

The Communion of the Holy Spirit

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- [0 : 0 0] If you would take out your Bibles and turn to page 185, Philippians chapter 2. If you've been an Anglican for a while or coming to an Anglican church, you'll know that we have a language all of our own here.
- For example, we call the foyer a narthex, and I'm not sure why. We call our annual general meeting a vestry. We also call that little room there a vestry, and I'm not sure why either.
- And our key elected leaders have the unfortunate title of wardens. And I've always wondered whether it's you who are the inmates or me. One of my favourite terms is rector, from the Latin to rule.
- But that's just... Perhaps one of the most confusing words we use as Anglicans is the word communion. We know it has something to do with God, something mysterious to do with God.
- We speak about the Anglican communion, which is the Anglican church throughout the world. In the creed that we said a few moments ago, we declared our faith in the communion of saints, which sounds suspiciously like dead people.
- [1 : 1 7] And twice a month we hold services of communion here when we celebrate the Lord's Supper. It's very confusing, really. But it's not unique to Anglicans, lest you should race down the street.
- If you go to a Baptist or a Pentecostal church, they have the same trouble with the word fellowship. Fellowship. Fellowship in Baptist terms can mean a group of Baptist churches or just one.
- Fellowship can be a reference to the youth group. Let's go to fellowship tonight. Or it can be that friendly feeling you have talking over cake and cookies, which is why after meeting in the Baptist church, you'll be invited, instead of to coffee, you'll be invited to go to the fellowship hall to have fellowship.
- So, that's been my experience anyway. Now, the curious thing about this is that behind the word communion and behind the word fellowship is the same New Testament word.
- When I was in seminary, I was taught never to use Greek from the pulpit, and that's why I want to teach you a Greek word this morning. And it is the Greek word koinonia.
- [2 : 2 9] Koinonia. I wonder if you could all say that, please. Koinonia. You're all Greek scholars. Fantastic. Now, this is one of those words that is very rich. It is translated in a number of different ways.
- It's translated as partnership or fellowship or sharing or communion or being partakers. And the key thought is this. Koinonia is a particular kind of relationship between two people that comes about as they participate in another spiritual reality.
- It's not just a partnership or a participation of two people together in a business or a friendship. It is two people who partake together of a third spiritual reality.
- And it is that spiritual reality which creates the bond of koinonia, of communion between the two people.

In other words, you can't just have koinonia or communion with another person if you get along tremendously well with them. It is a spiritual bond. It is a spiritual bond that binds two people and more together because together they participate in the life of God.

[3 : 46] And it's a crucial term in the Apostle Paul's letter to Philippians. It comes up in each of the chapters, all four of the chapters, because it's at the heart of the way the New Testament and the Apostle Paul understands the Christian life.

And what we're going to do today is we're going to look through this word in Philippians, which opens a window to us on the New Testament teaching on the precious reality of communion.

And there are two fundamental ideas. And the first is this. Our communion is communion with God. If you look at chapter 2, the Apostle Paul is urging the Philippians to a life of selfless service.

And in verse 1 he gives us the reason why anyone would be remotely interested in living selflessly. He says, chapter 2 verse 1, If there is any encouragement in Christ, any incentive of love, any koinonia in the Spirit.

In other words, the reason why we might count others better than ourselves in humility is not because it fits our short-term life goals. It's not because that's an effective strategy for getting ahead in life.

[5 : 07] It is because we participate, partake in the Holy Spirit. We are partners in the Holy Spirit. It's because of communion in the Spirit. When we turn to Christ in repentance and faith, it's not that the Holy Spirit has some vague influence over us.

It's not just that we merely experience the Spirit. What Paul is saying here, and what it says in other places in the New Testament, is that we have communion, koinonia, partnership, participation in the Holy Spirit.

We participate in Him. And every time we have a morning prayer service, as we come to the end of the prayer time here at St. John's, we say the word of the grace together. The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ and the love of God and the koinonia, the communion in the Holy Spirit, be with you all.

It's a wonderful prayer and blessing, and it's a prayer that we might know and practice and enjoy, that communion in the Holy Spirit. Now, I wonder if you'd keep a finger in Philippians and turn left to the book of 1 Corinthians, please.

1 Corinthians chapter 1. It's left to page 156. Usually at St. John's we look at one passage. We're going to look at a couple of them today. So, I wonder if you would turn back there.

[6 : 27] 1 Corinthians chapter 1, page 156, verse 9. Again, the Apostle Paul says, God is faithful by whom you were called into the koinonia, the fellowship of his Son, Jesus Christ our Lord.

It's exactly the same word. By faith in Jesus Christ, we have communion with the Son of God who came and died and rose and is coming again in glory.

Let's turn right to the book of 1 John, right near the back. Page 221. 1 John chapter 1 and verse 3.

The Apostle John is now speaking about Jesus and he says, that which we have seen and heard, we proclaim also to you, so that you might have koinonia with us.

And our communion, our fellowship, is with the Father and with his Son, Jesus Christ. Verse 6. If we say we have koinonia with him while we walk in darkness, we lie.

[7 : 48] In other words, our communion is with God the Father, God the Son and God the Holy Spirit. One more verse which is remarkable. The very previous book to Peter.

If you turn back to chapter 1 on page 219. Chapter 1 verse 4. Peter says, 1.4, By which God has granted to us his precious and very great promises, that through these you may escape the corruption that is in the world because of passion, and become communicants, participants in the divine nature.

It's a stunning verse. We have communion in the very nature of God. Communion describes that living bond that we have with one another because we participate in the very life of God, in the very person of God.

And what that is meant to do is it's meant to bind us together. Father, everything in the Christian life flows out of this. The fact that we can call God Father, the fact that we can call Jesus Christ Lord, the desire to have fellowship and to be with other Christians, the spiritual clarity we have to see that we are sinful and lost without the saving grace of God in Jesus Christ, the wisdom to see that we don't have spiritual answers in ourselves, the courage to see that of all things in the world, Christ alone is worth all.

This is the decisive factor in our life together as Christians. We participate. We have communion in the Father, in the Son and in the Holy Spirit.

[9 : 31] That is why we are a spiritual family, because of our communion with the Father. That is why we are a body of Christ, because of our communion with Jesus Christ. And that is why we are also a temple of the Holy Spirit for God's dwelling, because of our communion, our koinonia with the Spirit.

The heart of what makes you and I Christian, we participate in this life together. We have a family likeness, an unavoidable family likeness amongst Christians.

Because of our communion with Christ, our lives become like his. We see things through the cross and through the resurrection. Because of our communion with the Spirit, our affections are being reordered.

What was important is no longer important. What was trivial and embarrassing now becomes most important. We begin to love what he loves and hate what he hates. And we find ourselves wanting to give ourselves in humility and love for others.

And we have a first for righteousness and holiness and the desire of our life, instead of just obeying rules, becomes to please him. And please notice that there is nothing institutional or structural about this.

[10 : 44] Focus of the New Testament is never on the structures of the church, but on the spiritual realities that those structures are meant to defend and develop. You can have koinonia without the structures, you can have the structures without koinonia, or you can and should have them both together.

Let's turn back, shall we, to 1 Corinthians chapter 10, page 162. I'm not doing this just to keep you awake.

It's good that you look at these verses. 1 Corinthians chapter 10. We start at verse 16. We're going to read a few verses here. This is speaking about the Lord's Supper. 1 Corinthians 10, 16.

The apostle says, The cup of blessing which we bless, is it not a koinonia in the blood of Christ?

The bread which we break, is it not a koinonia in the body of Christ? Because there is one bread, we who are many are one body, for we all partake in the one bread.

[11 : 52] Now he says, Consider the people of Israel. Are not those who eat the sacrifices, koinonos, communicants, in the altar?

What do I imply then? The food offered to idols is anything, or an idol is anything? No, I imply that what pagan sacrifice, they offer to demons and not to God. I do not want you to be koinonos, with demons.

Isn't that stunning? In other words, he says that the Lord's Supper is the expression of the fellowship and communion that we have with Christ.

When we eat the bread and drink the wine, if our faith is in Jesus Christ and his promise, and if we have turned away from our sins, we have spiritual communion with him.

That is why it's called communion. But it is possible for us to have communion with demons. Notice please, there are limitations that come from having communion with Christ.

[12 : 57] It's possible to have communion with demons, he says, but it is not possible to have communion with Christ as well as having communion with demons. And it's very interesting when you look at 2 Corinthians, we won't turn to this, that those who have communion with Christ cannot have communion with those who do not belong to Jesus Christ.

It's not saying we don't have a lot in common, it's not saying we can't learn from them and be enriched by them and love them. We cannot have this genuine spiritual partnership that arises from communion with God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit.

And we don't have time for this, but let me also indicate to you, the New Testament warns us that we must not have communion with sin, with the unfruitful works of darkness, Ephesians 5, that we must not have communion in the sins of others, 1 Timothy 5, and there must be no communion with those who walk contrary to the teaching of Christ.

I wonder if we might just turn to that verse. Let's turn close to the back, to the little book of 2 John, page 225.

That little book at the top of the page, 225, it's called 2 John. I understand if you go to jail, sorry, Yale, not jail, there are three toilets.

[14 : 35] They're called 1 John, 2 John and 3 John. Now the Apostle John is warning us about an undiscerning charity, about a false tolerance.

And he says in verse 9, anyone who goes ahead and does not abide in the doctrine of Christ does not have God.

He who abides in the doctrine has both the Father and the Son. If anyone comes to you and does not bring this doctrine, do not receive him into the house. Now don't give this person a platform for ministry.

Verse 11, for he who greets or welcomes him has communion in his wicked work. Now I'm not sure of all the implications of this and I'll leave it to you to make application.

But this was used in the first ecumenical council in 254 as the primary text on which the church should order itself in truth. The point that I am making and the point that the New Testament makes is our communion, our koinonia is with God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit.

[15 : 48] And it brings us to our second point and that our communion is koinonia in the activity of God. It's very important to see that we see it's not just a passive thing.

It's not like having money in the bank that you go and draw on every now and again. It's not meant to be reserved for our private lives to be used on Sundays. It's meant to shape our lives, everything we do.

It's meant to demonstrate, if it's real, it will demonstrate itself in our action. And by far the majority of references to it in the book of Philippians are not just about our participating in the life of God, it's about the living and suffering.

It's about financial contributions. It's about prayer and speaking and caring. And in each of these, we demonstrate our communion with God and with one another.

We have communion in the activity of God. So let's go back to the book of Philippians. This is the last big flick we have on page 184.

[16 : 51] In chapter 1, verse 5, we read these words. Philippians 1, page 184, verse 5.

He says, I am thankful for your communion, koinonia, in the gospel from the first day until now. It's absolutely lovely.

I mean, here is the apostle Paul, chained in prison, looking at execution in Rome. And here is the church in Philippi, hundreds of miles away, in a completely different country.

And the Philippians love the apostle and they pray for the apostle. They hear about his destitution, so they send him a financial gift as well as one of their best people to be with him.

And that is, the apostle Paul says, koinonia. It's very interesting. The church of Philippi is a fascinating mix of people. We know from the book of Acts that there are some women in the congregation who run small businesses, there are some slaves and there are some retired military generals.

[17 : 57] And none of them are professional missionaries, none of them are professional preachers, but their concrete care for the apostle is described as koinonia, koinonia in the gospel.

We'll look at verse 7. It is right for me to feel thus about you all because I hold you in my heart, for you are all communicants, koinonos, with me of grace, both in my imprisonment and in the defence and confirmation of the gospel.

They are in Philippi, he is in Rome, but their common concern for the promotion and advance of the gospel isn't just a human thing. It is a mutual participation.

It is a koinonia in the grace of God. This is very important for us. You see, this is not just sentiment. It is a spiritual reality that flows out of their fellowship with the Holy Spirit.

They are affected deeply by his suffering. Spiritually they're affected. He is affected spiritually by their generosity and by their prayers and by their standing with him. It is communion in the gospel.

[19 : 08] So that the communion that begins with our fellowship and participation in God extends and grows and multiplies as we seek the progress of God's gospel and as we do it together.

The fact that the Philippians were not intimidated by their opponents, that they demonstrated consistent gracious care for the apostle, that they were not embarrassed, reveals the communion of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.

And I just need to say that our experience of koinonia depends on our active engagement in the purposes of God with each other.

It doesn't matter if you're a small business person or you're a slave or you're a retired military general. You and I will know very little of the koinonia of the Holy Spirit unless we're willing to share the sufferings of others.

Unless we're willing to give ourselves to the purposes of God, not by myself, but with others and for others. Turn over to chapter 4, last reference please, page 187, verse 14.

[20 : 29] Yet, says the apostle, it was kind of you to have communion in my trouble. And you Philippians yourselves know that in the beginning of the gospel when I entered, when I left Macedonia, no church entered into koinonia with me in giving and receiving except you only.

It's wonderful. He is speaking about their generous financial gift and he doesn't say to them, thank you for the gift, I will send you a gold embossed copy of my latest letter signed with a small figurine to hang on your mantelpiece.

He doesn't say, I'm going to put you on my apostolic platinum giver's list if you give more. He doesn't even tell them what the money is going to be used for. He says, your generosity in doing this you entered into communion.

By your gift you have joined me, you've taken the burden upon yourself. It is a sign of the communion of God in action. communion. So, they're the two aspects of communion in the New Testament.

We have communion with God and we have communion in the activity of God. And I want to finish by reminding you that both aspects of communion bring responsibility to us.

[21 : 46] You see, think about our communion with the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit. it is a gift from God that reveals afresh to us the purpose for which God sent His Son to live and to die for us.

The reason Jesus came into the world was not to make us religious, it was not to make us moral, it wasn't to give us a spiritual world view, it wasn't to make us nice people and obedient citizens.

Christ came into the world so that we might participate in God. God so loved the world that He gave His Son.

He came that we might know and participate in His mercy and His grace and His kindness. It's so that we might share the very life of God here in this world and in the world to come.

It's so that we might glorify Him and enjoy Him forever. Christ gave Himself for us that we might have nothing short of koinonia with God the Father, God the Son and God the Holy Spirit.

[22 : 52] And whether we like it or not, to have koinonia with God means we have koinonia with all those who call upon the name of the Lord in every place even in heaven.

True, true koinonia must be enjoyed with other believers and what happens is it opens our hearts and our lives to other believers.

We begin to see them as infinitely precious, as people for whom Christ died, as eternal brothers and sisters. That is why the gift of koinonia grows as we deepen in repentance and faith.

We turn away from all sin and grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. But, I need to say this to you, the gift of koinonia can be wounded, it can be neglected and it can be damaged.

We violate our communion with God and with one another when we pursue anything that is against God's will or if we join with others in pursuing disobedience, whether that disobedience is in behaviour or belief.

[24 : 02] and that is why our koinonia constantly needs to be renewed as we turn back to God in repentance and receive his forgiveness and his mercy.

Because, the communion that we have with God is both gift and responsibility. Or, think about the communion that we have in the activity of God.

when Christ draws us into communion with God by the power of his Spirit, we are caught up into something much greater than we realise, than we'll ever realise really.

I mean, it would be, it would have been enough, wouldn't it, if God, if we just had communion with God through the Son by the Spirit. But, it is more. It is a life lived towards God and lived towards other people.

And, everything you and I do in this life, if it is done for Christ, is miraculously somehow caught up into the life of God. Every thought, every prayer, every word, every gift, every act done in the name of Jesus Christ is a partnership and a participation in the grace of God and in the Gospel.

[25 : 15] And, that is why, brothers and sisters, the symbols of communion are a broken body and blood poured out. Because, it is the deep humility of Christ acting for our interest and not for his own that becomes our pattern and our power.

And, as we follow his example, we will know the reality of the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ and the love of God and the koinonia of the Holy Spirit in this life and in the life to come.

So, I wonder if you would take out your hymn sheet and turn to our next hymn, which is number four. It summarizes nicely Philippians 2.

It's the Father's pleasure we call him Lord. In verse four, there is this quaint expression that we enthrone him in our hearts. Christ is enthroned, but that is speaking of looking to him in our temptation.

And, as we confess him Lord of all, as we sing together, it is an act of koinonia that stand and sing together.