



Owen, John.

Communion with the Triune God

Edited by Kelly M. Kopic and Justin Taylor

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Nick Norelli

Rightly Dividing the Word of Truth

New Jersey

Communion with the Triune God is an update to John Owen's 17th century classic *Of Communion with God the Father, Son, and Holy Ghost, Each Person Distinctly, in Love, Grace, and Consolation*. Obviously, the modern title is the first of many improvements. To say that John Owen was erudite would be an understatement. He approaches the doctrine of the Trinity from so many perspectives that it's hard to think of a modern counterpart.

Edited by Kelly M. Kopic and popular blogger Justin Taylor, this volume marks many (stylistic) improvements on the original. The content follows William Goold's edition of Owen's *Works* from the 1850s and reverts to the 1657 original when necessary. There were many changes made to this volume such as Americanized spelling, updating of archaic words, different paragraph divisions, modern scripture citation, and more. I have to admit that even with all of the updates this was still a very difficult volume to read. Owen is not for the faint of heart, that's for sure!

I appreciated how heavily footnoted this book was, for instance, when we first encounter a difficult word there is a footnote giving us various modern definitions (e.g., "*annexed*" = "*joined, added, united, attached*" [p. 209]), all of which are collated in a four page glossary in the back of the book (427-430). While this was immensely helpful I still would have preferred for the language to have been updated in the text itself. I understand the editors' desire not to produce another paraphrase, so what they have done seems as close to a happy medium as possible.

I also appreciated the abundant references to the Early Church Fathers in both the *Patrologia Graeca/Latina* as well as the *Ante-Nicene, Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers* volumes. This feature made for extremely easy cross-referencing. I was quite surprised to find as many references to the Fathers as I did. Also worth noting is that all Hebrew and Greek terms are transliterated, which is ideal for the reader not familiar with Hebrew and Greek characters, and there is quite a bit of Hebrew and Greek in this book.

With a thirty-two page outline in the beginning of this volume, one can see how this could be used as a text to teach an advanced Bible study. I think the content is a little too difficult for beginners or children, but I couldn't imagine that an adult class would be anything less than blessed by learning from Owen's work.

Kelly M. Kopic says in the introduction that "[o]ne need not agree with everything this Puritan wrote in order to greatly profit from wrestling with his thinking" (18), and in this he is surely correct. I for one, found myself disagreeing with Owen's insistence that "[i]t is true that sin was imputed to [Jesus] when he was made sin (2 Cor. 5:21)" (166), yet in working through the implication of that belief it helped me to sharpen my particular position (that's an entire essay in and of itself).

On the contrary, I found myself agreeing strongly with his understanding that in worshipping one person, we worship the whole Trinity, yet I didn't agree with the particulars. Owen said:

The *divine nature* is the reason and cause of all worship; so that it is impossible to *worship any one* person, and not worship the *whole* Trinity. It is, and that not without ground, denied by the schoolmen [i.e. the scholars of the medieval Scholastic tradition], that the *formal reason* and object of divine worship is in the persons *precisely* considered; that is, under the formally constitutive reason of their personality, which is their relation to each other. But this belongs to the divine nature and essence, and to their *distinct* persons as they are *identified* with the essence itself. (419)

In my estimation, it is impossible to worship any one person apart from the others precisely because of their relation to each other, not because of the divine nature. We know the Father in relation to the Son and Spirit, and vice versa. If there were no Son we would know nothing of the Father, and if there were no Spirit we'd know nothing of either Father or Son. But Owen's emphasis on the divine nature is quite common in the Western tradition.

It is also impossible, as to my thought, to view the nature apart from the persons. So in worship, we worship Father, Son, and Spirit (the three persons) as God (the one divine nature). I think

Owen mistaken to say that the “*divine nature* is the reason and cause of all worship.” I do appreciate however his strong views on Trinitarian worship. This is something that we’ve seen a resurgence of in recent years, and for good reason (it’s thoroughly Biblical!).

Classics are classic for a reason; they can stand the test of time. Owen’s work is certainly deserving of the label ‘classic.’ His thought is anything but simplistic, his exegesis, while questionable at certain points, is for the most part spectacular, and he has a rare quality of being able to combine academic rigor with ministerial care. Owen’s love for the triune God shines through on every page, and his desire for the reader to love this God with all of their heart, soul, mind, and strength is self-evident.

As already mentioned, this book contains a glossary of archaic terms, as well as a name index, subject index, and scripture index. Footnotes are definitely a plus, as is the outline, and the introductory essay by Kopic is worth the price of the book. Also worth noting is that if one purchases this work directly from Crossway, they can obtain a free PDF file for storage on their computer. For the blogger who likes to post quotations, this would certainly prove beneficial, especially as this work is full of quotable comments. The only real cause of complaint is the language. It can be at times difficult to comprehend and require a couple of re-readings, but once you make sense of it all, it’s well worth the effort.