stars in their courses fight for them. God is at their right hand, and they shall not be moved...they are redeemed from their past offences, kept in their present circumstances by the power of an all-powerful God, and their future is safe in His hands. God has promised to support them in the flood, protect them in the fire, feed them in the famine, shield them against their enemies, hide them in His safe chambers until the indignation is past and receive them at last into eternal tabernacles. If we are called to suffer, we may be perfectly sure that we shall be rewarded for every pain and blessed for every tear. Underneath will be the Everlasting Arms and within will be the deep assurance that all is well with our souls. Nothing can separate us from the love of God – not death, nor life, nor height, nor depth, nor any other creature.”

Why? Because we were good? Because we impressed Him? No, look at verse 11: being predestined according to the purpose of Him who works all things according to the counsel of His will, He did this because He wanted to. Verse 9 - according to His good pleasure which He purposed in Himself, and just like the Father, He did this for the praise of His glory.

If the Father plans it, then the Son accomplishes it. He comes in and pays the price. If the Father is the architect, then the Son is the buyer of the materials and the builder. He is the worker who carries out the plan.

The Father purposes, and the Son performs. The Father selects, and the Son secures. The Father appoints and the Son accomplishes.

When we think of our salvation, we should thank the Son for carrying out the Father's plan. We should thank the Son for being willing to become one of us, so as to offer Himself up to the Father for us. We should thank Him for lavishing grace upon us in coming in obedience to the Father to make it possible for us to become children.”We should thank Him for inviting us to share in His future glory. In order to execute the Father's plan to turn sinners into sons, the eternal Son, had to become an incarnate Son.

Again, verse 13 serves as a bridge from the Son to the Spirit. After we heard the word of truth, the gospel, and we trusted in Christ, and we believed, the Holy Spirit then did something to us and for us.

III. The Spirit Applied Our Salvation

Ephesians 1:13-14 ¹³ In Him you also *trusted*, after you heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation; in whom also, having believed, you were sealed with the Holy Spirit of promise, ¹⁴ who is the guarantee of our inheritance until the redemption of the purchased possession, to the praise of His glory.

Once the Father has appointed it, and the Son has accomplished it, how does that get into our lives? How do we get the work of the Son on the cross into our lives? That's where the Spirit comes in. He applies the work of the Son.

He is the One who first comes to us and convicts us of sin. He is the one who sets us apart and leads us to Christ and illuminates us so that we can see Christ and repent and believe. And at that moment, it is the Spirit who then regenerates us, baptises us into Christ's work, and indwells us.

He is the One who takes the what the Father planned, and what the Son performed and applies it to people. If the Spirit did not do His work, all you would have is the Father's plan, and the Son's work on the cross, but no one saved by it. The Spirit comes and applies the work of Christ savingly to the hearts of people.

Here we are told of His work of sealing.

A seal in ancient times was a way of guaranteeing that the contents of a document or a package arrived at the destination untampered with. What is the seal? The seal is the Spirit Himself! When the Spirit comes and applies the work of Christ to you, one of the ways He makes you know that He has done that is that He comes within to live. The Holy Spirit's presence in us is a seal that we will arrive at the final day untampered with, as justified as the day it happened.

In fact, it is more than seal, it is a down-payment – a deposit that guarantees you will receive the rest of what is coming to you. His presence in your life, which you sense in His convicting and enabling, and filling, and gifting, and helping you to pray, and crying out in your heart, Abba! Father!, these prove, you belong to Christ, and you will receive your inheritance in time to come.

If the Father is the architect, and the Son is the builder, then the Spirit is the estate agent, who get the people into the house which the Father designed and the Son built.

The Father purposes, and the Son performs, and the Spirit empowers. The Father appoints and the Son accomplishes, the Spirit applies.

When we think of our salvation, we should be very thankful for the Spirit who took the finished work of Christ and applied it to us. We should praise Him for being willing to persuade hard hearts, to be grieved again and again, and until we saw Christ was irresistibly beautiful and came. We should be glad that it is He who takes something done in the year 32, and applies it thousands of years later to us. We can praise Him that He does all this and then chooses to dwell within us, assuring us that we are in Christ, and that He is in us.

If we subtract the Trinity from the gospel, what do we have? Who is dying on the cross? Who is He offering Himself to? Who is it that comes to live inside us? Who points us to Christ? The gospel is a Trinitarian gospel.