

DELIGHTING IN THE TRIUNE GOD

ROMANS 5:11

INTRODUCTION

As Paul opens his letter to the Romans, he writes of **“the gospel of God.”**

That is, the gospel is the good news message of **who God is** and **how God acts** towards His creation.

Having followed Paul through his efforts to assure us of our future salvation in **chapter five**, we can now understand just how profound it is to speak of **“the gospel of God.”**

This wonderful paragraph of **Romans 5:1–11** reveals that the **gospel of how God saves sinners** reflects **who God is as a triune God.**

It is as if the light of the triune God hits the prism of His gospel and what is refracted through that lens is the most **brehtaking, magnificent display** of God as Father, Son, and Spirit.

To change analogies, as Paul expounds upon the benefits of justification, or we might even say, upon the glories of the gospel, he reveals the **trinitarian shape** of the the gospel.

It is as if the gospel were **poured into the mould** of who God is so that it conforms, in every way, to who He is in the inseparable union of three distinct Persons—
Father, Son, and Spirit.

This is precisely what we see in this wonderful paragraph that opens **chapter five**.

As Paul has expounded upon the benefits of justification, he has given us a number of things to **boast in/ exult in/ glory in**.

Those who have a right relationship with God through faith in Jesus Christ can now glory in their future hope of sharing in God's glory by delighting in and displaying the splendour of His nature and character.

Furthermore, they can now glory in their present suffering as it instills perseverance, proven character, and hope in them.

They can glory in their present sufferings because they are assured of the love of God by the Spirit of God.

Therefore, by implication, they can now also glory in the love of God which is a profoundly trinitarian experience as we learnt this past Sunday.

But as Paul now **summarises and concludes** the whole paragraph in **verse 11**, it is little wonder that he calls us to glory not only in **what God does for us** in His actions but to cast our eyes over **the trinitarian shape of the gospel** and be drawn into the worship of the triune God Himself.

Though we glory in all that God does according to the gospel, we find that the focus of our glory ultimately comes to be on God Himself.

As we exult in how God acts, we exult in who God is.

To return to the previous analogy, as we glory/ as we delight in the light of the triune God that is refracted through prism of the gospel, we are drawn into the deepest delight of the triune God Himself.

That is why Paul refers to it as “**the gospel of God.**”

It is not only the good news of how God acts to save sinners, but it is the good news of how God draws those sinners into the most **breathtaking, magnificence** of who He is as Father, Son, and Spirit.

Therefore, God is the gospel.

The gospel is about how the triune God saves in order to bring His chosen people into their delight in Himself, the triune God.

We have previously learnt that the best part of the gospel is not the judgement of God that we are saved from, but the relationship with God that we are saved to.

As **Andy Naselli** puts it—

“Justification is good news not primarily because God forgives our sins and we escape God’s wrath. Justification is good news primarily because it enables us to enjoy God himself.”¹

¹ Andrew David Naselli, *Romans: A Concise Guide to the Greatest Letter Ever Written* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2022), 72.

John Piper makes the same point when he writes—

“Justification is not an end in itself. Neither is the forgiveness of sins or the imputation of righteousness. Neither is escape from hell or entrance into heaven or freedom from disease or liberation from bondage or eternal life or justice or mercy or the beauties of a pain-free world.

None of these facets of the gospel-diamond is the chief good or highest goal of the gospel. Only one thing is: seeing and savouring God himself, being changed into the image of his Son so that more and more we delight in and display God’s infinite beauty and worth.”²

Now, that brings us to the focus of today’s sermon—

delighting in the triune God.

For of all that the gospel gives us to boast in, our boast in God is the greatest of all.

To boast in God is nothing more than to delight in the God of the gospel, the God whose triunity indelibly marks the gospel.

The triune shape of the gospel calls us to delight in **the triune God of the gospel**, as Paul will explain in the summary and conclusion of his wonderful paragraph.

So as Paul calls us to **boast/ exult/ glory/ delight** in the triune God, we must, at least for a few moments, **pause to consider** why this might, at first, **sound odd to us.**

Why is it so strange for us to think of the Trinity, much less to think of the Trinity with delight?

² John Piper, *God Is the Gospel: Meditations on God’s Love as the Gift of Himself* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 2005), 45.

Could it be that many of you consider the Trinity to be **so strange and so far from delightful** because you think that the idea is **too “theological” to bother with?**

When theologians speak of the Trinity, they tend to use a **vocabulary** that is so foreign to us that it might as well be another language.

They speak with great vigour of essence, and substance, and hypostasis, and subsistence, and an ontological Trinity as well as an economic Trinity, and inseparable operations which is not the same as appropriations or missions.

It's enough to make your head spin!

When theologians speak in this way about the Trinity, though it is sometimes necessary to defend the doctrine of the Trinity, it is understandably that one would think that the idea is too “theological” to bother with.

It makes the Trinity sound **so strange and so far from delightful.**

If not that, then **could it be** that you consider the Trinity to be **irrelevant today?**

You might not begrudge the theologians their task, but you imagine that a **“stuffy old doctrine”** like the Trinity has got nothing to do with the important work we should focus on, like **loving one another** in the church in fellowship and **loving the unbelieving world** in evangelism.

If you don't recognise that the very concepts of love and fellowship and gospel mission are **rooted in the Trinity**, then certainly you will think of that Trinity as **irrelevant, strange, and anything but delightful**.

Even if it is not this, **could it be** that you simply find the idea of the Trinity either **confusing or a load of nonsense?**

This could well be the case if all that you've heard about the Trinity is that it is like a **three-leaf clover**.

The illustration is meant to point to three leaves on a single stem as a picture of the Trinity, but it not only sounds like nonsense but it involves a great error.

The leaves are separate “parts” of one whole, which implies that God's divine essence is divided into three parts.

Instead, Scripture teaches us that the three Persons are each fully and completely God—without division or separation.

In its worst presentation, the three-leaf clover can slide into tritheism—three separate gods loosely connected.

There are similar problems when you try to describe the Trinity as **an egg**.

Despite the best efforts of some to say that the shell, white, and yolk of a single egg is a picture of God's triunity, it suggests that the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit are each only part of God, and only when combined do they equal the full divine being.

Ah, but perhaps the cleverist among us will insist that the Trinity is like the **three states of water**—ice, liquid, and steam.

This analogy, they insist, doesn't make the errors of the clover or the egg.

Indeed! It makes an entirely different, but no less grave, error.

It implies that God is a single person who simply switches “modes” over time—one God who reveals Himself first as Father, then as Son, then as Holy Spirit.

Instead, Scripture teaches us that God is three distinct Persons who are eternally and inseparably united in one divine essence.

Whether you've been taught that God is like **a clover, an egg, or the three states of water**, it all sounds confusing and like the biggest load of nonsense.

It makes the Trinity sound **so strange and so far from delightful**.

But when **the Trinity speaks about the Trinity**, which is to say, when **the Bible speaks about the Trinity**, it speaks to us in such **plain language** that we can often overlook the profundity of what it says.

That is the case in what we learnt last week, that the simple statement that “**God is love**” of **1 John 4:8** is a profound statement that can only be understood in light of the Trinity.

That is the case again today as Paul exhorts us to “**boast in God.**”

This simple exhortation is a profound invitation to **delight in the triune God, by means of the triune God.**

PROPOSITION

In **Romans 5:11**, Paul calls us to **delight in the triune God.**

That exhortation itself is **shaped by the Trinity** as we are called to delight:

- In the Father
- Through the Son
- By the Spirit

That **three-fold structure** explains our invitation to **delight in the triune God, by means of the triune God.**

1. DELIGHTING IN THE FATHER

Paul’s exhortation, as we’ve noted, **summarises and concludes** the entire paragraph as he writes in **verse 11**—

¹¹ And not only this, but we also boast in God...

As we saw in **verse 3**, Paul again opens the verse with, “**And not only this...**”

We learnt previously that Paul often uses the phrase **“and not only so, but also”** to broaden the application of a principle.

He had previously applied the principle of boasting to our future glory.

He then broadened its application to our present suffering.

By implication, he included application to the love of God.

Now, he makes the most necessarily connection of applying our boast not only to the love of God, but to the God who is love.

As we boast in the love of God subjectively experienced in our hearts through the Holy Spirit, and the love of God objectively demonstrated on the cross through the Son, we come now to the source of this love—the infinite, eternal fountain of the Father who is love.

We should hear those trinitarian echoes as Paul continues—**“we also boast in God...”**

Perhaps one of the many reasons why we overlook profound trinitarian statements in the Bible is because we do not realise how carefully the authors communicate.

When Paul chose to speak of our boast in **“God,”** we might easily think that he is using the generic term for the divine being.

We don't see his intention to point us to a specific Person within the Trinity.

In all his writings, Paul uses the **Greek term θεός (God)** as an all-encompassing term to refer to the Divine Being.

Although the term can be used of all three Persons of the Godhead, Paul uses it primarily to refer to the Father in distinction from Christ and the Holy Spirit.³

This is certainly the case when he uses it in a context where he refers otherwise to the Son and the Spirit.

Turn back quickly to Paul's opening greeting in **Romans 1:1-4**

1 Paul, a slave of Christ Jesus, called as an apostle, having been set apart for the gospel of God,
2 which He promised beforehand through His prophets in the holy Scriptures,
3 concerning His Son, who was born of the seed of David according to the flesh,
4 who was designated as the Son of God in power, according to the Spirit of holiness...

We can see clearly that Paul defines the term “**God**” in his letter to the Romans as the primary term that he will use to refer to the first Person of the Trinity—the Father.

So as he exhorts us to “**boast in God**” we should not overlook the trinitarian context of Paul's thinking as he calls us to **delight in the Father**.

³ George W. Knight, *The Pastoral Epistles: A Commentary on the Greek Text*, New International Greek Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids, MI; Carlisle, England: W.B. Eerdmans; Paternoster Press, 1992), 67–68.

Once again, Paul uses the word “**boast**” to describe this delight.

It refers to a **joyful confidence**, no longer focussed on the **benefits** we receive through justification but on the **Benefactor Himself**.

In other words, we find our ultimate assurance of what God has promised to do because our confidence is built upon God Himself.

Even as we get blissfully caught up in the trinitarian glory of this text, we shouldn't forget that Paul's aim in this paragraph is to assure believers of their future salvation.

Therefore, he makes the essential point that our assurance is founded not on who we are—whether we are good enough, lovable enough—but on who God is.

This assurance, this hope itself is not more important than the One in whom we hope.

Our assured hope becomes the source of our joyful confidence—our boast—in God.

As a result of all He has done to save us and offer us the security of our final salvation, **we boast in God the Father**.

We exult in the Father.

We glory in the Father.

We delight in the Father.

Think of what a transformation this is!

Before God justified us, we were God's enemies.

We did not delight in the Father.

We found nothing lovely in Him.

We were repulsed by Him.

We hated him.

Instead of trusting and treasuring Him, we thanklessly took His common grace for granted while we rebelled against Him.

But now that we have been justified by faith, we are **happy in God**—we delight in the Father.

Now, Paul doesn't end his exhortation there, because to delight in the Father we must delight in the One in whom the Father delights.

We must delight in the Son.

As Paul describes Him in **Colossians 1:13**, He is **“the Son of [the Father's] love.”**

But we must also delight in the Father **through the Son**, which is why Paul invites us to **delight in the triune God, by means of the triune God.**

2. DELIGHTING THROUGH THE SON

Paul's exhortation bears the **indelible mark of the Trinity** as he calls us to delight in the Father, **through the Son**, as he writes—

¹¹ And not only this, but we also boast in God **through our Lord Jesus Christ...**

We can see that boasting in God, or delighting in the Father, is based on the work of Jesus Christ.⁴

Certainly it is true that we can only exult in God **after we have been justified through the work of the Son**, as even **verse 1** states—

¹ **Therefore, having been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ**

However, we would be sorely neglecting Paul's emphasis in this paragraph if we reduced his statement in **verse 11** to mean that we can boast in God because our legal woes have been solved.

While it is true—as Paul himself affirms—that we cannot approach God in any way before being made right with Him through the forgiveness of our sins and the imputation of the righteousness of God through Christ,

Paul's overwhelming emphasis in this paragraph has been **relational**.

⁴ Schreiner, *Romans*, 273.

Every benefit of justification points to the **relationship with God that we are saved to.**

First, we have peace with God which is another way of referring to the reconciled relationship we enjoy with the Father, through the Son.

Second, we have access to the most intimate relationship with the Father as we are welcomed into His presence—again, through the Son.

Third, we have the confident expectation that we will share in the very glory of God as those who are made in His image by delighting in and displaying the splendour of His nature and character.

We are assured of this future glory because the Son came as the incarnate God-man in order to bring us to God, so we share in the glory of the Father, through the Son.

Fourth, we are assured that God is working every experience of pain, pressure, and persecution to conform us to the image of His Son.

This assurance in our suffering is sustained by the love of God that is objectively demonstrated by the Son so that, once more, it is the love of the Father, through the Son, experienced by the Spirit.

All of these benefits are **relational** as they focus on us being brought to **know and enjoy** the Father, through the Son.

Therefore, it is no surprise that Paul **summarises and concludes** this relational emphasis with an exhortation to delight in the Father, through the Son.

This is the profound invitation to **delight in the triune God, by means of the triune God.**

This relational emphasis is reinforced as Paul writes in **verse 11**—

¹¹ And not only this, but we also boast in God through our Lord Jesus Christ, **through whom we have now received the reconciliation.**

In other words, it is **only on account of what Christ has done** that we can boast in God and be reconciled to God.

Paul makes this point elsewhere in another text that is set against the **brehtaking backdrop of the Trinity** as he writes in **Colossians 1:19-20**—

¹⁹ **For in Him [Christ] all the fullness of God was pleased to dwell,**

²⁰ **And through Him [the Son] to reconcile all things to Himself [the Father], having made peace through the blood of His [Christ's] cross...**

That is similar to what Paul says in **2 Corinthians 5:19**, that—

¹⁹ **God was in Christ reconciling the world to Himself, not counting their transgressions against them...**

In another gloriously trinitarian passage, Paul writes in **Ephesians 2:13**—

¹³ **But now in Christ Jesus you who formerly were far off have been brought near by the blood of Christ.**

Then again in **verse 16**, he speaks of Christ reconciling both Jew and Gentile, **“in one body to God through the cross, having in Himself put to death the enmity.”**

In other words, the work of the Son is to bring us to the Father in order to reconcile us to Him.

We know the Father and enjoy Him through the Son.

But this is more than just what the Son does—
this is who the Son is.

We will eternally relate to the Father through the Son because the Son is the very reason we can know Him as Father.

The Son not only reconciles us to the Father, but He reveals God as Father.

That is, without the Son we would only ever know God as Creator.

As Jesus Himself declares in **Matthew 11:27**—

¹⁷ **All things have been handed over to Me by My Father; and no one knows the Son except the Father; nor does anyone know the Father except the Son, and anyone to whom the Son wills to reveal Him.**

As we come to understand the Trinity, **we begin to appreciate both the unity and the distinction** of the three Persons inseparably united in one divine essence.

The Father, the Son, and the Spirit are inseparably united in who they are and how they act towards creation.

Since the Father, Son, and Spirit share the same divine essence, what distinguishes them cannot be their nature itself.

Rather, the persons of the Trinity are **distinguished by the particular roles** each performs and the **relationships each maintains** with the other divine persons.⁵

In other words, what distinguishes the Son is that He is **eternally begotten by the Father**.

As we read in the opening of John's gospel, in **John 1:1-3**—

¹ In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.

² He was in the beginning with God.

³ All things came into being through Him, and apart from Him nothing came into being that has come into being.

That is, the Son who is the Word was always with God so that **we must not think of the Father creating the Son**.

That is the **heresy of Arius** that was condemned by the council of **Nicaea in 325 AD**.

As John explicitly teaches, the Word is the eternal Son.

⁵ Bruce A. Ware, "The Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit: The Trinity as Theological Foundation for Family Ministry," *Journal of Family Ministry* 1, no. 2 (2011): 7.

He expresses the distinction of the Son from the Father in terms of eternal generation, as we read in **John 1:14**—

¹⁴ **And the Word became flesh, and dwelt among us, and we beheld His glory, glory as of the only begotten from the Father, full of grace and truth.**

As John speaks of the Son as eternally begotten by the Father, so we come to understand that it is the Son's unique role to be sent by the Father to bring His people to the Father in reconciliation.

In simple terms, the work of Jesus Christ the Son to reconcile us to God reflects His distinct role within the Trinity.

Who the Son is as the eternally begotten of the Father is reflected in what He does as the One who reconciles us to the Father.

Therefore, as we've already noted, we are invited to **delight in the triune God, by means of the triune God.**

That means that we must delight in the Father,
through the Son.

But as we see the light of who God is refracted through the prism of the gospel, we find that the Father's plan of redemption which is accomplished by the Son is then applied to those the Father has chosen by the Holy Spirit.

As the gospel is poured into the mould of who God is, it takes on a trinitarian shape.

It is no surprise, therefore, that Paul's exhortation to delight in the triune God is shaped by the Trinity so that we are called to delight in the Father, through the Son, and by the Spirit.

3. DELIGHTING BY THE SPIRIT

Though Paul does not explicitly mention the Spirit in **verse 11**, it nevertheless follows the same trinitarian pattern that we have come to expect in the words—

¹¹ And not only this, but we also boast in God through our Lord Jesus Christ, **through whom we have now received the reconciliation.**

According to Paul, we are reconciled through the Son.

In the context of this paragraph, that serves to support Paul's intention of assuring us of our future salvation.

In the same paragraph, Paul has gone to great pains to teach us that assurance is found in the objectivity of who God is and what He has accomplished through Jesus Christ.

That is, it is found in the objectivity of who the triune God is and what the Father has accomplished through the Son.

But Paul has also taught us that this objective assurance is subjectively experienced and sustained through the Holy Spirit who works in our hearts to assure us of the love of the triune God.

That is what Paul meant in **verse 5**—

⁵ Hope does not put to shame, because the love of God has been poured out within our hearts through the Holy Spirit who was given to us.

We know that we are following the contours of Paul's thought as we see the trinitarian pattern here because he expounds on this idea later in **Romans 8:14-17**—

¹⁴ For as many as are being led by the Spirit of God, these are sons of God.

¹⁵ For you have not received a spirit of slavery leading to fear again, but you have received the Spirit of adoption as sons by whom we cry out, “Abba! Father!”

¹⁶ The Spirit Himself testifies with our spirit that we are children of God,

¹⁷ and if children, also heirs, heirs of God and fellow heirs with Christ, if indeed we suffer with Him so that we may also be glorified with Him.

Therefore, we can confidently state that even without Paul mentioning the Spirit in **verse 11**, he intended us to experience both our **assurance from God** and our **delight in God** by the Spirit of God as He works in our hearts.

The trinitarian context of this paragraph helps us to recognise that our reconciliation is with the Father, through the Son, and **experienced and enabled by the Spirit.**

Then we can conclude that Paul's exhortation to delight in the triune God must necessarily be a call to delight in the Father, through the Son, by the Spirit.

That is why we receive an invitation to **delight in the triune God, by means of the triune God.**

Just as we discovered earlier, since the Father, Son, and Spirit share the same divine essence, what distinguishes them cannot be their nature itself.

Rather, the persons of the Trinity are distinguished by the particular roles each performs and the relationships each maintains with the other divine persons.

In other words, what distinguishes the Spirit is that He eternally proceeds from the Father and the Son.

This is what John teaches in **John 15:26**—

²⁶ **“When the Advocate comes, whom I will send to you from the Father, the Spirit of truth who proceeds from the Father, He will bear witness about Me.”**

As John speaks of the Spirit as **eternally proceeding** from the Father and the Son, so we come to understand that it is the Spirit's unique role to apply what the Father accomplishes through the Son to His chosen people.

In simple terms, the work of the Holy Spirit to **regenerate** us and **produce in us** both a faith and delight in the triune God reflects His distinct role within the Trinity.

Who the Spirit is as the eternally procession of the Father and the Son is reflected in what He does as the One who assures us of our reconciliation so that we can delight in the Father.

Therefore, as Paul calls us to **delight in the triune God** the exhortation itself is **shaped by the Trinity** as we are called to delight:

- In the Father
- Through the Son
- By the Spirit

That **three-fold structure** explains our invitation to **delight in the triune God**, **by means of the triune God**.

The invitation also helps us understand what is so delightful about the Trinity.

Far from being too “theological” to bother with, or an irrelevant doctrine, or something too confusing or too nonsensical to give our attention to, the Trinity shapes both the love we receive from God and the love we reciprocate to God.

As we learnt this past Sunday, it is because of who God is as **the triunity of Father, Son, and Spirit** that John can write that, **“God is love.”**

Because God is love, God can love us in the overflow of his infinite, eternal love.

Such a God is **breathtakingly, magnificently** glorious.

The triune God is **breathtakingly, magnificently** loveable.

The Father, Son, and Spirit are, together, **breathtakingly, magnificently** delightful.

Therefore, we respond to the glorious wonder of who He is and what He has done for us by loving Him in return as we delight in Him.

To delight in the Trinity is, therefore, the very same as praising Him and worshipping Him for who He is and how He acts towards His creation.

To delight in the triune God is the essence of loving God.

To delight in the triune God is the essence of worshipping God.

So while we may find ourselves intimidated by the doctrine of the Trinity, we cannot ignore it.

It is, as **Martin Luther** said, the highest article of our faith, upon which all others hang.⁶

We must, then, come to think of God in trinitarian terms in order to boast in Him/ glory in Him/ delight in Him/ love Him/ praise Him/ worship Him.

If we have been created and redeemed in order to know and enjoy God, then we must delight in God the Father, through the Son, by the Spirit as we **delight in the triune God, by means of the triune God.**

⁶ "The Trinity is the highest article of 'our faith' and of the 'holy, Christian church.'" Christine Helmer, *The Trinity and Martin Luther*, ed. Todd Hains et al., Revised Edition, Studies in Historical and Systematic Theology (Bellingham, WA: Lexham Press, 2017), 228.

CONCLUSION

As the light of the triune God hits the prism of His gospel, what is refracted through that lens is the most **brehtaking, magnificent display** of God as Father, Son, and Spirit.

We see the triune God working to save us as the Father sends the Son who then brings us to the Father in reconciliation that we experience by the Spirit.

In your reconciled relationship, you are invited to **delight in the triune God, by means of the triune God.**

Your delight must be **shaped by the Trinity** as you delight **in the Father, through the Son, and by the Spirit.**

Surely you cannot help but delight in the triune God because He is so gloriously delightful.

So our hearts resonate with the **anonymous** words from the **18th century**—

*To the great One in Three
Eternal praises be,
Hence evermore.
His sovereign majesty
May we in glory see,
And to eternity
Love and adore.*

BENEDICTION

2 Corinthians 13:14

**The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ,
and the love of God,
and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit,
be with you all.**