

Series: Communion With The Triune God #1618

Title: 2 Corinthians 13.14

Our Deeply Personal Relationship 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. Here is a brief story for you, with a point, as we begin. When I was a child, growing up in a Baptist church in downtown Boston, during every Sunday service the offering would be taken. And here's how. On cue, when the pastor was ready for it, the deacons would each step into a side room nearby the platform and each would take a long pole with a box on the end of it. They would proceed to the front of the sanctuary and turn down the aisles, extending the pole down each row. The congregation would put our offering in the box and the deacon would pull it back and march it down to the next row and so on.

Then, when they all arrived at the back of the sanctuary, again on cue, they would march up the aisles as the congregation sang what we called the doxology. You may know it. Here are the words: Praise God, from whom all blessings flow; praise Him, all creatures here below; praise Him above, ye heavenly host; praise Father, Son, and Holy Ghost. Amen. I can still hear it. And whenever I sing these words it always puts me back to the deacons carrying the offering up the aisles to the front of the church where a prayer would then be said. That was how the offering was taken in that historic, downtown Boston Baptist church.

Well, I again found myself humming these words today. Praise Father, Son, and Holy Ghost. And that is because we have been focused on enjoying communion with God in prayer – God who is Father, Son, and Holy Spirit (or in older English Holy Ghost). I am prayerful that this series has been helpful to you in some way. And I certainly hope practical and useful. Having communion with the Triune God should *be* our enjoyment, friends! If someone were to ask me, “What do you enjoy doing?” could I sincerely say, “My enjoyment is having communion, prayer, fellowship with God”? How would I answer? How would you answer if this same question was asked of you? This is a very convicting thought, isn't it?

This has not been a series on the doctrine of the Trinity. That will require more time and attention, and at another time. What we have tried to do here is connect our prayer life with the Trinitarian God. God the Father who is our *love*, and God the Son (Jesus Christ) who is our *grace*, and God the Holy Spirit who is our *comfort*. Let's find ourselves drawing love from the Father, grace from the Son, and comfort from the Spirit. For this, the 17th century Puritan theologian John Owen has been our guide. His writing in *Communion with God* is very instructive. And we are also thankful for people who have helped us understand Owen, men like Joel Beeke and Mark Jones, men like Sinclair Ferguson, Brian Kay, Randall Peterson, and J.I. Packer.

In fact, listen to J.I. Packer again, writing about the Puritan idea of communion with God. He says, “This, then, according to Owen, should be the pattern of our regular communion with the three persons of the Godhead, in meditation, prayer, and a duly ordered life. We should dwell on the special mercy and ministry of each person towards us, and make our proper response of love and communion distinctly to each. Thus, we are to maintain a full-orbed communion with God (12).” Unquote.

Let these words inspire you and I to a greater and more meaningful prayer life. Let us be a people who have a truly full-orbed communion with God. And, as we end, I just want to draw out two more insights from John Owen for our careful reflection, because I think he is absolutely correct. The first is that it's very difficult and challenging for us to teach and to learn what is the Trinity. The human mind, in both teacher and student, finds this difficult to grasp. The reality of One God who exists eternally in Three Persons is mind boggling.

But one of the key points that Owen makes is that *experiencing* God as the Trinity actually confirms and strengthens faith in the *doctrine* of the Trinity. Let me say that again: *experiencing* God as the Trinity actually confirms and strengthens faith in the *doctrine* of the Trinity. Listen to what he wrote regarding the interplay of experiencing the Trinity with the doctrine or the teaching of the Trinity.

I am quoting Owen now, "Take a believer who [has] tasted how gracious the Lord is, in the eternal love of the Father, the great undertaking of the Son in the work of mediation and redemption, with the almighty work of the Spirit creating grace and comfort in the soul; [and the believer has had] an experience of the love, holiness, and power of God in them all; he will with more firm confidence adhere to [the mysterious truth of the Trinity...than a thousand disputers...who only have a notion of [the Trinity] in their minds (*A Practical Exposition upon Psalm CXXX*, 6:459)."

He is saying that if you and I will enter deep communion with the Trinity, then we will with confidence believe in and accept the mysterious truth that is the Trinity. Yes, we can sit around and learn who the Triune God is. We can discuss the Trinity and debate the Trinity. You know me well enough to know that I am all for this, and God willing, we're going to tackle this central doctrine one day here on *God Is*. But, actually, the better way to affirm our belief in the Trinity is to experience the Trinity! In prayer, experience the love of the Father, the grace of the Son, and the comfort of the Holy Spirit, then you will affirm the Trinity, even if you cannot totally understand this or teach this to others. *Experiencing God* as the Trinity actually confirms and strengthens faith in the *doctrine* of the Trinity.

Second, and on this point I want to quote somewhat extensively Joel Beeke and Mark Jones in *A Puritan Theology: Doctrine for Life*. Here is what they say, listen, "The doctrine of the Trinity makes spirituality profoundly *relational* and guards it from becoming a mystical experience of an impersonal, even pantheistic deity. The doctrine of one God in three *persons* makes our relationship with God deeply *personal*. This is essential for true communion, for Owen defined communion as the sharing of good and delightful things between persons united with one another. Owen's doctrine of divine communion highlights the mutual interactions between God and His people. In these interactions, the sovereign Lord leads and believers respond, yet both God and men move together in personal embrace (115-116)." Close quote.

I love all of that, and in particular this: "the doctrine of one God in three *persons* makes our relationship with God deeply *personal*." I am always amazed that here I am, little me, all the way down here on planet earth. And God has taken a personal interest in...*me*? He created me. He sought me out. He has loved me long before I loved Him. He has chosen me to follow His Son Jesus. And through Christ He made it possible to redeem me from my sin. And He *did* save me from sin. And now the Lord invites me into daily, hourly, minute-by-minute communion and fellowship with Him at His throne of grace. And all of this holds true for you, brother and sister in Christ. God – in the fullness of His being – wants a *deeply personal* relationship with us! He lives in relationship within Himself and He draws us into the Trinitarian relationship.

As you and I make our way through another day in another week, another month in yet another year, let us not let these truths pass us by. God is with us. And we can avail ourselves of a deeply personal relationship with our Father and the Son and the Spirit. Indeed, these words ring out: praise God, from whom all blessings flow; praise Him, all creatures here below; praise Him above, ye heavenly host; praise Father, Son, and Holy Ghost. Amen.

It is always good practice to go back to those who have preceded us in our walk before God. We can reach back not too far to more recent history, or we can go back several centuries as we have done here with John Owen, and we can go all the way back to the ancients. Of course, in each broadcast and podcast we root ourselves in the Bible itself. As good students we want to learn from the life experiences, the theology, doctrine, and teaching of our trusted predecessors in the orthodox, Christian faith. I hope that our visit with John Owen and others in these last several days was illuminating for you. If so, do write to me and let me know how. If what we have discussed has impacted you, I would love to know.

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Receive from God the Father love and from God the Son grace and from God the Holy Spirit comfort. Pray to the Father, Son, and Spirit. And receive from each member of the Trinity as well. And then be sure and return next time as we continue to discover who God Is.

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