

Communion With God The Holy Spirit

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[0 : 0 0] Over the past two Sunday evenings we have been thinking about the theme of communion with God. That's one of the great privileges of being a Christian that we can know and enjoy communion with God. Two weeks ago we thought about communion with God the Father. Last week we thought about communion with God the Son. This week we are going to bring our short series to a conclusion by looking at communion with God the Holy Spirit. All three of our sermons have been based on Ephesians chapter 1 and we can read again verses 13 and 14 on the screen. In him you also, when you heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation and believed in him were sealed with the promised Holy Spirit who is the guarantee of our inheritance until we acquire possession of it to the praise of his glory. The Christian understanding of God is grounded in what we call the doctrine of the Trinity. The fact that God is one nature and three persons. In other words there is only one God but within the nature of that God, within the God-ness of that God if you like, there are three.

Three who we describe as persons. Father, Son and Holy Spirit. That's the foundation of the Christian understanding of God and one of the amazing consequences of that is it means that God is relational. So God's never been isolated in complete solitary existence. For all eternity God exists in a beautiful bond of fellowship, of relationship between God the Father, God the Son and God the Holy Spirit. These three persons, these three persons know each other, interact with each other and above all love each other.

And of course thinking about it a little bit it helps us to understand that the whole reason that the Bible can say that God is love is because of this doctrine of the Trinity. Father, Son and Holy Spirit eternally loving one another. That relational aspect of God is at the core of who he is and any understanding of God that does not have this emphasis is an inaccurate understanding of God and it's something that we marvel at. It's part of just what makes God so glorious. One God, one nature, three persons. But what's even more astounding is that the Gospel means that we don't just marvel at this relational God, we can have a relationship with him as well. And that eternal bond of love shared in God is something that through

Jesus Christ is shared with us. And that relationship with God is what Christianity is all about. It's what we were created for to know him and to be with him. It's what we lost because of our sin. We were alienated from God by our rebellion. It's what Jesus has come to restore through his death and resurrection and it's what awaits us in the future where we will enjoy eternity in fellowship with God with every brother and sister we have in Christ in his new creation. It's all reminding us that communion with God is at the heart of the Christian faith. Or as Jesus said, eternal life is to know him. And that communion is with all three persons. So when we think of communion with the Father, there's a sense in which that's a wee bit familiar in a sense because our experience of our own fathers makes that accessible. Now that might be positive whereby a wonderful Father has given you a glimpse of the love and care of God or it might be negative where the failings of a father has shown you everything that God isn't. Either way it's something that we can in a sense relate to. Same when we talk about communion with the Son, there's something familiar about that because the wonder of the incarnation is that God the

Son has come to be one of us. So we can look at Jesus as our elder brother, as our fellow human. He's one of us. He knows and understands exactly what it's like to be a human. And so yes in saying that, you know, God as Father, God as Son, that's still mind-blowingly big beyond anything that we can take in but at the same time we can relate to those terms a little bit. It's familiar for us if we say, here's what a Father is like, here's what a Son is like. But what about when we say, here's what a Spirit is like? That's not so familiar. And for that reason, communion with God the Holy Spirit is something that we can easily misunderstand. And in particular, and this raises an issue which I

think has been a stumbling block to many people over the centuries in terms of the Christian Gospel.

[5 : 53] When we think about the hurdles that prevent people or that hinder people in terms of their relationship with God, in terms of communion with God, probably the most common stumbling block, the typical stumbling block if you like, is the mindset that looks at God and says, he can't, I won't. He can't, I won't. Now that's the mindset of somebody who's a hardened skeptic, somebody who doesn't see God as capable or relevant or maybe somebody who doesn't even see God as real at all and as a result refuses to believe, refuses to follow him. It's the person who says, God, he can't do much for me. I won't believe in him. That's the typical, that's the typical objection that you get to God, to get about God, he can't, I won't. But thinking about the Holy Spirit reveals another stumbling block, one that plagues people who are seeking Jesus and one that even for Christians of many years, one that can cripple us. This isn't the skeptical, heart-hearted mindset that says, he can't, I won't. This is the nervous, trembling mindset that says, I can't.

He won't. That's not a heart that pushes God away. That's a heart that thinks that God is out of reach. It's the heart that thinks, you know, whatever it is that Christians are meant to be, I can't do that. I can't match up, I can't be what I'm supposed to be. And all the things that God does for other people, he won't do them for me. He'll pass me by and as a result, the Holy Spirit can seem distant, elusive, even unattainable for us.

Now, that whole mindset is a very common one. We can see that because throughout the history of the Christian church, two theological errors have arisen from this kind of thinking. One is to think that the Holy Spirit is only experienced by certain Christians. Now, that's an issue that has repeatedly come up in the history of the church and loads of different people have kind of made this sort of claim that, you know, that only certain people, only certain Christians have the Holy Spirit and as a result, they're in a different category. So you've got your kind of ordinary ones here, your special ones up here, they're the ones who've got the Holy Spirit. That's happened many, many, many times in the last 2000 years and the last 100 years, it's something that's been taught by many Pentecostal churches and often the emphasis has been that after you become a Christian, for some you'll be able to receive the Holy Spirit and that will be accompanied by various signs, wonders, speaking in tongues and things like that. I'm not commenting on that, I'm just letting you know that that is what happens and that's been the history in the past 100 years or so and it's not just being confined to Pentecostal churches, it's something that's appeared in many other churches as well. It's just the idea that the Holy Spirit is something that I kind of, a select few enjoy. The other mistake though is to think that the Holy Spirit is only experienced at certain times. Now, it is true that there are times, there are certain times when the

Holy Spirit works in a special way with particular power. We can even see that in our own lives. For people here who are Christians, you can maybe look back at a time when you really felt God working in your life. Maybe it was when you became a Christian, maybe it was further on, maybe it was when you faced a particular difficulty in your life. Or as communities, we can look back and see times of revival, see times when remarkable things happen. But the mistake comes when we think that when these moments pass, the Holy Spirit departs and that it's only at certain times we enjoy His communion. Now, both of these are what we could call understandable and misunderstandings. Because it's understandable to look at somebody with great qualities and think, oh well they must have the Holy Spirit and I don't. And it's easy to look at periods when remarkable things happen and think, well the Holy Spirit was here then but those days are gone. He's departed now.

But the consequences of that is that in terms of what we're talking about tonight, communion with God the Holy Spirit, it's so easy to think that that is something that is only for certain people and it's only something you experience at certain times. As for ordinary people like me and you, well it's so easy for us to look at ourselves and think, I can't be one of those proper Christians and even if I could the Holy Spirit, He won't want to come near me. I can't, He won't. What I hope we'll see tonight is that neither of those conclusions are supported by the New Testament. The truth is, communion with God the Holy Spirit is something that we are completely dependent on at every single step that we take as Christians. In other words, it's foundational to everything we do as followers of Jesus. Now to see that we need to ask ourselves the question, how should we understand communion with the Holy Spirit? That's our question for tonight. How should we understand communion with the Holy Spirit? To answer that, this might sound very weird, to answer that tonight

[12:10] I want you to think of a cake, okay? So I want you to think of a cake and we're going to structure our sermon around this cake that you're imagining and we're going to say a little bit about the whole cake and we're going to say a little bit about the two layers that are in the cake and we're going to say a little bit about one slice. So whole cake, two layers, one slice. Now what I mean by that is that we're going to think about something broad to do with the Holy Spirit. We're going to think about two key aspects of who he is and we're going to think about one particular element of what he does. Whole cake, two layers, one slice. I don't usually structure my sermons around cake so you can decide at the end whether or not it's a half-baked idea. I just hope I don't make a ganache of it. Okay, so the whole cake, let me think about the whole cake. What we're doing is we're asking the question who is the Holy Spirit? Like what's the big thing that you should think about when you're thinking about the Holy Spirit? Well, the answer to that's really very basic but it's really important and it's actually easy to get wrong. Key thing we need to recognize is that he's a he. He is a he. Now when I say that I don't mean male. I'm not saying he in terms of being male. Male and female are categories that apply to humanity, not to God. I mean he in terms of being a person. And that's why we don't ask what is the Holy Spirit. We ask who is the Holy Spirit. In other words, the Holy Spirit is not an it and he's not a thing. He's a he. He's a divine person in the same way that God the Father is and that God the Son is. And that's crucial because it's very easy to think of the Holy Spirit as a kind of impersonal force.

But it's not too. Or to think of them as a tool that the Father and the Son use. Like a hammer or a saw or whatever. We must not think in those terms. Maybe you can remember cartoons when you were wee. I'm trying to think of examples. I'm thinking thunder cats but I don't know if any of you can remember that. But you'd think of like, you'd see either baddies or beauties in the kind of zapping electricity out of their hands or fire coming out of their mouths or whatever.

It's easy to think of the Holy Spirit in those terms that he's like the kind of the zapping of power or electricity from God the Father or from Jesus. You mustn't think in those terms because that makes the Holy Spirit impersonal. That makes him an it or a thing. And that's not who he is.

He's a he in exactly the same way as the Father and the Son are. And the reason we know that is because that is how the Bible reveals him to us. That's crucial. Our understanding of the Holy Spirit is completely shaped by what the Bible reveals. And the Bible makes it clear that the Holy Spirit speaks. You can see that there. What he says. Sorry, went too far there. What he says.

The Holy Spirit teaches. The Holy Spirit helps. The Holy Spirit guides. The Holy Spirit acts. He listens. He groans. He does all of these things. Not only that, he can be lied to.

[15:28] He can be grieved. He can be outraged. In other words, he's related to as a person. Communion with him is communion with one who thinks, who listens, who speaks, who plans, responds and loves.

Just as the Father can say, I am. And the Son can say, I am. So too the Holy Spirit can say, I am. And that's why the first thing that you come to your minds when we talk about the Holy Spirit is that he's a he. He is God. Two very basic but very important points arise from this. One, it means that you can talk to him. You can talk to him. Now primarily in prayer we follow Jesus' example and we pray to the Father. But just as we can speak to Jesus at times, so too we can speak to the Holy Spirit. And when you speak, he listens. The second thing is that how we live matters to him. The way I think, speak and behave is seen by him, known by him, and he cares about every detail.

All the foolish things I do cause him to grieve. All the weaknesses I struggle with move him to help. So that's the big cake that I want you to think of. But within that cake there's two layers. And thinking about the two layers, we're asking the question, you know, what is distinctive about the Holy Spirit? What stands out? You know, you've got Father, Son, Holy Spirit. What stands out about the Holy Spirit? What else should we think of when we think of him? Whether it's loads we could say, tonight I just want to identify two layers. These are two of the most important categories related to the Holy Spirit. We can call them power and truth. Two layers, power and truth.

So first layer is power. The reason I've chosen that word is because when you read about the Holy Spirit in Scripture, there's a repeated emphasis on movement, energy and action. You can see that so clearly in the verses that I've put on the screen. Very beginning of the Bible. You don't need two verses in. The Spirit of God is hovering over the waters. You go into the great historical narratives of the Old Testament and the life of Samson in Judges 14, the Holy Spirit rushes upon him. Coming into the new at Jesus' baptism, the Holy Spirit descends on him like a dove on the day of Pentecost in Acts 2. There's a mighty rushing wind, tongues of fire. When Scripture speaks about the Holy

Spirit, it speaks of action, energy, power. And that's what I want you to think of when you think of him. He's always moving, always ready, always active. He's God in action.

Summed up by one of the many titles that the Holy Spirit has in Romans 8, 2, he's called the Spirit of Life, Movement, Energy, Power. The second layer is truth. And that's the other great emphasis we see in Scripture, that the Holy Spirit is the one who reveals the truth. Jesus spoke about that in the night before he died. He said, I still have many things to say to you, but you cannot bear them now. When the Spirit of Truth comes, he will guide you into all the truth, for he'll not speak in his own authority. But whatever he hears, he will speak, he will declare to you the things that are to come. He will glorify me, for he will take what is mine and declare it to you. It's the Holy Spirit who teaches us the truth about ourselves and about Jesus. In fact, he's the one who opens our eyes. [19:28] He's the one who directed every writer of Scripture in revealing God's great message to us. And so in the Holy Spirit, we have power and truth. And I just want to stop for a moment and highlight what a brilliant combination that is. So often in life, we see people who have power and little or no commitment to truth. And you only have to look at politics for five minutes to see that. Or we see people who know the truth but have little or no power to do anything about it. An exhausted nurse knows better than anybody what a hospital needs, and yet she's got no power to do anything about it.

The Holy Spirit is revealed to us in Scripture as the great example of both, a bounding power, impeccable truth. But there's more than that. He's not just where we see God's power in action, and he's not just where we see God's truths revealed. He is also the one who empowers us and who enables us to know the truth. So we mustn't just think of the Holy Spirit as power, we must think of the Holy Spirit as Empowerer. He is the one who gives us power. He strengthens, equips and supports us. And we mustn't just think of the Holy Spirit as truth, we must recognise Him as the Entruther. Now, I know that that's not a word, but it should be a word because it captures so perfectly what the Holy Spirit is doing. He is enabling us to see the truth, enabling you and me to learn about Jesus and about everything that God has done and that

He is doing for us through Him. And both of these, the fact that He's Empowerer and Entruther, they combine to make the Holy Spirit a helper. That's how He's described here in John 15 by Jesus. That's the Greek word *para-clate*, which can be translated in various ways. It can be translated helper, comforter, advocate. It basically means to come alongside, to help and encourage. *Para* alongside, *clate* is kind of related to the word for encouragement. Somebody who comes alongside you to help you. And in that, in doing that, He's the one who comes right beside us to empower us, giving us life, strength and help. And He's the one who comes right alongside us to entruth us, to teach us, guide us and enable us to see what we've never seen before. And this is especially relevant for us when we read the Bible, as what we're talking about this morning.

When we read the Bible, the Holy Spirit empowers our hearts to be enthrothed by His word. He empowers our hearts to be enthrothed by His word. The Holy Spirit's provided this great external revelation in the pages of Scripture, and the Holy Spirit provides the internal testimony to our hearts, enabling us to hear God's voice. The Holy Spirit is the one who empowers us.

[23:06] He's the one who enthrothes us. Now this raises a massively important question that we need to ask. How far can you get in the Christian life without the Holy Spirit?

Nowhere. How many steps can you take as a Christian without the Holy Spirit?

None. Not a single step. All our theology teaches us that. It all makes perfect sense. We're drawn to God by being effectually called by Him, invited by His irresistible grace. We're enabled to see our sin and to recognize Jesus as our Savior because our eyes are opened, minds awakened, hearts regenerated. As Jesus said, we're born again. We're justified by faith when our wills are renewed and we turn from sin in repentance and we put our faith in Jesus as our Savior and Lord. We're adopted into God's family and we cry out to God as Father. Who does all of that? It's God the Holy Spirit who does all of that. And that makes perfect sense because all of that requires power and truth. The Holy Spirit is the one who has the power to open our hearts and he pours in the truth that we desperately need to hear.

We can't take a single step without the Holy Spirit. Now, does that mean that you're stuck and you can't move forward? No, it means that you're never without Him.

He's taken you every step of the way. No one can be a Christian without the Holy Spirit. Nobody can say Jesus is Lord and mean it except with the Holy Spirit working in them. Nobody can see their sin that he here is referring to the Holy Spirit. Nobody can see their sin without the help of the Holy

Spirit. Nobody can cry out to God as Father without the work of the Holy Spirit in them.

[25 : 21] In terms of being a Christian, the Holy Spirit is the starting point for everything. And that's why the idea that the Holy Spirit is only in some Christians is completely unsupported by Scripture. It's not something that stands theologically.

The idea that only certain Christians have the Holy Spirit or that the Holy Spirit is only here in certain periods, both of those ideas are a denial of one of the most basic theories of Christianity. The fact that from day one, no one can take a single step as a Christian without God the Holy Spirit within. But what I want us to see in the last five minutes is that the Holy Spirit is not just there at the start. He's there all the way through and that takes us to the third point, the slice of the cake. So we've looked at the whole cake. He's a he. He is a person just as God the Father is just as God the Son is. We've thought of two layers, power and truth.

Now we're going to take a slice out of the cake and look at one aspect of the Holy Spirit's work in particular. There's loads of slices we could look at. I want us to look at the one that we find in Ephesians 1.13 and 14. In him, you also, when you heard the word of the truth, the gospel of your salvation and believed in him were sealed with the promised Holy Spirit, who's the guarantee of our inheritance until we acquire possession of it to the praise of his glory. What this is reminding us of is the fact that whenever anybody becomes a Christian, the Holy Spirit comes to dwell within them. That's what Paul is talking about here and he's telling us in particular that that indwelling seals us. And so if you're a Christian, if you become a Christian, you are sealed with the promised Holy Spirit. And the question arises, what on earth does that mean?

Well, at a very basic level, it's reinforcing the fact that he's present with us. He's not distant, elusive or out of reach. He's with us. In fact, he's in us. And that is the reason why we can grieve him. If you look later on in Ephesians 4, it talks about grieving the Holy Spirit and it uses the same language, the same language of being sealed. And that makes sense. The reason that we grieve him is because whenever we are bitter or angry or full of wrath or slander, whenever we're unkind, unforgiving as Christians, we are doing all of that with the Holy Spirit with us.

So no wonder it grieves him because we're dragging him into our mess. We're giving people the impression that that kind of thing is okay if you're a Christian. And for the Holy Spirit, whose mission it is to enthuse people about the beauty and glory of Jesus, that is a huge reason to grieve.

[28 : 22] These verses, both positively in the encouragement of in chapter 1 and the warning in chapter 4, they're both reminding us that there's never ever a moment when he's not with us. So that means that for you as a Christian, there is never a moment when the Holy Spirit is up there.

At every step you take, he's with you in here. But the seal language reveals even more. And there's two things that I want to highlight. Remember, if you take a slice out of the cake, it's got two layers. So we need to say something about both layers in relation to this slice. Such a wonderful way to structure a sermon.

So the Holy Spirit as a seal relates to power and truth. Power because he does something as he seals us, as he is the seal within us, he keeps us secure, safe and protected. That's highlighted in the language of guarantee there in verse 14. The Holy Spirit seals you, you're sealed in him with him so that you are utterly safe. And it relates to truth because he's telling you something. That sealing is telling you something. When Jesus seals you with the Holy Spirit, it's to tell you that you are his. A seal is a mark of ownership. When God comes to dwelling you by his Spirit, he's declaring that you are his and you are his forever.

The inheritance that he promises is guaranteed. And so as the seal by which Jesus seals us, the Holy Spirit is doing this magnificent twofold work, keeping you secure with all his power and energy and strength and assuring you that you are his with all his impeccable commitment to truth.

He's come to dwell with you, he's going nowhere and that's exactly what Jesus promised. He says, I will ask the Father and he'll give you another helper to be with you forever, even the Spirit of truth whom the world cannot receive because it neither sees him nor knows him, you know him for he dwells with you and you will be in you. I will not leave you as orphans, I will come to you. So what does all this mean in terms of communion with the Holy Spirit?

[31 : 03] For you as a Christian, for you if you become a Christian, what does it mean for us all in regard to communion with the Holy Spirit? Well this is where I'm going to tell you the real reason why I've been using a cake for my sermon structure. The real reason I use the whole cake thing is to correct a massive misunderstanding, a massive mistake that we can make regarding communion with the Holy Spirit. The massive mistake is to think that having communion with the Holy Spirit is

the icing on the cake. In other words that it's like you know it's what the good Christians get, what certain Christians get, what you get at certain times, it's what you have when things are going well, when you feel great, when you feel strong, when you feel positive, when wonderful things happen, it's the icing on the cake. No it's not. Communion with the Holy Spirit is not the icing on the cake. He is not the icing on the cake. He is the first and most basic ingredient.

He's the one who starts it all in you and in me and he's the one who keeps us forever. There's never a moment where he's not with us and we can so easily get this wrong we can think that we don't have the Holy Spirit anymore or that we never had him in the first place. We can think that our biggest problem is that we need the Holy Spirit because we don't have an Ephesians chapter 1 corrects us magnificently because it shows us what we actually have and it shows us what we really need. Verse 13 tells us what we actually have. You were sealed with the promised Holy Spirit. Verses 17 and 18 tells us what you need. You need to realise it.

We need to know it. To have the eyes of our hearts enlightened that you may know what is the hope to which he's called you. What are the riches of his glorious inheritance in the saints. What's the immeasurable greatness of his power toward us who believe according to the working of his great might.

We don't need the Holy Spirit. We need to realise that we've got him. In preparing this sermon I found a wonderful quote from Donald MacLeod that I thought would be helpful to share. It is not difficult to imagine the confusion which arises when Christians spend their lives seeking for what they already have and delaying their service until they get it.

So are you here tonight thinking I can't he won't. I can't be a Christian or I can't serve as a Christian. God won't want to help me. The Holy Spirit won't come. He won't be at work. I can't.

[34 : 16] You're half correct I suppose. You're half correct because without Jesus we can't do anything. But the he won't part is wrong. Completely wrong. So should you say I can't he will.

Well that's only three quarters correct because if you can see that you can't. If you can see that you can't. Then that means that the Holy Spirit has already started working in you.

And what you should say is I can't. But he has started a work in me. He is with me keeping me and sustaining me and he will never leave me. He will never let me go. I can't but he has.

He is. He will. Communion with the Holy Spirit is not an occasional blessing. It's not something that only the best of Christians enjoy. He has been with you from step one.

And for anyone who's not yet a Christian that's the whole reason you can take step one because he's the one who'll help you with that. He's been with you from step one.

[35 : 30] He will be with you at every step you take this week and he will never ever leave you.

May God grant that that reality shapes everything that we do this week and everything we do for the rest of our lives. Amen. Let's pray.

Holy Spirit, we worship you. We thank you for your power and truth.

We thank you that you are the Empowerer and the Entruder. And we praise you, our wonderful God.

Amen.