

Series: Communion With The Triune God #1608

Title: 2 Corinthians 13.14

Enjoying Communion with God

Thank you for joining me today from wherever you are and by however you listen as we meet together coast-to-coast here in the United States and all the way around the world. Let me begin with a question: do you spend time with God? Do you commune with Him, have fellowship together, do you pray? And in prayer do you both talk and listen? If you answer yes, what is this time like? At present, in your time together alone with the Lord, is this a season that is fruitful for you? Is your communion with God sweet? Do you enjoy prayer? I emphasize this particular season, or time, because for many of us it depends when we get asked this question. At times our communion with God is filled with many delights. At other times our communion with God is dry, uneventful, and even forced. If we are honest, there is an ebb and flow to our prayer lives.

Last time we began to think together about our communion with the Living God. And remember, by communion we *primarily* mean fellowship, intimacy, relationship, the conversation and the listening we have with God. We mean prayer. By “communion” we do *not* primarily mean the Lord’s Supper – which in many traditions is called Communion. And we picked up on the writing of the 17th century theologian John Owen and his work *Communion with God*. Thankfully, we have a summary and interpretation of this in Joel Beeke and Mark Jones systematic theology on the Puritan theology by the title *A Puritan Theology: Doctrine for Life*. I want to acknowledge these brothers and the excellent, hard work they have done to draw out the content of which we now follow.

And when we last left off we heard Owen define what he means by communion with God. “It is the mutual exchange of spiritual benefits between God and His people based on the bond between them in Christ (102).” Right there you have the emphasis on two members of the Trinity: God the Father and Christ. And let’s think about that statement for a moment. Jesus is the bond between God and us and between us and God. Or, I can put it better this way: Jesus brings God to us and Jesus brings us to God. We are bonded together with God always through Jesus Christ. As the British preacher of the 19th century, Charles Spurgeon, put it, “Christ is our messenger and our mediator with the Father. You want to tell your Father something; Jesus stands to carry the message for you (*The Life and Work Of Our Lord, Volume II, 27-28*).”

He then quotes from this poem by George Herbert in which Herbert pictures Christ, with the hole in His side from His crucifixion on the cross, Christ using the hole in His side to carry our letters (our prayers) to heaven. Christ speaking in the poem reads, “If ye have anything to send or write/I have no bag, but here is room/Unto my father’s hands and sight/Believe me it shall safely come./That I shall mind what you impart; Look, you may put it very near my heart (28).” Spurgeon adds, “In the wounds of Christ we put our messages to God (28).”

You may really need to hear that today. I certainly do. As Owen says, communion with God is the mutual exchange of spiritual benefits between God and His people based on the bond between them in Christ. And as Spurgeon says, Christ is our messenger and our mediator with the Father. You want to tell your Father something; Jesus stands to carry the message for you. In the wounds of Christ we put our messages to God. Dear friend, do not lose sight of Christ. Make Him prominent in your prayers, in your fellowship with the Triune God. Christ is the bond between God and us and us and God. And we will certainly have more to say about Christ as we move along.

At the beginning I asked if you enjoy prayer, if you and I enjoy our communion with the Living God. And I asked that because for John Owen communion with God *is* enjoyment. To commune with the Triune God is to take pleasure in God. And this did not originate with Owen, rather he took it from Saint Augustine. Augustine, the renowned theologian and prolific writer, who lived between 396 and 430AD. Listen to what Beeke and Jones say about how Owen borrowed from Augustine this sweet truth about *enjoying* our communion with our God. I am quoting them now,

“Owen picked up a theme found in Augustine, namely, communion as the ‘enjoyment,’ or possession of and delighting in the *triune* God. In Augustine’s ‘On Christian Doctrine,’ one chapter is titled ‘The Trinity the true object of enjoyment.’ There, Augustine wrote, ‘The true objects of enjoyment, then, are the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit, who are at the same time the Trinity, one Being, supreme above all, and common to all who enjoy Him (*A Puritan Theology: Doctrine for Life, 103*).’ End of the quotation.

Have you thought of God that way? Have you thought of your prayer life that way? Communing with God, this *is* enjoyment. This is the way to define enjoyment in our lives. When we commune with God the Father and God the Son and God the Holy Spirit we very much enjoy ourselves. One of the (many) reasons I like to read the early church fathers, men like Augustine, and I like to read the Puritans, men like Owen is because of their well-developed prayer lives. I listen to them talk about communing with, having fellowship with God and I must ask myself, "Mark, what are you missing? Why would I not come to the conclusion, in my own experience, that my relationship, the conversation and the listening I have with God *is* my enjoyment?"

I admit, I confess these reasons. One, I am not giving the Lord enough of my *time*. I am too distracted. I am way too distracted. By what? The pleasures of this world, sports, developing news stories, and scrolling through social media on this blasted mobile phone. The truth is I have interests outside of prayer. And I give my time to these other things. Think of the lack of distraction men like Augustine and Owen had. They lived in a primitive time (we would say). They certainly did not have the internet, mobile phones, and tablets (well, not tablets as we know them in the twenty-first century)! And the lack of all this technology gave them more time, and freed their minds, for God.

Second, I live amidst such noise and have to be very intentional to find quiet places and spaces where I can center myself on the Triune God. Regularly, when I am working in Hong Kong there is a pounding, incessant drilling that goes on at a construction site near my office. And when I am working near Boston here in the United States it is so much quieter and I notice that quality of my communion with the Lord increases. I do not know about you, but I have to be intentional and plan ahead if I am going to retreat and be with my God, in a place and space where we can have sweet, uninterrupted time with one another. I am not saying Augustine and Owen did not have to be intentional as well, but if you consider their geographic locations at the times in which they lived, this certainly came easier.

Look, at all times and in all places it has always taken sinners discipline to pray. Communing with God has never been easy, natural, and without a spiritual battle (in some way, shape, and form). Read these men's writing and you will learn about their struggles. We are all human, whatever century in which we live. But I do think we, alive today, have an extra battle to bear when we set out to really develop our intimacy with God. And I have deep admiration for those among us who are doing it. And perhaps *you* are. Keep on, sister. Keep on, brother. And please, pray for me.

Third, what have I been missing in prayer that these men had? Why would I not always describe my communion with God as my enjoyment? I'll tell you why: I have often missed this biblical Trinitarian emphasis in prayer. To pray specifically to and to receive specifically from the Father. To pray specifically to and to receive specifically from the Son. To pray specifically to and to receive specifically from the Spirit. I have to develop this. And part of the reason for this little series on Communion with the Triune God is that writing this for you will first help me.

For example, I come from a Christocentric tradition. As a child and young adult I directed all my prayers to Jesus. And then, as I grew in my walk with Christ I shifted to a more Father-centric emphasis. God the Father took the focus. And, always the Holy Spirit was the One who got ignored. I am working to correct this. What about you? I gave you my reasons. What are yours? Oh, what's that you say, you have always been thinking about God and having communion with God the way Augustine and Owen and others like them have? Well, again then, pray for *me*! You have not needed this wisdom today, but I sure have.

And I believe there *will* be others like me amongst you. So what we are going to do next time is to follow John Owen as he highlights what communion with the Father is, what communion with the Son is, and what communion with the Holy Spirit is. Remember, that underlying all these relationships is the enjoyment we have in *One* God. So find a way to apply this to your life and please plan to be with us again soon as we continue to discover who the Triune God Is.

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